

Authentic Christianity

**Rescue**

James 5:19-20

March 28, 2021 am

HDBC

**Rescue attempts** can be dangerous. **Drowning** victims, for example, often fight their rescuers simply because they are panicked. In fact in some cases the drowning person has actually caused both to die. Almost all rescue attempts present some danger to the rescuer.

**The same is true of** spiritual rescue efforts. Whenever an attempt is made to rescue a person who is spiritually sinking, the person often resists the rescuer. That may explain why *many believers never jump into the water to save a drowning brother or sister*. Howard Hendricks tells the story of a young man who had strayed from the Lord, but was finally brought back by a loving friend.

**The young man later said** *it was like he was out to sea, in deep water, deep trouble, and all his friends were on the shoreline hurling biblical accusations at him about justice, penalty, and wrong. But there was one Christian brother who actually swam out to get me and would not let me go.*

*I fought him, but he pushed aside my fighting, grasped me, put a life jacket around me, and took me to shore. By the grace of God, he was the reason I was restored. He would not let me go.*

**This morning we conclude** our study of James with a call to **Rescue**. James has written about **Authentic Christianity**. What does it mean to live as an authentic Christian in a hostile culture. In this letter James has provided a number of markers. It is a clarion call to living the gospel! However, James was well aware of the pressure to quit, to fall back, to give in, to compromise. It could come morally or theologically. In either case it would be tragic if left unchecked. So, in his parting words James calls for us to be willing to rescue one another!

**Read the Text. James 5:19-20**

Before getting into the main points on the outline, I want to remind you of some other verses that provide somewhat of a backdrop to this text.

### **James 4:11-12**

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?*

Some read this verse think it is a call for isolation and insulation. We are to live and let live. But this is not a prohibition to confront someone who has strayed. It is a warning against believers who maliciously slander others.

### **Matthew 7:1-5**

*Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

This is a warning against judging others with a malicious intent. But it does not exclude us from reaching out to help an erring brother or sister.

**Verse five clarifies** the issue. There is a place for **removing specks** from the eyes of others, but only after we have dealt with our own sins.

### **Galatians 6:1-3**

*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself*

**Those who do** the restoring must be sensitive, caring, compassionate, and careful. **Eye surgery is not like road building.** It requires a steady, delicate hand. Those who engage in this must be careful to have the right attitudes.

Notice a few important truths that these two verses make clear:

## 1. The Possibility of Straying

James makes it clear that it is possible for a person to wander away from the faith either theologically or morally. Some may wonder if he is referring to a person who is lost and needs to be saved or a person who is saved and needs to be restored. It is not crystal clear. So, let's consider each.

### A. Unbeliever

**Save his soul from death** certainly sounds like he might be referring to a lost person who is led to salvation. One who leads another to come to his senses and express faith in Christ will in one sense be a savior of that person's soul. In that process the person's sins are covered by the blood of Christ. The covering is a picture of forgiveness

**If this is James' intent** then it is a reminder of our role in evangelism. We need to be involved in helping others come to Jesus. And specifically those who are associated with the church. Here James clearly has in mind people who are attending the services and who are connected with the church, but who are lost. We must have a concern for those around us who are connected with us but who are not born again.

### B. Believer

It seems equally evident from the text that he is referring to believers who have wandered either theologically or morally. Beliefs or actions.

#### 1) **Among You**

Associated with the church. They are with the believers.

#### 2) **Strays** *Planao* - (planet)

The ancient Greeks saw the heavenly bodies as wandering stars and planets. **The word means to wander from a prescribed course.** It pictures one who has lost his way and wanders aimlessly.

#### 3) **Error of His Way**

Could be theological or moral. Believe the wrong things or act in the wrong ways. Often is a combination of both. On wrong path.

## 2. The Opportunity for Restoration

Praise God there is also the opportunity for restoration.

**Notice** the phrase in verse 19 *and one turns him back*. That phrase speaks of acting in such a way that causes or leads the wandering person to change course and return to the right path.

**In verse 20** James shares the result of a successful rescue. Two phrases. *Save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

### *Save his soul from death*

**It seems** most likely that James has in mind *the way of death*, or *the deathlike existence* of one who is ignoring God's plan and living in the way of the world. In early Christian training life was viewed as following one of two paths; the path of life or the path of death. It was a figurative way of describing life outside the will of God. This is how James uses this phrase.

### *Cover a multitude of sins*

This has a double application. First, when the person confesses sin there is forgiveness from the Lord. Second, this keeps the person from continuing further down that road of death. The damage will end, rather than being extended further. When the person ends their sinful ways, it keeps the church from having to further expose this sin through discipline.

## 3. **The Process of Restoration**

God often uses people as instruments of restoration for wandering believers. He calls a believer to come alongside a wandering Christian and uses them to gently call the wanderer back to the truth.

**That means** we have a responsibility to **pay attention** not only to what is happening in our own lives but to the lives of those around us. We must not only pay attention, but at times **step into the lives** of others and gently lead them back to the truth.

**It is interesting** that James does not offer any practical steps. Maybe he assumes that his readers will remember the practical steps outlined by the Lord Jesus and recorded in Matthew 18:15-17.

*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and*

*if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

Jesus outlined a clear process for attempting to restore a sinning brother or sister. Here are the steps:

- 1) Go to them in private.
- 2) Go back to them with one or two witnesses
- 3) Take the information to the church
- 4) Consider him an outsider to the church

#### **4. Practical Suggestions**

##### **1) Be connected**

If you are to be involved in helping others, or for that matter, in being helped by others, you must be connected with others. Be a member of a local church. Be an active, participating member of a local church.

*In the animated movie, **Ice Age**, a sabertooth tiger, a sloth and a woolly mammoth find a lost human infant and try to return him to his tribe. In one scene they are walking through mountainous terrain of ice and snow Diego, the sabertooth tiger falls into a chasm. Manfred, the woolly mammoth jumps in after him and tosses the tiger upwards to safety. Diego, realizing the danger Manfred faced is moved by his compassion, courage and sacrifice.*

*Why did you do that? You could have died trying to save me.*

*Manfred responds, **That's what you do when you're part of a herd. You look after each other.***

##### **2) Be aware**

Watch and listen. Have conversations with others. Listen to their words and to their hearts. Watch body language. Notice when others are struggling. Doesn't mean we always act quickly, but we need to be more aware of what's going on with one another. Conversely, share with others. Find some trusted believers and be a little more transparent.

### 3) Be patient

Rescues don't always happen quickly. Often it takes time. Stay with the person and the process. Don't give up on them.

I think it is appropriate for James to end his letter about **Authentic Christianity** with a call for us to keep an eye out for one another. We are certainly called to look at ourselves to make sure we are living **authentic Christian** lives, but that is not always enough. We sometimes need help from others. Others sometime need help from you. It will not be easy or glamorous. **It might be messy.** But rescuing a brother or sister is worth the effort.

*Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist was asked what was first sign of civilization in a given culture. The questioner expected her to say something like, pottery, or innovation etc. She said it was a **healed femur**. Shows that someone cared. Hunted for them, took care of them while it healed. Evidence of compassion is first sign of civilization.*

We are simply a group of broken people whom God is in the process of fixing. What would you do if you were arrested for drunk driving and your picture was on the front page of the paper. Would you be too ashamed to come to church? Would you want hide out for a while and then try to sneak into church?

**Don't do it.** When you fail, your church is the most important place to be. Come and heal with us. In the church you will find forgiveness, acceptance and love.