

1 The Great Escape

On Anzac Day 2006 there was an earthquake in Beaconsfield Tasmania.

A kilometre underground there was a rock fall and a number of miners were caught underground. Many of the trapped miners found their own way out. Three miners remained: Larry Knight, Todd Russell and Brant Webb.

When we heard about the tragedy there was a great deal of interest. As time went by more and more people began to pray for the rescue effort. Perhaps you prayed too. Our Heavenly Father wants us to pray to him. He wants us to tell him our concerns and express our hopes and dreams, our griefs and sorrows, as well as our thanks and praise.

The Beaconsfield mine disaster was one of those occasions when we all felt so helpless to do anything, and so we prayed and prayed.

Even the media talked about people praying.

As time went by, and the results looked increasingly dismal, how did that effect our view of prayer? What questions did we start to ask? What did we draw upon to guide our faith? The answers will depend on our own personal awareness of the character of God. How do we view God? I hope that we will all listen to what the Bible teaches us about prayer.

*"The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."* Philippians 4:5-6

God already knows what is going on. He is concerned to each one of us. He wants us to cast our burdens on him and trust him with our problems. When we share our troubles with the Lord we do not need to be overly-worried or frantically anxious anymore. He may not always give us what we want. He may ask us to wait, even a long time. In his wisdom he may have other plans for us. But we can be sure that he always hears us. We must always trust that his ways are always best for us. *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* Romans 8:28

On the third day we heard the very sad news of the death of one of the miners Larry Knight. It brought home to everyone the frailty of life and the dangers of working in a mine. On the sixth day the rescue teams made contact with the remaining two miners. By a miracle they were still alive, protected by their steel cage.

This was a time of great celebration and emotional relief. It was also a time of tremendous thanksgiving to God, for he had preserved them.

I wonder how often in our own lives we turn to God when we have a problem that we cannot solve on our own. We pray. We seek God's face. We cry out to him. But when things turn out for the better we tend to forget about God. We might even pass off the good result as inevitable. It was bound to turn out well. It is a common human failing that we forget to say thank you to God for all his blessings.

The verses from Philippians encourage us to bring our supplications to God with thanksgiving. Let's think about all the good things for which can give thanks to God today and really thank Him.

Once the two surviving miners were found the next task was to get them out of the mine safely. There was always a fear that further tunneling may disturb more rocks and endanger the lives of the rescuers as well as the trapped miners.

A number of media outlets called the successful rescue effort the Great Escape. Each day while people waited for the men to be brought up from their two star hotel we were told about each step in the progress,

the small hole for food and drink and communication, the longer tunnel with the huge machine, the slow and careful hammering by the men and then the controlled small burst charges.

Brant and Todd showed their courage and their character. But they really were in a state of helplessness, when it came to getting out. There was no way that they could have dug their way out of the rock fall which trapped them. They had to wait for others to do the necessary and careful work that would allow them to come to the surface again and be reunited with their families.

In their isolation and separation from their loved ones, the two trapped miners, provide a vivid illustration of the struggle that we all have. The bible makes it very clear that left to our own devices we are all trapped by the consequences of our own sin. Every one of us has a tendency to go our own way, not God's way, to do our own thing, and not God's will for us. The Bible can talk about us being separated from God, out of fellowship, spiritually dead, captive to the Devil.

We may not be as bad as some people, but we would all admit that none of us are perfect.

And yet we know that God is a holy God. In his justice he has every right to make His assessment of each one of us. We will all have to give an account of our lives to him. Without the Lord Jesus, he would always find each one of us, spiritually bankrupt.

The point is that like those trapped miners, we cannot save ourselves. We cannot escape the judgement of God through our own efforts, through extra pain, or heaps of good deeds, or even a life of religious devotion. We have to be rescued.

The Lord Jesus is the skilled and prepared rescue team that God has sent into our world. For the God of the Bible is not only a just and holy and righteous God, he is also loving and merciful and kind and active. He has shown his love for us in that while we were still sinners he sent the Lord Jesus into the mineshaft of this broken world. He shared his life with us, lived the perfect life and became the innocent one upon the cross. When he died on that cross he took the punishment of isolation from God that we all deserve. God's justice was satisfied. The penalty had been paid. The path back to God has been opened up. Reconciliation is not possible. We can all be reunited with God again.

Whatever we have done, however we have expressed our rebellion against God, through Jesus, God is willing to forgive us, to let it go, to give us a fresh start. We can have a new beginning to our lives.

We also join a new Christian family and look forward to living with God and with one another forever.

The Great Escape for the believer is one that God provides for us through Jesus. Do you know this rescuer?

Have you received God's forgiveness through Jesus? It is available for you. It is a gift wrapped in love.

All you have to do is receive it through prayer to make it your own.

On the day of the miners' rescue, Todd and Brant were brought out of the underground cage just before 5am.

An hour later they were able to walk out of the mine laughing and joking and punching the air. They removed their tags from the board and greeted their families with hugs of joy.

For Todd and Brant it was an amazing relief to be finally free. Their brush with death was brought home to them on the day of their release, through the funeral of their fellow-miner and friend Larry Knight.

Todd and Brant have been given a second chance, a fresh appreciation of the joy of living and the pleasure of fresh air and ongoing friendships.

It is also a time for all of us to reflect on how God wants us to be living our lives. Each day is a new day, a gift from God to be used in his service.

When Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus he emphasizes that we have been saved by grace. It is not something that we can boast about. God rescued us. Having been saved through his mercy we should be living to do the good things he wants us to do, to walk in the paths he has laid out for us in his word.

See Ephesians 2:8-10

He has shown us the way through Jesus. He went out of his way to help us in our time of need. We need to think about how we can go out of our way to also provide help for others who are in need.