



Peace On Earth Ministries
"Proclaiming Peace To The Nations" – Zechariah 9:10

Do I Have Good News For You!

REFRESHING WATERS RENEWAL
CARL JUNCTION, MO
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"In the midst of the theologically discredited nineteenth century there was a preacher who had at least six thousand people in his congregation every Sunday, whose sermons for many years were cabled to New York every Monday and reprinted in the leading newspapers of the country, and who occupied the same pulpit for almost forty years without ever repeating himself or preaching himself dry. The fire he thus kindled, and turned into a beacon that shone across the seas and down through the generations, was no mere brush fire of sensationalism, but an inexhaustible blaze that glowed and burned on solid hearths and was fed by the wells of the eternal Word. Here was the miracle of a bush that burned with fire and yet was not consumed" (Helmut Thielicke, on Charles Haddon Spurgeon).

The theme of this Bible conference is "The Gospel in the Epistles." Spurgeon said, "It is not ours to improve the Gospel, but to repeat it when we preach, and obey it when we hear."

J. I. Packer said, "The Bible is God preaching." God is preaching to us in our text today. He is telling us that He has good news for us in Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the greatest news the world has never heard.

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep,

we should live together with Him" (1 Thessalonians 5:9,10).

Who are the "us" and the "we" that are mentioned four times in our text? Surely they are "the church of the Thessalonians" who were "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). This wonderful congregation was established on only three weeks of Paul's scripture exposition in a Jewish synagogue, "explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" (Acts 17:1-4). It must have been persuasive proclamation for "some were persuaded," including a "great multitude of devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women." They became imitators of Paul and Silas and, more importantly, Jesus Christ. They received the word in both affliction and joy. They became examples – living models – of what a Christian should be to all in Macedonia and Achaia. From them "sounded forth" ("rang out" NIV) the word of the Lord in every place. Their faith toward God went out to the extent that Paul and Silas did not have to say anything. This is every preacher's dream! Their sterling lives demonstrated to all how they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God – and to wait for His Son's second coming from heaven, even Jesus who delivers from the wrath to come (1:5-10). Hence, this letter. Hence, this text. *Application:* if we are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, imitators of Christ, recipients of His word in both affliction and joy, consistent examples to others, those who "sound forth" the message, then this text is ours to embrace.

An aside: B. W. Johnson, in his *People's Commentary with Notes*, has this to say about the church in Thessalonica. "About AD 52, the church was planted. This church honored with the first of the apostolic epistles, long continued to enjoy a glorious history. Though for more than 400 years under the sway of the Turk [translation: Islam. V.K], the majority of its population has continued to profess the religion of Christ. Stop the tape. Johnson, who served as president of Oskaloosa (Iowa) College, later Drake University, wrote his commentary between 1889-1891. But he writes of the church in Thessalonica *in the present tense!* He said, "The city is still great and flourishing ... About half the population are Greek Christians, and the remainder nearly equally divided between Muslims and Jews."

In 2003 I was teaching in the first-ever Christians Writers' Seminar in Damoh, India. I mentioned the above information and said, "Someone should write a book some day spelling out the timeless principles that produced a church that lasted longer than any other church of the New Testament era." Sitting on the front row, taking notes like a schoolboy, was the esteemed Dr. J. H. Anand, editor of the Hindi Theological Literature Committee in Jabalpur. He pointed his pencil at me and said in an excited voice, "You do that! You write a monograph on this subject!" He has translated three of my books into Hindi and I may yet take him up on this challenge that still rings in my ears! *When you build a church on Christ, what you build will last!* Think of this: the specter of Nazism lasted only six years. Communism in Russia crumbled after 70 years. But the church in Thessalonica, according to Johnson, lasted nearly 2,000 years.

The bottom line in our text is this: *Christ died so that we can live together (forever) with Him.* But there is more. I see at least three progressive and powerful points – life changing lessons if you will – in the sacred text that has been assigned to me.

FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS: GOD DID NOT APPOINT US TO WRATH.

God *has* appointed some things. He appointed a law in Israel that fathers should teach their children

so that the generation to come might know them and declare them to their children (Psalm 78:5,6). He appointed the moon for seasons (Psalm 109:19). He appointed the ancient people and the things that are coming and shall come (Isaiah 44:7). He appointed a kingdom to His Son (Luke 22:29). In turn, the Son appointed the 12 (and later the 70) to go forth and preach the Gospel. Jesus said, "I have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). Our text shows just how long Paul's fruit remained in Thessalonica!

