

## **Luke 23:32-56**

### **Responding to the Rescue**

Austin Applebee

Is an unlikely saviour in a remarkable rescue

I mean first things first

Austin Applebee

What a great name for a hero

In February this year

Austin and his family were on vacation in Quindalup in Western Australia

When they were swept out to sea by strong winds and currents

His mother Joanne was trying to keep her two youngest children Beau and Grace alive

By not letting them slip underwater from their paddleboard

And so Joanne made the unenviable decision to send 13-year old Austin alone for help

So Austin began the long journey back to shore by himself

His kayak began taking on water in the rough swells

So he left the kayak behind and swam towards shore in shark infested waters

He kept going for hours in the 4 kilometre swim against wind and waves

In fact he took off his life jacket because it was slowing down his swimming

Once Austin got to shore with legs buckling under him

He still had to run a further two kilometres to his mum's phone

In order to call Triple Zero

Where he said "I need helicopters, I need planes, I need boats, my family's out to sea"

By the time the rescue boat reached Joanne

A large wave had separated her from her kids

But eventually they plucked all three of them out of the ocean after a 10-hour ordeal

Austin Applebee

An unlikely saviour in a remarkable rescue

Unlikely not just because he's 13

But unlikely because here's the irony of the story

Austin had just finished a school holiday swimming program

Where he was not allowed to progress to the next level

Because he failed to swim 350 metres in the pool

I think Austin should open his own swimming school

What a remarkable rescue?

A rescue that made headlines all around the world

Described by emergency services as "superhuman"

And in an interview with Channel 7

Austin credited God for the rescue

And can you imagine from now on

Every time Austin negotiates an increase in his pocket money?

"Ah Mum, do you remember that time I saved the family from drowning?"

"I think that deserves some extra cash"

Today on Good Friday all around the world

Billions of people remember another Unlikely Saviour in a Remarkable Rescue

For this is what the death of Jesus means for us  
The most remarkable rescue mission God has ever undertaken  
Led by the most unlikely Saviour  
And it's a rescue that demands a response  
In fact as you heard the passage from Luke read  
You would have heard a number of responses to Jesus  
The crowd, the religious leaders, the soldiers executing him  
The centurion supervising them  
The women and Joseph of Arimathea  
But this Good Friday morning  
I want to focus on just two responses

The responses of the two men  
Who are being executed with Jesus  
These two men, like Jesus, will breathe their final breaths by the end of the day  
But before they do, they will have two contrasting responses to Jesus  
One will reject him  
And one will rely on him

What should have been an obscure death of a man two thousand years ago  
Lost in the chapters of history  
Is an event that still shapes the lives of so many today  
And it raises the question for us  
How will we respond to this Unlikely Saviour and His Remarkable Rescue?

Jesus is an Unlikely Saviour  
Born in an animal stable  
A carpenter's son  
But also the Son of God  
And In Jesus' own mind he came to do something significant  
He came to save

Earlier in Luke 19 Jesus said of himself,  
For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost  
People who are far away from God  
Lost in their sin against God  
Whether that is simply ignoring God or actively rejecting Him  
And for Jesus, his death on the cross was a key part of that rescue  
Three times Jesus predicted his death and he saw it as necessary in order to save people  
And during the time of Jesus' ministry  
He had developed quite a following  
Many thousands would gather to listen to his teaching about the kingdom of God  
His twelve disciples were also convinced that Jesus had come to save  
And that he was the Jewish Messiah  
God's chosen King of Israel.  
But their idea of the Messiah's salvation was not what Jesus had in mind

Jesus is an unlikely King.  
Kings come with power and military might  
Pomp and ceremony  
Status and wealth

The disciples had glimpsed his power  
Power to drive out demons  
Power to calm storms  
Power to heal disease and even raise the dead  
They thought perhaps this power could drive out the Roman occupiers from their land  
But the disciples are nowhere to be seen  
Because for them, kings are not executed on Roman crosses  
Like common criminals  
And that is what is happening to this king

Verse 35

<sup>35</sup> The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: "He saved others; let him save himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!"

