

Galen Peterson in 1995, doing doctoral research on rescuers at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance center in Jerusalem.



English.

Regardless of the language, it was very moving to hold in my hands the words of people who cared enough to rescue Jews and then to tell their tale afterward. Their words represented the willingness of everyday people to act righteously when they very easily could have been killed for daring to give life to Jews during that time of systematic extermination.

The reason that I wanted to see those documents is because I wanted to know their motivation for taking great risks, which later became an important element of my dissertation.

This is truly a profound issue. Why did common people in Europe risk their lives to rescue Jews during the Holocaust? Many of them were Christians with a genuine faith, and thus they were led by God to act in the same way that their Savior acted on behalf of them.

Christian rescuers often referred to the teachings of Jesus as motivation for their efforts. These include loving your neighbor as yourself (Mat 7:12; 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-37), and facing future judgment depending on our response to people in need (Mat 25:31-46). Many of them expressed a love for the Jewish people after reading the Bible

where God's love for His covenant people is so evident. Some even had never met a Jewish person until an encounter occurred at time when a rescue was desperately needed. But because they had read God's Word, they were prepared to act, and so they did.

But that is not true for all of the rescuers during the Holocaust. Some didn't consider themselves to be religious and they couldn't cite any particular biblical principle, but they commonly said words to the effect, "we are all God's children." Others described being raised in homes where moral values were taught, and they had a strong sense of right and wrong from childhood. Still others reasoned in their minds that they couldn't live with themselves if failing to act would lead to anyone's death.

So while the greatest number of rescuers were motivated by spiritual reasons, we have to recognize that others were motivated by a simple recognition of right and wrong and empathy for victims. Some sociologists have attempted to explain such actions in evolutionary ways, so that morality is the result of humans having larger brains and thus a greater capability for thinking more abstractly, as well as striving toward self-preservation by protecting

humanity. In other words, humans will risk their own lives to save other people because we have space in our brains to think about such things, and in the end, it will be good for us if we keep other people around us.

But in reality, that is just comparing us to animals and the ways that they think, and acting like herds and flocks as a means of self-preservation.

Human beings, unlike animals, bear the image and likeness of God. That means we are like Him in terms of personhood, so that we can relate to God and to other people in very personal ways. It also means that we have self-awareness, so that we can sense our place in the universe, and we can comprehend concepts like time and eternity, and the implications of death.

Bearing God's image and likeness makes all human life sacred. So instead of the sociological explanation of morality and the motivation for rescuing others being a function of brain capacity and self-preservation, the biblical explanation is that we humans have been made like God in terms of understanding the broader implications of threats to human life. Moreover, we are capable of willingly risking our self-preservation by seeing others as being just as valuable as ourselves.

That explains why people who were not spiritually-oriented would be willing to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. They may not have believed in God, but they possessed the image and likeness of God, and so they acted accordingly.

Our Need for Rescue

This does not mean that it is sufficient to go about our lives as considerate non-religious people.

Jewish people who were hidden by the Ten Boom family of Amsterdam during the Holocaust.



The reality is that all of us need to be rescued ourselves. And the reason is that the image and likeness of God that we all bear has been marred by sin. Yes, we can discern the difference between good and evil, but we also have the ability of exercising our will by rejecting the decision to do good.

Even our sense of morality and ethics can work against us. For if you feel good about yourself as a result of accomplishing something that spared someone else from harm, it can lead you to having a false sense of your own spiritual vulnerability by assuming that you are good enough in God's eyes.

The fact is that everybody sins. And the seriousness of even a single sin is not always acknowledged. The common strategy for overcoming our imperfection is to strive to be good enough to reach some ambiguous standard. Maybe, as the thinking goes, if I do something extraordinarily good, that will give me a goodness boost in God's eyes. As the degree of seriousness of the rescue increases, so does our perception of the goodness of our deeds.

This does not mean that heroic acts are meaningless. But it is easy to over-inflate them to make you feel like you deserve a

place in heaven.

The problem is that God has never said that such a result is possible. In fact, our good deeds will have no bearing whatsoever in securing a place in the world to come. God has made it clear that a favorable outcome in divine judgment is only a matter of believing in Yeshua (Jesus). And the reason is that He alone provides us with a solution to our imperfection.

Since Yeshua was conceived with a divine origin and without an earthly father, that means that He had no sin nature. On top of that, unlike all other people, He lived a perfect life by never committing a sin. He was perfect in every way—something that no common human being can achieve.

