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**Rescue 911**  
**James 5:19-20**

One of my favorite TV shows when I was a kid was called “Emergency”. Johnny Gage and Roy Desoto were firefighters at station 51. The show usually opened with some non-critical, but important to them at the time, scene in the firehouse. It was usually some slice of life setting. The guys might be arguing over a card game, trying to get the firehouse dog, Boots, to eat, complaining about Chet’s chili or whose job it was to mop the floors. They were everyday problems that all of us might get exercised over at times. Then in the middle of their everyday problem, the alarm would ring; bam, bom-baum! Emergency! Emergency! Their arguments would stop in mid-sentence. The food left on the table. The card game didn’t matter any more. The dog left to eat on his own. There was a life-threatening emergency that demanded a rescue, demanded their attention. They would run to get dressed in their yellow fire gear. sprint to the fire engine and rush out the station just as the large doors were still rolling up. On the scene of the accident or fire they routinely put their own lives in peril in order to save the one in danger. These guys were my heroes. My friends and I would pretend we were the emergency firemen. We would act like we were sleeping downstairs in our basement then one of us would mimic the alarm. Bam Bom, Baum. Emergency. Emergency! While one of us would describe the call. “Man crashed into the river. Car under water.” We would rush to put on our rain slickers and boots and run upstairs to the garage where we had our bikes all lined up. One of us would roll up the garage door and we would ride off to the emergency screaming out our voice sirens as we peddled as fast as we could to the scene of the accident. I wanted to be the hero who rescues people in danger of dying. Wouldn’t you like to be the person

who helps save people from life threatening situations? Wouldn't you like to be a part of a team that goes out and rescues a person, who would certainly face death if it wasn't for you? If you knew your good friend was facing death unless you came, wouldn't all the other things of life that you are exercised over right now pale in comparison to rescuing your friend? Wouldn't you want to put your best effort into pursuing everything you could think of to help that person?

Sure we all would. But why is it more often we simply don't care? Why is it we have friends around us who are committing spiritual suicide and we don't even bother to come alongside and listen and encourage and help and speak the truth in love to them? Some of us would say, "I'd tried to help but they simply don't want it." I'd told them they are driving their spiritual car at 75 mph into a brick wall and they don't want to hear about it. We don't want to be pushy. Lets be honest, we fear rejection. We don't want to be the ones who rush into the room yelling "Emergency! Emergency! And everyone is still sitting around a table playing cards, just staring back at us like we're from the planet Neptune.

This morning we hear the heart of James. He wants to be in the rescue business and wants us to be a part of the team in freeing people trapped in spiritual death. James uses the Word of God just like the jaws of life to pull apart the wreckage so they can see the bondage and risk they are in and step free. James has a tremendous concern for friends who have wandered away from the truth. He has a tremendous desire to help those who once knew the truth but are no longer living the truth. He is challenging us this morning to become a part of the rescue team.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of James. This is our final talk in our "Faith Works" series. James whole point of his book has been that if faith is going to be real, then we ought to be able to see where it works. In the last two verses of his book, he describes why he wrote what he did. He tells us what motivated his to say what he did. Let me read James 5:19-20 (READ)

James is writing to the “brethren”. These are people just like us who are a part of the community of believers. James is saying you are family. I’m with you in this. But he speaks with reality. He knows that there is a very real possibility that some of the “brethren”, some of those who come to the church services are in danger of walking away from the truth. “If” anyone strays. There is a very real possibility that this will happen. It doesn’t have to happen. It certainly shouldn’t be the normal experience, but it very well may happen. When James uses the word “strays” what he means is that at one time this person may have been heading in the right way. At one time they were walking in the truth. At least at one time they knew the right way to go, but now have drifted away. That word suggests a gradual slow moving away from doing life God’s way. Isn’t that the way it usually happens? There are times when we are “overtaken in a fault” and we immediately go from following strong after God to jumping off the cliff into raging rebellion. But that’s not what usually happens. Most of the time it is a result of a slow, gradual, almost imperceptible, spiritual decline that worms its way into our attitudes, begins to eat holes in our actions. Hebrews 2:1 says, “pay close attention to what you have heard, lest we drift away from it.” It begins with a laziness here, an unopened bible there. Its an apathy about Christian community. Following Jesus gets pushed back to our list of other nice options. Then it may get fueled by a hurt, an offense taken, a brusque word. Then it moves to disdain, removing yourself from the community of believers and slowly, ever so slowly the wanderer finds himself on a totally different path.