Many watching Jesus hoisted on that cross  
Thought he was an unlikely Saviour  
All show, no go  
Dripping off their tongues is mocking sarcasm  
And from their perspective it makes sense to mock Jesus  
If you have all this power  
Then surely you would use it to save yourself  
As far as they are concerned  
All Jesus deserves is cheap wine for a cheap King  
It's a pretty horrific scene isn't it  
Jesus at his most powerless to defend himself  
Tormented physically and verbally by those holding the power

I remember when my family first came to Australia from Malaysia  
We lived in Glen Waverley and I was enrolled in grade 1 in Mimosa Primary School  
Just near the Glen Shopping Centre  
And there were not nearly as many Asians in that suburb back in 1980  
And one lunchtime  
A group of four or five older boys surrounded me  
Pushed me to the ground and made fun of the colour of my skin  
And my slanty eyes  
It was my first taste of racism in my new country  
And the sheer injustice of it seared my heart with rage  
They used their power against me  
And I was determined from that day never to feel that powerless again  
That I would be better than any stupid white Australian  
Who would ever dare make fun of the colour of my skin  
Turns out my peeps took over Glen Waverley – score for the Asians  
But do you see how sin works?  
Sin in those boys drove them to be racist  
To use their power against me  
Sin in me resulted in anger and pride  
That I might use my power against them  
And in the end, sin never leads anywhere good  
It doesn't bring about the world you and I want to live in

Jesus on the other hand is so different.  
This Unlikely Saviour  
Stages a Remarkable Rescue  
Even as he is dying from the nails driven into his body

He utters a prayer for those killing him  
Verse 34

Father forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing  
This rabbi who once told his followers  
Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you  
Is now practicing what he preached  
Can you imagine how hard it must have been for Jesus to do that?  
As people are mocking and spitting on him  
Yelling for his death  
Pushing a crown of thorns on his head  
And yet the only words that come from his mouth  
Are words that seek the good of those who hate him  
As far as Jesus is concerned – they are the lost  
Lost in their hatred  
Lost in their anger  
Lost in their thirst for power  
Lost in their sin  
Who would have blamed Jesus  
If he had spewed back the same filth that was being poured onto him?  
But not this King of Love and Forgiveness

And this is what the rescue mission is about  
Forgiveness of sin  
Saving the lost from their sin against God and others  
Sin deserves God's just judgement  
Surely if you murder the Son of God  
God should punish you with death  
That seems only just and fair  
But the bible is clear that it is not only those who drove the nails into Jesus who should die  
For each and everyone of us has contributed to the sin that drove Jesus to the cross  
We are the lost he came to rescue from the death we deserve for our sin

And the cross on our hot cross buns  
Reminds us of the great exchange that took place that first Good Friday  
Jesus died so that we could escape death  
That is the great irony of the cross  
The ones who kill Jesus cry out in verse 35  
"He saved others, let him save himself"  
But in reality Jesus could *only* save others  
*Because* he did not save himself  
He *has* to die in order to bring forgiveness for many  
As he told his disciples at the last supper they shared together  
This is my body given for you  
This is my blood poured out for you

This remarkable rescue was planned by God in ancient times  
And Jesus' death on the cross  
Fulfilled this 700-year old prediction from the prophet Isaiah  
But he was pierced because of our rebellion,  
crushed because of our iniquities;  
punishment for our peace was on him,  
and we are healed by his wounds.

Our sin brings conflict, Jesus brings peace  
Our sin brings hatred, Jesus brings love and forgiveness

Nicky Cruz had a brutal upbringing in Puerto Rico  
He was subject to terrible abuse as one of 19 children  
His mother once called him the "son of Satan" when he was a child  
And eventually Cruz was sent to live with his brother in New York  
Full of rage he joined a street gang at the age of 16  
And rose to become their leader through brutal violence  
And his life was so hopeless lost  
He was destined for prison or execution for his crimes  
One day he met a skinny country preacher named David Wilkerson  
Who kept showing relentless love to Cruz  
And told him that Jesus loved him and would never stop loving him  
Nicky beat up Wilkerson, spat on him  
And threatened his life saying, "You come near me and I'll kill you!"  
Wilkerson replied, "Yeah, you could do that. You could cut me up into a thousand pieces  
and lay them in the street, and every piece will still love you."  
Eventually at one of the gospel meetings held by Wilkerson  
Cruz and a number of his gang members surrendered their lives to Jesus  
And afterwards they handed in knives, bricks and handguns at the police station  
Cruz eventually became a preacher to those in cycles of violence on the streets  
This is what an Unlikely Saviour and his Remarkable Rescue can do

### **Things brings us to the responses to Jesus**

Two men hang on crosses next to Jesus  
And we now see their contrasting responses  
The first is to **Reject Him**

Verse 39

<sup>39</sup> Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

Only the most serious criminals and political enemies of Rome were crucified  
And the fake news is that they charged Jesus – an innocent man  
On trumped up political charges – the King of the Jews  
That's what they nailed above him on the cross  
But this criminal unlike Jesus is not innocent of wrongdoing  
And he now stands on the very edge of death  
And he uses his last breaths to taunt and reject Jesus  
He has the same mocking insults as the religious leaders and the crowd  
In American sport the final last ditch effort to win the game from behind