The Bible says that it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained (Acts 17:21). *But God has not appointed us to wrath!*

Wrath, as it is used here, is in reference to the *coming* wrath. There is wrath past and wrath present. Scripture is full of examples of the wrath of God. That is wrath past. But the Bible also speaks of wrath present. "The wrath of God *is being revealed* from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Romans 1:8 NIV). Paul implies that God's wrath is being revealed and being received by men and women as "due penalty for their perversion" (1:26,27). I know that is not "politically correct" but it is "theologically accurate." A moral wrong can never be a civil right.

But *future* wrath is what Paul is talking about in our text. Earlier he spoke of the Second Coming of Christ – "even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"

(1 Thessalonians 1:10). There will be "hell to pay" some day, but since Jesus "paid it all," we can rest assured that "God has not appointed us to wrath" ("us" being all who have turned to God, serve God, and patiently wait for the return of Christ). What a wonderful Savior we have in Christ! He not only delivers us from sin but from the wrath to come as well.

I saw an arresting book title recently. *Seven Things You Better Nail Down before All Hell Breaks Loose.* I

have no idea what seven things the author had in mind, but I do know that here is one thing you had better nail down: *God has not appointed us to wrath.* He did not choose us only to condemn us; He did not desire us only to destine us to doom and everlasting darkness.

SECOND, EVEN BETTER NEWS: GOD HAS APPOINTED US TO OBTAIN SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

There are some things that I shall never obtain. When I was a boy I dreamed of playing shortstop for the New York Yankees. I finally go to Yankee Stadium in 2000. But I had to pay for my ticket, like every other average Joe, just to get into “The House that Ruth Built.”

There are some things in life that God does not want me to obtain – like those three things that have tripped up many a Christian leader: money, sex, and power. I have seen colleagues brought low by their lust for sordid gain, illicit sex, and inordinate power. May God’s preventative grace keep me from ever becoming a Balak, an Absalom, or a Diotrefes.

But there are some things, more important things, vitally spiritual and eternal things, that God has actually appointed us to obtain. God wants us to obtain mercy. “For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Jews who rejected Christ, V.K.] disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy show you they also may obtain mercy” (Romans 11:30,31). There is mercy for both saint and sinner. “Mercy there was great and grace was free, pardon there was multiplied to me, there my burdened soul found liberty – at Calvary” (William R. Newell).

Consider those who obtained mercy. The Faith Chapter (Hebrews 11) says that through faith they subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, *obtained promises*, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women

received their dead raise to life again. But others were tortured, not accepting deliverance! Why? So that they might *obtain a better resurrection!* And all of these heroes and heroines, *having obtained a good testimony through faith*, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Life on this polluted planet is but for a moment. The faithful Christian, however, shall continue to obtain in that better land! “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may *obtain it.* And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, *but we for an imperishable crown*” (1 Corinthians 9:24,25). The crown of life is promised to those who are faithful – even to the point of death (Revelation 2:10). When we cross the finish line, we shall receive a crown.

One of my father’s favorite songs is “Is It the Crowning Day?” (George Walker Whitcomb). Ponder the refrain: “Glad day! Glad day! Is it the crowing day? I’ll live for today, nor anxious be, Jesus my Lord I soon shall see; Glad day! Glad day! Is it the crowning day?” That’s a question we ought to ask every day. But it seems from Scripture that when we receive our crowns that we will cast them at Jesus’ feet, just like the 24 elders did in Revelation 4:10. Perhaps that verse inspired this stanza: “Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore Thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea” (Reginald Heber). Our crown will not be for wearing but for casting!

But the greatest thing we can obtain (acquire, secure, full attainment – NEB) is “salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice where salvation comes from: not from government, not from our best efforts, but from our Lord Jesus Christ. When I was in college in the 1960s I remember a statement from Judge Earl Warren, justice of the Supreme Court. “Only law can save mankind.” Wrong. Three-fourths of the Bible was written to show that law can never save mankind! The apostle Peter declared, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 NIV).

Obama can't save you, McCain can't save you, and universal health care can't save you; only Jesus can save you. The angel told Joseph, "Call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

We do not understand the enormity of sin, but John Bunyan did. He said, "Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love."

