

TUESDAY 04 October 2022 "Rescue & Restore" (Gal. 6:1,2)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I wonder how many of you have ever served as a lifeguard at the beach or a swimming pool? Or perhaps some of you have served as 'first responders', trained to be among the first people to come to the aid of someone whose life is at risk. *In both cases often seconds count and both your words and actions are vital if you will save the person from death.*

Paul the apostle is nearing the end of the first of his many letters. This one, which we know as Galatians, Paul is writing to Gentile Christians in central Asia as confusion has come through the contrary teachings of some teachers who followed Paul after he left the towns he and Barnabas had visited. *Word had come to Paul in Syrian Antioch that some of those who had believed Paul's Gospel and trusted in Jesus for their salvation, were now doubting the truthfulness of Paul's words and some were turning away from what they had believed.*

Paul is grieved to hear this and he is writing carefully and powerfully to try and bring clarity into their confusion. Now beginning his sixth and final chapter, Paul writes: ***"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ."*** (Gal. 6:1,2) Did you notice the word I underlined? RESTORE! That is a fundamental, wonderful core value of Christianity. *In fact, restoration permeates Jesus' teachings and the entire God designed plan of redemption, do you see that?*

Rather than God simply removing Himself from any involvement in our human journey and watching the human race implode and self-destruct as we kill each other in our wickedness; OR rather than God pouring out His holy judgment to give our sinful human race the punishment we deserve, which is death; *God has developed a plan which enables sinful human beings to be RESCUED from our self-destructive sin and RESTORED into relationship with God, with our sins pardoned!*

I realize that sounds too good to be true, but it is true! That is what is called "The Gospel", the very best news imaginable. As you may know this Gospel has been rescuing and restoring hundreds of millions of people, one at a time, in almost every place in the world, *since Jesus paid the full price making redemption, rescue and restoration possible!*

As Paul sits to write this last chapter, I'm so glad Paul never sugarcoats or pretends to not understand the moral struggle we all face in life. Yesterday we looked at Paul's acknowledgment that **"The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Holy Spirit and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."** (Gal. 5:16,17) The battle for every heart and mind in our world is real. *The evil darkness that so easily consumes us and leads us into wicked self-destruction is powerful.* And when a person has trusted Jesus to be their Savior and therefore has the Holy Spirit living within them, coaching and teaching them, still the battle rages, and in that battle sometimes people really trying to follow the Spirit's guidance in their lives stumble, sometimes they succumb to the dark temptations and their sinful nature wins a victory. That's what Paul is talking about when he acknowledges the harsh truth all around us.

Sometimes Christians sin! But Paul gives some very important advice here regarding how others should attempt to help the drifter. John the beloved disciple, some years later wrote this very encouraging truth explaining that there is hope when Christian's sin: **"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world."** (1 John 2:1,2)

Battle hardened war veterans tell me in some branches of the military there is a code of honor which says: *"No one left behind."* It means that in the ferociousness of the fighting neither the wounded nor killed in action are left lying on the battlefield. All efforts will be made to bring them out of the fighting and to safety, dead or alive. It also means every effort will be made to rescue and restore any who have been taken captive by the enemy. *Paul is challenging the first generation of Gentile Christians in central Asia to adopt a similar battle standard. Is there any reason it should be different today where you live?* So, it calls for some honest questions for all of us...

1. If you claim Jesus as your Savior, when you stumble and sin, *what is your hope and expectation of your friends who are Christians?* Should they ignore you, abandon you to your poor choices, mock you, or make every effort to rescue and restore you, like a good lifeguard at the beach when the riptide is carrying a swimmer out to the ocean?

2. And when you see a Christian friend drifting spiritually, making unwise choices that are yielding to the dark temptations, or following those who influence them to do what they know is wrong... *what should you do?* Paul challenges us to act, with tenderness, gentleness but in truth, and help the drifter by seeking to rescue and restore them. *And what does it mean if you or I choose NOT to help our drifting friend?*

But it raises questions, doesn't it my friends? Questions like... what should you and I do if in our attempt to rescue and restore our drifting Christian friend they say to us: *"Leave me alone, this is none of your business."* or *"It's not at all what you think. I'm not drifting spiritually, I'm doing just fine."* or *"If I wanted your help, I'd ask you. I didn't ask, so don't intrude where you aren't wanted."*

I have found the book of Proverbs to be so helpful in these types of situations which is why I recommend reading several verses of that wisdom book every day. Here's but one example as it relates to this current situation about trying to help a drifting Christian friend. Proverbs 9:7-10 says: ***"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker for he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still... the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*** Do you see the contrast in how a wise man and a wicked man respond to help offered by their friends when they are perceived to be drifting? May I ask, how do you respond, especially when you know full well that you are drifting? Do you welcome help or reject it? Here's another piece of wisdom from Proverbs: ***"He who heeds discipline shows the way to life; but whoever ignores correction leads others astray."*** (Prov. 10:17)

Paul knew that all of us who are trying to live God honoring lives in a wicked world, will find ourselves challenged, tempted, opposed and therefore chances are we'll occasionally find ourselves drifting morally or spiritually. I want to join Paul in extending a challenge, right now, to every person hearing my voice or reading these words. ***IF it is your intention to live a God honoring life, call some of your best Christian friend today and not only give them permission, but challenge them to be courageous enough and to love you enough that IF they suspect they see you drifting, urge them to promise you that they will not stand by idle, they will not walk away and abandon you, but they will press in. They will challenge you, tenderly but as forcefully as needed, to help you face the truth about your drift and turn to Jesus!***

What do you think about that my friends? Will you pick up the phone or write an email? ***Will you surround yourself with friends who will promise that 'no one will be left behind' in the battles you and I face every day?*** Let's ponder that. Could it be there is someone you know is drifting and the Holy Spirit is urging you to call them and offer them the help they need for rescue and restore? What are you going to do about that? Let's start right now by praying for them.

Today's Scripture is Galatians 6:1, 2.