In spite of all that, He still died *because* of sin. Not His sin, mind you, but our sin. In fact, He willingly gave His life as an act of atonement for the sin of everyone who believes in Him and receives that great act on their behalf. The solution could not be any clearer than this:

“If you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Both King David and Paul tell us that when our sins are

forgiven through atonement, God credits us with righteousness (Romans 4:6-7; Psalm 32:1). That is consistent with what God did for Abraham. Genesis 15 6 states that God credited Abraham with righteousness because of his belief, not because of his good deeds. So we can see how this is a Jewish concept, more specifically a Torah concept. Paul sums it up by saying that when we believe in Yeshua, God credits us with the goodness or the righteousness of the perfect Son of God who died for us (Romans 4:24).

In that way, we can set aside our well-intended but inadequate attempts of trying to be good enough in God's eyes. According to this far better solution, we end up relying on an all-loving, all-merciful, all-forgiving Holy God for a blessed outcome in eternity, rather than ourselves. But we do have to believe in Yeshua for that to be possible. God has given us no other way.

That is why it is crucial for all of us to have that basis settled today, while the opportunity is still available to us. Judgment day will be too late. We all need to be rescued before that day comes, which is always just a moment away because of the fragile nature of life. Ultimately, our great assurance can be expressed this way:

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever” (2 Tim 4:18).

Yeshua is the solution to our sin, not doing good deeds, for He is the great rescuer that the Father sent to this earth because of His love for us who bear His image and likeness.

That does not mean doing good deeds is meaningless. But the

reason that we do them is not to earn an eternal favor from God, but because we have already been blessed by Him through grace, and we care enough for our fellow human beings that we desire for them to share in the same blessing.

It is all about recognizing the great value in every single human being, and wanting the very best for them in every way. All we have to do is to follow the example of Yeshua, who demonstrated pure compassion and was willing not just to risk His life but to give it up completely for our benefit. This is all about realizing that there are other people who are precious because they bear the image and likeness of God, but they are in need in some kind of rescue.

A Great Example of a Rescuer

Fanny Crosby is best known as the writer of many noteworthy hymns, like “Blessed Assurance” and “To God be the Glory.” What you may not know is that in 1820, at the age of six months, she became blind. But in spite of the challenges that came with blindness 200 years ago, that never stopped her from becoming a remarkable contributor to society.

Her father died at an early age, so she was raised by her

mother and grandmother who were godly women and they encouraged her to overcome her inability to read by memorizing Scripture. Beginning at the age of ten, they read to her five chapters of the Bible each week that she memorized.

By the time she reached the age of fifteen, she had memorized the entire Torah, all four of the Gospels and many of the Psalms and other passages. That explains, in part, how she could so easily “write” 8,000 hymns in her lifetime in spite of not being able to see.

In her early twenties she became an advocate for the blind, and was actually the first woman ever to speak in the U.S. Senate. When she began writing songs, they weren’t spiritual in nature. When the Civil War broke out, her songs strongly defended the cause of the North and criticized the South because of its adherence to slavery. It was also during this time that she began writing hymns.

Throughout her adult years, she lived in parts of New York City where there was much poverty. So she became involved in helping rescue missions there in a number of ways. In 1869, after visiting one of those rescue missions, she wrote the words to one of her more famous hymns,

“Rescue the Perishing.” Its words expressed her lifelong commitment to caring for others.

For nearly 50 years after writing that song, until the age of 94, she never stopped living out those words by ministering to the blind, the impoverished, and the lingering effects of slavery, while being blind herself all of that time. So while we might recognize her great contributions to the songs that are sung in worship, I think her greatest legacy is being a reflection of God’s commitment to rescuing humanity from the many ills that we face—from material and social to spiritual.

And so it should be for all of us who name Yeshua as Lord. We share in that same calling to minister to others in need. And when we speak about Yeshua to others, we are offering a lifeline of rescue with eternal implications.

So who do you know that very much needs to be rescued in a godly way? I trust that you will gather up the courage to reach out and to speak out. Just do it in a loving way, while trusting in the Good Lord who created us in His image and calls us to act just as He does.

Galen Peterson
is Executive Director of the
American Remnant Mission

*Thank you for
blessing us with
your support*

American Remnant Mission
Post Office Box 2321
Pleasant Hill, California 94523
[925] 943-6061
E-mail: arm@remnant.net
Internet: www.remnant.net



Dr. Galen Peterson, Executive Director