<u>**Sermon for August 12, 2012 – VBS Sunday**</u>

2Timothy 4:18

<u>Theme</u>: **The LORD rescues you . . .**
1) *From every evil attack*
2) *For his heavenly Kingdom.*

¹⁸ *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Two men are involved in a car crash. One walks away unhurt; the other loses both of his legs. Which of the two did the LORD rescue?

Two women find out they have breast cancer. One is on the road to full recovery; the other is about to die. Which of the two did the LORD rescue?

Human nature equates physical health and prosperity with whether or not a person is "blessed" by God. But this is <u>not</u> the case. The person who suffers is also blessed, for the Lord might be using his suffering to rescue him from a greater danger. This is only understood when a person realizes that the LORD is far more concerned about our souls than our bodies – although he certainly cares for both. Let us see how this truth played out in the life of the apostle Paul.

<u>Part One</u>: From Every Evil Attack.

Our sermon text reads: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.*

What kind of man do you think penned these words? The way they stand, all by themselves, we might imagine someone who had a very "lucky" life – someone who never faced real trials.

Is this who Paul was? Well, let's let the apostle tell us in his own words. He once wrote about himself: *I have . . . been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).* Now how can a man who has suffered so much and who is sitting in a Roman dungeon, awaiting certain execution, write: "The LORD will rescue me from every evil attack?" A cynical person might say, "Paul, are you blind? The LORD has not protected you. Look at all you suffered! You are about to be killed for your faith in Christ! How can you say that God rescued you?"

He could say it because Paul knew there was a greater danger facing him than all the suffering he experienced. The only thing that disease, war, crime and disaster could do was kill the body.   But Paul feared the one who could destroy both his body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28). Paul knew God's law. He knew that God is holy, righteous and perfect. He knew that God hates sin; that only those who are perfectly righteous – those who are sinless - will live with God forever. Paul also knew that no one is righteous before God (Romans 3:10); *for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).* He also knew that God's law threatens to punish all sinners to eternal death in hell.

Paul knew that he was a sinner. The good he wanted to do he could not do. The evil he hated, he kept on doing. Who would save him from his sinful self?   Paul himself tells us: *"Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our LORD. . . There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus our LORD."* (Roman7:14ff) Jesus Christ, true God, took on human flesh and blood in order to save all mankind from the sin, death and eternal hell we deserve. How did he do it? He was tempted in every way, just as we are, but was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He took our guilt upon himself

and let his Father punish him for it all. Why? So that we could be forgiven! The Bible says: *²¹ God made him* [that is Jesus] *who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Just think of what this verse means! God considered Jesus as sin personified and punished him so that, through faith, we might possess Jesus' perfect righteousness as our own, and be welcomed by God in heaven.
And to prove that Jesus' suffering and death for us actually did save us, Jesus rose from the grave!

The LORD rescued Paul from the greatest danger of all – eternal death in hell. Because God did this, Paul knew that God truly loved him. The LORD never promised Paul an easy life. Actually he said of Paul: *I will show him how much he must suffer for my name (Acts 9:16).* But the one thing God did promise is that He would be with Paul and bring him safely into his kingdom; making sure that all things worked out for his eternal good. (Romans 8:28)

What about us? God never promised believers an easy life. He says: *"All men will hate you because of me (Luke 21:17). In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33)."* Did you catch Jesus' promise to believers? Yes, we will face danger, sorrow and hardships in life, but Christ has overcome the world. He died for our sins as he died for Paul's. When we trust Jesus for forgiveness, God gives us Christ's perfect righteousness to be our own. God loves you. Jesus is the proof. This is why we can say with St. Paul: *³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).*

Part Two: For His Heavenly Kingdom.

Paul experienced a lot of evil in life but God used all of it to train, discipline and strengthen Paul's faith. But now he sat in a Roman dungeon awaiting execution. Would death - that event which everyone fears - separate Paul from God's love? Would it reveal Paul's God as powerless to rescue him? No, not at all!

Because Jesus died and rose again, death has lost its sting. Since Jesus paid for Paul's every sin, he didn't have to worry about the judgment that comes after death. Why? Because *there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus our LORD (Romans 8:1)!* On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3).* A place at Jesus' side, in his kingdom - this is what every Christian is journeying towards. It is a place we possess even now through faith in Jesus. Our reservation is guaranteed.

Now someone may ask: "How can I be sure that God rescued me? What must I do to know I am saved?" Paul once answered that question for a certain jailer who came close to losing his life. What did Paul say? *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household (Acts 16:31)."* Now someone might wonder: "what does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus?" Simply this: first of all realize and confess your sinfulness to God, and then trust that He forgives you for Christ's sake. Jesus has done it all: he has paid for every single sin you have ever or will ever commit. The person who puts his hope and trust in this good news is a Christian. He has been recued by God.

So, whom did God rescue in the car accident I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon: The man who went away healthy, or the man who lost his legs? Did he rescue the woman who was healed of her cancer or the woman who died? The answer is this: God rescued all of humanity by sending his Son to live, die and rise again. Those who trust in this message are saved, regardless of whether they experience good or bad, sickness or health, rags or riches. They stand under God's promise *that in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).*

Dear friends gathered here this morning: do you believe in Jesus? Then confess confidently with St. Paul: *¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*