Is called a "Hail Mary" – a hope and pray moment  
And this criminal's Hail Mary  
Is half arrogant insult and half wishful thinking  
"Aren't you the Messiah, Save yourself and us"  
And it is met with silence by Jesus  
Because it is not a real prayer

In my personal life and my professional life  
I see people before they die  
I see people breathe their last breaths in hospitals and at home  
I visit people days and hours before they die  
I hold their hand and I pray with them  
I read them parts of the bible where possible  
I sing with them sometimes  
And I have seen people die well  
And I have often wondered, when my time comes, will I die well?  
Will I die with dignity, peace and love?  
Or will I die shaking the fist in anger  
Full of despair and desperate pride like this man?  
One of the most popular songs played at funerals is Frank Sinatra's song  
"I did it my way"  
A celebration of defiant pride  
I died as I lived – doing my own thing  
And it sounds like such an anthem of our age  
But behind the façade  
There is guilt and shame  
Behind the pride is fear and insecurity  
Broken relationships that we can't bear to think about  
Awful regret at wrong choices  
Despair and uncertainty of what lies ahead after death  
"I did it my way"  
Why would you use your last breath to reject the King of Love and Forgiveness

In contrast on the other cross next to Jesus  
Is another criminal who chooses to **rely on Jesus**

Verse 40

<sup>40</sup> But the other answered, rebuking him: "Don't you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment?" <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

What an incredible deathbed confession  
The criminal gets a number of things right  
Firstly, he acknowledges the judgement of God is real  
He knows he's a sinner and he has a right fear of God  
He acknowledges rightly that he is guilty before a righteous God  
That he and his fellow criminal are receiving the just punishment that they deserve  
The criminal also recognises the innocence of Jesus  
Jesus is falsely punished because he has not sinned  
But even more than that

The criminal looks beyond the insults of the crowd  
And he recognises that Jesus is a real King  
With a real kingdom  
A kingdom that goes even beyond this life  
And from a place of humility  
He cries a real prayer appealing to the mercy of King Jesus  
“Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom”

What a confession  
And you see according to Matthew’s gospel  
This is not where the day started for this criminal  
According to Matthew 27  
Both criminals were hurling insults at Jesus  
But as each of them hung on their crosses  
This criminal had a change of heart  
Perhaps seeing the conduct of Jesus has softened the hard heart of this man  
Seeing one who loves his enemies even at the most desperate of times  
Perhaps he realised then that this man must have come from God  
Perhaps he realised the gravity of his own situation  
That the only things awaiting him now are death and the fearsome judgement of God  
And instead of shaking his fist at God  
He bows the knee with the simplest of prayers  
“Remember me”  
He cannot come down off the cross and perform good works for God  
He cannot atone for his mistakes  
He cannot give to the poor  
He cannot make restitution for all the harm he has done  
There is absolutely nothing he can do to earn his way into the good books of God  
And so he casts himself on the mercy of the King  
“Remember me”

And instead of the silence he gave the other criminal  
Jesus answers simply in verse 43  
“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

What beautiful words from Jesus  
You are forgiven, I have paid your debt  
Welcome to heaven  
Death is not the final word  
I am the final word  
Neither you or I will come to an end today  
For we will meet again in eternal life  
No longer in pain but in peace  
“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

There is something scandalous about these words of Jesus  
For what has this criminal done to deserve a place in God’s kingdom?  
Nothing  
Absolutely nothing  
And that is exactly the point that Luke is making  
That is why the cross of Christ is a remarkable rescue

None of us deserve the mercy of God  
But he offers it anyway  
To all those who abandon their pride  
And rely on Jesus  
In fact Luke is saying there is no other way to be forgiven  
But to rely on the death of Jesus

I am so glad that Jesus met me when he did  
My anger and my rage would have consumed me  
My desire for power to shield myself from being hurt  
Would have crushed all those around me  
I shudder to think how I would have died  
But I know Christ died not only for those who have sinned against me  
He died for my sin.  
And he died for your sin too.

Jesus invites you to pray today  
"Remember me" is what the criminal prayed  
You can find your own simple words to cry out to God  
Bring your guilt, your shame  
Bring your rage, your anger  
Bring your arrogance, your pride  
Bring your lust, and your lust for power  
Confess your sin to Jesus  
And he will forgive you  
Rely on him and you will die well and live again with him

This is how Joanne Applebee responded to the remarkable rescue performed by her son  
Full of thankfulness, she said of Austin, "He's absolutely amazing"  
"Me and his dad are super proud"  
Our Saviour too is absolutely amazing  
And we have even greater reason to be thankful for His remarkable rescue  
This Good Friday, give thanks for Jesus, rely on him  
And he too will speak those words to you  
"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."