

## ***Rescue From Above – The Thai Soccer Team Analogy***

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(A good source of info is <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44791998>)

The call went out - “Trapped! 12 young boys, teammates of the Wild Boars soccer team and their coach are trapped deep within a cave system in Thailand. We need help to search for and rescue them! The rainy season has begun and torrential rains are flooding the cave. It means certain death for them unless they can be rescued. Who will help?”

On June 23, 2018 in northern Thailand, twelve soccer teammates, ages 11 to 16 and their 25-year-old coach rode their bicycles to a cave with the intent to go for a few-hour adventure. They knew that to do so was dangerous, but they had explored the cave before. There were signs warning people to keep out. They brought a little food and water with them. The caves were in essence, a drainage system for the rain when it poured. While they were in the cave system, it began to rain and the monsoon flood waters pushed them deeper and deeper into the cave until they were perched on a ledge 4km or 2.5 miles deep into the cave system. Above them was more than 600 feet of rock, and beneath them the waters flowed. There was no way they could have gotten out on their own. Given enough time, they were subject to certain death.

But a boy who hadn't gone on the trip reported where the boys had gone and someone discovered the bicycles and confirmed that the boys were trapped in the cave. Rescue efforts began. Experienced cave divers from all over the world joined in. These were US Air Force rescue specialists, and cave divers from the United Kingdom, Belgium, Australia, Scandinavia, and other countries. Some had volunteered, and some were called in by the authorities from Thailand. Two divers from a British Cave diving rescue team after hours of diving in the treacherous conditions found the boys. A video showed a boy asking, "Have you come to take us out now?" The response was, "No, not today, not today. We are coming. Many people are coming. We are the first. Many people come. Someday. Not now, but we come!"

Tremendous efforts began to rescue the boys, sight unseen by them. Large pumps were installed to reduce the amount of the water blocking the passageways. Enough water was pumped out to fill a huge World Cup Soccer stadium to a depth of 90 feet.

The world was watching the rescue, enthralled by this race between life and death.

Oxygen ran low in the chamber so fresh oxygen had to be pumped in. Liquid food was brought to the boys and fresh drinking water to sustain them. They would have to be guided, in fact pulled or carried through chambers and narrow passageways, at times fully immersed in water, in order to get out to the light and life.

One Navy Seal diver from Thailand, Saman Gunan, struggling to help the boys, died in the process, giving up his own life so that they might have a chance to live. He was in his 30's.

The boys had two choices. They could stay in the cave and die, or they could follow the rescue plan outlined to them in order to reach the light, life and be saved from certain death.

The boys had to be taught how to breathe using the scuba gear, how to receive the calming influence of sedatives, how to swim and pull the guide rope against the currents that would keep them in the cave.

Then the rescue began. Boy after boy was extracted, guided by two rescuers, one in front of and another behind them until they all came into the light and life.

Just as the last boy came out, one of the massive pumps failed or was turned off. The final rescuers barely made it out. Anyone remaining in the cave would have perished.

In the town where the boys were taken to a hospital, jubilant crowds lined the streets leading to the hospital, cheering on the ambulances. Car horns blared incessantly in celebration. All around the world, millions of people who had anxiously followed the story celebrated the return of the Wild Boars.

One of the boys' grandfathers made this statement "It's like they have died and now have been reborn."

The boys had literally been "rescued from above."

As I followed this story, I was struck with the parallels between the drama of the boys' rescue and our rescue from certain eternal death, the consequences of sin. Satan rebelled against God in heaven, was cast to the earth, and then he deceived Adam and Eve into rebelling against God as well. And so sin and death came into the world. Adam and Eve sinned seeking an adventure, a more exalted position than what God had given to them.

Just as the boys were attracted by the cave system, so we are attracted by things of this world that draw us away from our loving God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

1. James 1:14-15 (NKJV) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

The reality is that we have all sinned,

2. Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

And that sin has natural consequences,

3. Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The boys, once they embarked on their adventure, were driven deeper and deeper into the cave system by something beyond their control. In a similar sense, we are driven deeper and deeper into sin until we find ourselves trapped. Perhaps it is alcohol, marijuana or other drugs, lust, pornography, anger, thefts, sexual immortality. Whatever it is, we become addicted to sin, we become numb to its evil and its consequences. There is nothing we can do to get out of our sinful condition on our own. There is nothing we can do to escape the certainty of death.

But like the boys who were driven 4 km into the cave system and had no way out, there is a rescue effort that has been put in place by our loving God – a Rescue from Above. Just as there were over 150 individuals that worked together to free the boys from the cave, so God has sent Someone with a team to rescue us. He sent Jesus Christ His Son to provide a way out and He is the ONLY way out of the cave of eternal death.

4. John 3:16-17 (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

5. John 11:25-26 (NKJV) Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

6. John 14:6 (NKJV) Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

7. Acts 4:12 (NKJV) Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Jesus gave up his life, voluntarily dying on the cross so that we might have a chance at eternal life. What incredible love from our Creator!

Besides Jesus, God sent his angels, his Holy Spirit, his prophets, preachers, teachers, all rescuers, to call people to Him and share, “There is a way out of certain death.” “Repent, believe, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”

Just like an Australian doctor went into the cave to comfort and care for the boys, so Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit to comfort us, to calm us in spite of adversity.