Salvation means *deliverance*. Three biblical illustrations are in order. David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:27). King Darius looked down into the lions' den and cried, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" (Daniel 6:22). Peter, after the iron gates opened and shut of their own accord, testified, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people" (Acts 12:11). Salvation is divine deliverance.

Salvation is spiritual and eternal deliverance from the bondage of sin and the wrath to come, granted by God to those who accept His conditions of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. For this purpose the Gospel is the saving instrument. Paul declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for *it* is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

I have a friend in Spokane, Washington, Jenny Gower, a member of the Sunrise Church of Christ. On her own Jenny did a "word search" Bible study on the topic of salvation. After she became a Christian she discovered that many people had varying beliefs on how one is saved. She wanted to be sure in her own heart that she was saved, so she went to the Word of God. Using only her Bible and a concordance she studied every verse in the Bible that contained every variation of the word "salvation" – 232 of them. She found the following requirements to obtain salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ (these do not include God's part, i.e., His love, grace, and mercy).

- *Believe (50x)*
- *Have faith (40x)*
- *Be baptized (36x)*
- *Receive/accept the Word (39x)*
- *Repent (29x)*
- *Obey (20x)*
- *Confess (13x)*
- *Call on His name (5x)*

Jenny also discovered that it is imperative to "persevere in life and doctrine," that is, to "stand firm to the end" in order to be saved. In other words, it is not a matter of "once saved, always saved." Jenny said, "To believe that we are not called to be active participants in our salvation process is to close our eyes to all that we have been entrusted with, which is God's Word." I gladly endorse and recommend her little 15-page booklet to you (available from POEM, \$5 postpaid).

Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed (Romans 13:11). That verse means a lot to me because this year marks the 50th anniversary of my conversion to Christ. And yet today can be the day of salvation for you if you are not saved (2 Corinthians 6:2). Isn't that marvelous? Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation – a salvation that is not to be regretted (2 Corinthians 7:10). Do you regret that you were saved? Hardly! We are to put on the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17). We are to receive the love of the truth that we might be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The scriptures will make us wise to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Jesus Christ is the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10) – in fact, He is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

There are things that "accompany salvation" (Hebrews 6:9). My friend Given O. Blakely, coordinator of this conference, recently compiled a list of 168 things that "accompany salvation." He states that they are "realities that are either immediately possessed when a person is born again [though we might not realize it at the time – V.K], or are inherent to salvation itself ... they all can be experienced in expo-

mental measures ... none of them are to be viewed as optional, for salvation deals with necessities and essentials ... Those who are unaware of these realities are at a decided disadvantage in the good fight of faith.”

Continuing on: Peter says that the end of our faith is the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:9). Jude wrote of our “common salvation” (Jude 3). I see the faces of suffering saints in places I have been: Poland, Russia, White Russia (Belarus), Ukraine, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Northern Ireland, etc. We share a common salvation! And that salvation, though enjoyed by all of us, belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb (Revelation 7:10). Is this good news or what? *God has appointed you to obtain salvation – through our Lord Jesus Christ!* Never seek it elsewhere. Never accept some shallow substitute. In all your obtaining, make sure you obtain this before you die!

THIRD, THE BEST NEWS OF ALL: CHRIST DIED FOR US ... SO THAT WE SHOULD LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM!

There are many reasons why Christ died. I list a number of these in my study brochure *Celebrating 33 Enduring Qualities of Jesus of Nazareth* (available from POEM for \$2, postpaid).

- *To demonstrate God’s love and justice.*
- *To die in our place.*

In the *Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens tells of a young Englishman who was captured while trying to flee the country with his French wife and child. He was thrown into the dreaded Bastille. He was sentenced to death. One of his friends tried to get him released, but failed. The day of execution arrived. The Englishman’s friend visited him. The jailer left. The two men embraced. “What are you doing here?” the Englishman asked. “There’s no time to explain,” replied the Frenchman. “Only do as I say.” With that the Frenchman stripped and demanded his friend do the same. “Now,” he went on as he put on the prison garb, “you put on my clothes.” “But I cannot do it,” protested the Englishman. “You must,” replied the Frenchman. “Your wife and child are waiting for you in a carriage at the door.” The Englishman dressed

in the Frenchman’s suit, and unknowingly the guard escorted him safely to the carriage. Within the hour, the Frenchman knelt at the guillotine. Later, the Englishman knelt on English soil to give thanks for his substitute. This story reminds us of – us! “I stood condemned to die but Jesus freely took my place, He bore it all that I might live!”