Have you wandered away from God before? How long did it take for you to realize you were heading in a different direction? You find yourself in a sin you said you would never do. Perhaps a song on the radio, a call from a friend gave you a little wake up call that made you realize how far you’d moved. But it could be you continued to listen to Satan’s lies that

it was too late for you, you are too far off the path. Lies that say God would never want you back again.

I've watched friends wander away from the truth, blinded and seduced by the lies of Satan. One of the sharpest thinking guys I knew in seminary has wandered away. One of my children hero's, an athletic talented guy people all had slated for to do great things for God has wandered away. A former youth director married to my sister still wandering. I think of several teens who grew up in this church, went on mission trips wandered away. I think of some who have come to Christ at this church and been disciples and have drifted away. You can probably think of a few of your friends that have drifted away. Perhaps your looking in the mirror at someone who has drifted away from God and its time to come back home. Put a picture of that person in your mind. I'm going to ask you to do something with that later.

James in v.19 says they have strayed, drifted from the truth. What truth is that? The truth is the Word of God. John 17:17 says "Thy Word is truth." If one has wandered away from the wisdom and truth of God then they must be believing some lies that Satan is whispering in their minds. The whole reason that James writes this book is to expose the lies that we believe that cause us to drift away from the truth, away from following strong after God. V.20 the one who one turns back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul (the wanderers soul) from death and cover a multitude of sins. James say, brothers, the stakes are high. There are people out there right now committing spiritual suicide. They are in danger. They have wandered off the path of truth and may very well step off the cliff into spiritual death.

Are we concerned? Do we care? Some might say, "Well they made their choices let them bear the consequences. They made their bed now let them lay in it." Or we might say, I really can't do anything about it anyway, they are not going to listen to me." Or "Its not my job. Or I don't really believe those things that James is talking about could really

happen to them.” After all didn’t they pray the prayer? Didn’t they at one time say “Yes” to Jesus. Sure it would be great if they were living obedient lives to Jesus, but at least they have their fire insurance to keep them out of hell...don’t they?

This brings up a great debate on whether or not its possible to lose your salvation. One side says, “God is sovereign. He chooses. He is the one who saves. If God is the one who saves then no one can separate and undo what God has done. God’s grace is irresistible and its impossible to slide so far away from the truth that your salvation is lost. The other side of the debate points to passages that say people need to endure to the end to be saved, and those who taste the truth and reject will never enjoy eternal life with God. We will not solve the debate today. There is some truth in both and seems to be a tension not fully resolved in scripture. I believe that because God is the one who works salvation if we see no fruit in ones life there are two options; either they have back-slidden, a temporary set-back from following God, which we all have to some degree. Or they were never genuinely saved in the first place. They may have prayed the prayer or walked the isle, but in their hearts no true faith happened.

None of us have the ability to see deep into the heart and judge whether or not someone else is saved. We can only see the externals. We can hear their confession of faith and observe their actions and whether or not they appear to be bearing fruit, but we can’t see inside the heart. Jesus gave a strong warning in Matthew 7:12 “not everyone who say, “Lord, “Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Even you may show up to church every Sunday, you may sing praise to God. Jesus says, wait a minute. Are you doing what I want you to do? Is that your heart to follow the will of the father? Has their been a change in your heart or are you just playing a religious game? You may well be fooling us to keep the peace at home with your wife, or playing along with it to keep your parents happy, but deep down you know you don’t really believe. Maybe

some of us are even fooling ourselves. All you've ever made was a superficial response to a time when your emotions got away from you, but there is no change, no real fruit. We can't fully evaluate other people, but the Lord knows and we can't fool him. II Timothy 2:19 says "The Lord knows those who are His." John 15 is clear that we can prove we his disciples if we are bearing fruits. Sometimes that fruit might be long in coming. Sometimes the fruit is hard to see, but without any evidence of a changed life we have to ask ourselves very seriously, has there been a change? Is there any spiritual life?

James wrote in 2:14 "what use is it brothers if a man says he has faith but he has no works, can that kind of faith save him?" James wants us to seriously evaluate our faith. Is superficial words enough if there never backed up by actions? Is merely saying the words "sure I believe in God" enough if there is no indication of a real belief. I say "real" belief, because we will always will act on what we truly believe. Especially telling is when its hard and we still act in keeping with our belief. For example most of us would say we believe in honesty. We would even tell people, "I am an honest person". But when we are doing our tax return and it becomes apparent we will owe lots more money that we don't have... but if we are dishonest in our reporting, and ignore reporting certain cash income that would be difficult to track. Then we have exposed our true belief. Our true belief about honesty is that we believe honesty is a very good thing to do as long as its convenient and doesn't hurt us too bad. Our actions have revealed not what we say we believe about honesty, but what we truly do believe.