8. John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

9. Ephesians 1:13-14 (NKJV) In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

God did not make his creatures to die but to live forever. But sin entered the world through Adam's disobedience and so death comes to all.

10. Romans 5:12 (NKJV) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned:

But God sent his Son to give us a chance at life, to transform us from beings of mortality back into the glorious immortal nature that he had given Adam and Eve from the very beginning. When will that happen? Not now, but let's find out.

11. 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 (NKJV) Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

When the British divers finally came upon the chamber with the boys, they were asked, "have you come to take us out now?" And the answer was "not yet." But rescue was in the works.

12. Acts 1:6 (NKJV) [Jesus' disciples] asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The answer was "no," but Jesus would come again and take us to be with him where he is also, the New Jerusalem.

13. John 14:1-3 (NKJV) "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Just as the boys were running low on oxygen, food and water, which had to be brought into them, so until the rescue happens from above, we have to partake of Jesus, the breath of life, Jesus the bread of life and Jesus the water of life. Let's read that in God's word:

14.

Genesis 2:7 God [that is Jesus the Word] breathed into Adam the breath of life.

John 6:35 Jesus said, I am the bread of life

John 4:14 [Jesus said] I am the water of life

Jesus sustains us until we are resurrected at his second coming and transformed into the beings of immortality that he promised.

15. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NKJV) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

16. 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 (NKJV) So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?"

As the boys had to be taught how to facilitate their rescue, so believers have to be taught God's way. The path out would be tortuous, dangerous and God's adversary, Satan would try to push believers off the path, persecuting them at times or trying to deceive them with his lies.

17. Luke 13:23-24 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

18. Matthew 7:13-14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

What does the word strait mean in these passages? Some think the opposite of crooked. Yet in these verses, the word "strait" means narrow and confining. Think of a "strait jacket" like Houdini used to escape from. It's restrictive. Think of a narrow passage that ships squeeze their way through. Think of having someone park right next to your car's driver's side door and you have to work to squeeze yourself in. It is tight, confining. That's the meaning of the word "strait."

How do Jesus words compare to the teaching that all paths lead to God? It's the opposite, isn't it? That teaching comes from the evil one. If you are on an easy path, a popular path that doesn't require change, then when you get to the end of that path, you will find a demon there instead of Jesus.

The journey to heaven, the path to eternal life is not an easy one, but you are not alone. Just as the divers helped the boys, so there would be evangelists, Bible workers, God's angels and his Holy Spirit to help the believer on the journey to life.

19. Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) [Jesus said to his disciples] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."  
Amen.

20. Romans 10:13-15 (NKJV) For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

So learning is important and even more important is observing or obeying the commandments that Jesus gave to His disciples.

The boys had to pass through water in order to get out of the tunnel system. They had to be fully immersed in order to get to the light, not just experience the sprinkling of a few water drops.

21. Mark 16:16 [Jesus said,] He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

The boys could have turned down the rescuers but by doing so, they would have condemned themselves to death. They could have ignored the rescuers, handing them the greatest rejection possible but they did not. They chose life. And all came out into the light.

Just as the world was watching the rescue efforts of the boys, so the universe, angels and human beings are watching the rescue efforts here. What will each person decide?

22. 1 Corinthians 4:9 (NIV) ... We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings.

As the last boys were led or carried out of the cave system, the pump system failed and the monsoon rains that had been held back immediately poured down. As mentioned the final rescuers had to scramble to get out of the cave system. In a similar sense when Christ comes again, those who have rejected God’s rescue plan will perish until they are resurrected to face the judgment.

In order to get out of the cave system, the boys had to make the decision to follow the rescue plan while they were still alive. If they had died, it would have been too late.

In the same way, the decision to accept Jesus as one's Savior has to be made while one is alive. Once a person has died, it's too late. There is no reincarnation, no second chance to accept Jesus and receive eternal life.

23. Hebrews 9:27 As it is appointed unto men once to die; but after this the judgment.

And so we are faced with a choice, whether to accept God’s rescue plan or to reject it.

At this point in time you have two choices – it is really that simple:

You can choose light or you can choose darkness.

You can choose to embark on the narrow confining path to eternal life or you can choose to stay put and be subject to certain death. Like the boys, you can't dig out of the cave of death on your own. It's impossible.

You can choose God's way, his rescue plan or you can choose Satan's way. There is no in-between. To not choose Christ is to choose his adversary, Satan.

You can choose to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, asking for forgiveness for the sins that have separated you from God over your lifetime, and you can ask that you can be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. As long as one is breathing, and before the door of mercy closes, it's not too late.

Or you can choose to ignore or reject Jesus, side with Satan, and be subject to God's judgment, punishment and eternal death.

Which one will you choose?

If you would like to begin the journey out of the cave of death, then pray the following prayer with me:

Merciful heavenly Father, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who died on the cross and I accept Him as my Savior. Please forgive me of my sins and blot them from my record book through the blood of Jesus Christ. I ask that you place in me your Comforter, the Holy Spirit and ask Him to drive away any evil spirits that might try to prevent me from obeying your commandments. If I have not been baptized by immersion, I commit to be buried under the water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I thank you for having heard my prayer. In Jesus name and through the power of his blood I pray, Amen!

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