- *To die for our sins.* Just think of the accumulated sins in this room!
- *To bear our griefs and carry our sorrows.* Just think of the accumulated griefs and sorrows in this room!
- *To become sin for us.* Christ actually *became* sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- *To reconcile us to God.*
- *To bring us to God.*
- *To destroy the works of the devil.* The next time Satan reminds you of your past, remind him of his future!
- *To redeem us from the curse of the law.* He literally became a curse – becoming the lightning rod that turned away God’s wrath and saved us from our sins.
- *To reconcile Jew and Gentile.*
- *To make peace through the blood of His cross.* A. Word said the cross is God’s last roadblock on the road to hell. Spurgeon said the cross is the last argument of God.
- *To reconcile the world to God.*
- *To taste death for every man* (so much for “limited atonement”).
- *And in our text – to make it possible for us to live together with Christ!*

First, let these words be branded in your brain: “Our Lord Jesus Christ ... died *for us*.” Paul made it even more personal in Galatians 2:20, “...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, *who loved me and gave Himself for me*.” I love the words of that old song, “Yes, For Me” (Horatius Bonar).

Yes, for me, for me He careth, with loving, tender care;

Yes, with me, with me He shareth each burden and each fear.

Yes, o'er me, o'er me He watcheth, ceaseless watcheth night and day;

Yes, e'en me, e'en me He snatcheth from perils of the way.

Yes, for me, He standeth pleading at mercy's seat above,

Ever for me interceding in love, untiring love.

Yes, in me abroad He sheddeth joys unearthly, love and light;

And to cover me He spreadeth His loving wings of might.

Now, take note. *“That whether we wake or sleep.”* This is not in the same context of verse 6, which speaks of those who are spiritually asleep at the switch. Rather, Paul is saying, as he did in Romans 14:9, that Christ is the Lord of both the dead and the living. In other words, *Christ died for us so that whether we are among the living or among the dead, we will live together with Him forever!* The Amplified New Testament makes this clear: “Who died for us so that whether we are still alive or dead [at Christ’s appearing] we might live together with Him and share His life.”

Jesus Christ has always desired and sought fellowship with His people. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, *and we will come to him and make Our home with him* (John 14:23). Literally, that means, “settle down” with us. “Abide in Me, *and I in you ... He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit*” (John 15:4,5). Then comes this prayer just 12 hours before the cross: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me *may be with Me where I am ...*” (John 17:24. Let that prayer impact your heart and your life’s ambitions will be changed in a flash. Jesus wants you to be with Him for all eternity! That’s why He died – that we may live together with Him. That’s why He stood for Stephen! That’s why He’s coming again! That’s why Paul wrote, a few verses earlier, “We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. *And so we will be with the Lord forever*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NIV). Think of it. Together ... forever ... with Christ!

Some time ago our little granddaughter Emily Jane gave my wife her Silly Putty. She told her, “You can have it ‘fo-ev-o and ev-o’ (forever and ever).” But a few days later she came back and asked Evelyn if she could have it back. Not so with the gift of salvation. Christ died for us so that we could live with Him ‘fo-ev-o and ev-o’ – forever and ever!

In May 2008 Evelyn and I received a lovely letter from a Christian lady in Kansas. We had been with the church she attends for a glorious weekend. She wrote, “Your time here was all too short. We loved having you here. God bless you in your untiring labor of love.” Then she closed her letter with these four words: *“Looking forward to Heaven.”* We had just experienced a little bit of heaven on earth and it made her long for heaven. And so should we all.

Looking forward to heaven! Where we will all be together with Christ, and each other, forever and ever, because ... ***God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him!***

With Charles Gabriel I sing:

When all my labors and trials are o'er, and I am safe on that beautiful shore,

Just to be near the dear Lord I adore will through the ages me glory for me.

When by the gift of His infinite grace, I am accorded in Heaven a place,

Just to be there and to look on His face will through the ages me glory for me.

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To read Victor Knowles’ daily Bible study, “Honey from the Rock,” visit www.poemintries.org.