So James tells us to take a look at my actions. If they are not in keeping with what I say I believe, then quite possibly what I say I believe is not what I really believe at all!

James has offered a few ways you can tell if your faith is backed up by actions. Chapter 1. Where is the first place you turn to when you need advice? Wisdom? How do you respond to temptation? Trial and

suffering? How so you treat the least of society? Chapter 2 How do you treat other people that are simply different than you? Chapter 3 Listen to the words that are coming out of your mouth. The words that come out of our mouth reveal the condition of the heart. How do you speak about other people? Chapter 4 How do you handle conflicts and quarrels? Does your life with Christ have any bearing on your work life or the way you run your business? Chapter 5 Is our first response to take our concerns to God in prayer? Do we long for Christ's return? Do we say what we mean and mean what we say? Are we ready to be vulnerable and transparent with others about our weaknesses? Do we care about those who are wandering away from the truth? All of these are opportunities for us to demonstrate what is really inside, to move from mere words of belief, to reality. James writes to encourage "brethren" to follow the truth, follow God. And now is always the right time to follow him. None of us will be perfect this side of heaven. But where is your heart? Is it moving closer to God in desiring to live in obedience to Him or is it drifting, straying farther and farther from the truth?

In v.19-20, James makes an assumption that these people have heard the truth and know it up in their heads, maybe at one time they even walked in the truth, but they are no longer living in it. They may even be still saying the word of belief, but their actions reveal what they truly believe in. James wants us to get involved. In the verses just before the elders were called on to offer up special prayer for those who are very sick, but here James doesn't say its just the job of the pastor's or elders to restore one who has wandered away from the truth. He say "if any among you". If you are walking in truth as a believer and one of your friends is wandering, guess whose job it is to make an effort to turn him back? That's right its you. Its me. Any among us.

How has James been working at doing this? Well he wrote a letter and sent it out to all the Jewish Christians who had dispersed out from Jerusalem after the persecution describing what it looks like to walk in

the truth. Here is what living out the truth looks like. James asks us to evaluate. How well am I walking in the truth?

So James begins by giving information. Perhaps they have simply forgotten and need to be reminded of the truth. James reminds them of the truth. Next James exposes the lies that they might be deluded into believing. He exposes the forces that might cause them to avoid dealing with the truth. Then James gives plenty of motivation for walking in the truth. So James says. If its an information problem, Hear this loud and clear, this is God's truth. Whether is appears to you to be the right move or not, this is God's truth. If it's a motivation problem, James says here are the consequences and here are the benefits of following after God.

What are those consequences for not following after God, that James included in his book? Flip through the book. Chapter 1:6 unstable life, loss of God's resource. V10-11 humiliation, diminished significance. V14 death deception and delusion. V22 forgetfulness (most of us can't afford that). 2:4 becoming driven by evil. V2:9,10 convicted. Guilty. V.13 shown no mercy. V.14 salvation in question. V.20 useless. 3:16 a life of disorder and filled with evil things. 4:2 fights and quarrels. V.6 God is on the other side, an enemy. V.9 misery and weeping. V14 all your best efforts are meaningless. 5:1 all your hard work rots away. 5:12 you will fall under the judgment of God. And in our passage this morning. Living in error, on the wrong path and experiencing spiritual death. Anybody squirming under the natural consequences of not living in the truth? Whether you see it right now or not, that is what you will experience.

What about on the positive side? What benefits does James give us to motivate us to live out our faith in God? Chapter 1:3 the testing of our faith produces endurance that moves us toward being complete and whole, lacking nothing. V.5 we receive wisdom in generous allotments. V.12 we get the crown of life. v.17 perfect gifts come down to us from our Father. V.21 our souls are assured of salvation. V.25 we will be blessed

in what we do. 2:5 as we live truth out we become rich in faith and heirs to God's kingdom, chosen by God. 3:13 our lives become marked with gentleness and wisdom. V17 purity, peace, mercy, good fruit and steadiness. 4:8 we are welcomed into His presence and God draws near to us. V.10 God lifts us up. 5:11 We experience God's compassion and mercy. V.16 forgiven. V16 healed, restored. Our prayers can accomplish much. And now in v.19-20 we see that we can be a part of rescuing someone that is headed for spiritual death and cover multiplied sin.

It would be great to be on the volcano rescue team and to save a lost climber on Mt Saint Helens. It would be great to be one of the fire crews that work together to rescue a child from a burning building. It would be great to be on the EMT team over at North country who work together to rescue a woman from a terrible car accident. But what an even greater delight to be a part of a team that rescues a man or woman, teen, grandma, grandpa from spiritual deadness. Just as real as heaven is, the Bible is very clear, Hell is not a place to joke about. It is real and apart from God those who have not experienced spiritual life are heading to an eternal place of torment separated from anything worthwhile and good. James invites "any among us" to be a part of the rescue team effort.

How can you be a part of the rescue team? The collapse of the spiritual life is rarely a blowout but usually a slow leak. Our job is to listen for the hiss. We know that only God is the One who ultimately draws a person back to living the truth. But God for some reason has chosen to use people to be agents in ministry of peoples life. Can you think of any greater privilege then to save a person's life? and cover a multitude of sins? We want to see them come back to God. We want to see God forgive their sins and save them. What can we do?

1) Certainly we can pray. James doesn't mention it here, but in the context of this chapter v.16 says "the prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective." I have never seen someone come to Christ

without someone first praying for them. A grandparent, a child, a friend. Think about it. Who was praying for you before you were saved? I Samuel 12:23 says, “far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you...” If a friend of yours has drifted pray for them

2) Get involved in their life. You can't make a difference in someone's life long-distance. If they let you in, it may be the last thing you want to do, but pursue friendship and take the initiative. Go to them. Don't wait for them to ask for help. Give them a call. Write a letter. Show up. Just be there. Show concern for them that clearly demonstrates that you are interested in them far more than taking an evangelical scalp. They don't want to be someone's religious recovery project. They want to be loved. They won't care how much you know, until they know how much you really care. I Peter 4:8 “love covers a multitude of sins.”

3) Is it an information problem? Then pick a good time and affirm the truth. Don't bludgeon them with truth. But you may have to say some very hard things. Speak that truth in love. It seems like the objective of some Christians is to amputate the limb rather than working to heal it. II Timothy 2:25 “with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth that they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil...” Come alongside them and point them in the right direction.

4) Do all of this with integrity. We must possess what we want them to live. If we are not walking in the truth, first get right with God and then you can go help out another who is struggling. Gal 6:1 “If one is caught in a sin. You who are spiritual should restore such a one with gentleness, testing yourself lest you yourself be tempted.” This is a ministry of cutting through deception and then setting forth a clear path of obedience. Remember not just for pastor types. We are all responsible.

4) Keep loving them and praying for them. It may be you have said all you can. It's not an information problem, it's a heart issue. Then take it to God in prayer and wait anticipating for God to work. It's ultimately not

up to us. We get to be part of the rescue team but its God who is 4:12 “able to save”. We want to be a part of the rescue team but ultimately it is not up to us. God will accomplish His work in his people in His time.

So in a couple of minutes I'm going to ask you to do something to respond to the message. Could you think of one person who has wandered away from the truth? Are you praying for them? Are you pursuing relationship with them? What are you doing to turn them back to Jesus? What I'd like you to do with the slips of paper is to write the name of someone you know who has wandered from the truth and I'd like you to come up to the cross and nail it to the cross. By doing that you are committing to praying for this person daily that their eyes would be open and they would come back to living the truth. You are committing pursuing relationship with them, loving them. For them it may not be an information problem, it may be a heart issue. But it may be that you need to expose some lies they have been believing and affirm the truth of God. Who is that person you will pray for? It may be that you will invite them to SNL or Easter service in 6 weeks where they will hear a clear invitation to follow Jesus and we will have a baptism right here.

Perhaps you are the one that has wandered. You know in your heart that you have been faking it for years. I can't see the heart, but God can. Now is the time to come home. Perhaps you need to write you own name on the piece of paper and nail it to the cross and come home to Jesus. As the worship team sings a song, I want you to get up out of your seats and nail the names to the cross.

PRAYERS: Dear Lord. I've known a lot about the truth, but I haven't really followed it. I see the dangers of a superficial belief that doesn't really act on it or obey. I ask you to forgive me. I ask that you would come into my life and give me the desire to follow you closely. I mean it and pray this in the name of Jesus.

Dear father I know people who have wandered and I've ceased to pray for them. I've stopped pursuing relationship with them and speaking the truth

in love. I will pray for this person and take whatever initiative needed to involve myself in their life again if they will let me so I can team up with God to turn a sinner from the error of their ways and save them from eternal and spiritual death. I mean it and pray these things in Christ's name.