

Echoes of Grace

IT'S OKAY
TO YELL
FIRE!

August 2015 – Vol. 86 – Number 2

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ECHOES OF GRACE (USPS 167-180) is published monthly by Bible Truth Publishers, 59 Industrial Road, P.O. Box 649, Addison, Illinois 60101, USA. Periodical postage paid at Addison, Illinois. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ECHOES OF GRACE, P.O. Box 649, Addison Illinois 60101.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: Postage paid to one address within the United States \$10.50 per year (12 issues). Postage paid to one address outside the United States \$13.50 per year (12 issues). Special prices on quantities.

Printed in USA

IT'S OKAY TO YELL FIRE!

In the early 90s my wife Zebo and I lived in Des Moines, Iowa. One freezing night around 3 a.m. on December 26, I was awakened by a knock at the door. I quickly got dressed, answered the door and found the neighbor lady and her baby from the apartment next door standing there in their pajamas. She said, "My baby started crying and woke me up a few minutes ago, and when I came out to the kitchen to get a bottle, I smelled smoke. Do you smell it?" I said, "Maybe a little ... it's probably nothing. Go back inside and I'll go down the stairs and check out all three floors. I'll let you know what I find."

I started walking down the center hallway of our floor, stopping at each door to smell for smoke and to feel each door for heat. Nothing seemed out of order. Then I went down the stairway to the second floor. I could really

smell the smoke now and I knew something was wrong. I pushed open the door and saw flames coming through the door of a utility room. I quickly ran upstairs and down the hall to our apartment, asking the Lord to help me warn everyone and for us all to get out safely.

WAKE UP!

I ran back to our bedroom to shake my wife awake. As I put on my shoes and grabbed my coat I told my wife, “Zebo, get up, get up! The place is on fire. It’s down on the second floor at the other end, so we have a few minutes. Get dressed, put on your coat, grab your purse and the important paper file and I’ll be back for you. I’m going to warn people about the fire.”

“Okay, okay,” she replied. I ran out the door and started by warning the neighbor lady with the baby, telling her where the fire was and to call the apartment complex superintendent and get out right away.

Then I went down the hall banging on each door yelling, “Wake up; wake up. There’s a fire on the second floor. You need to get out right away and go down the south stairs; it’s the only way out.” I kept banging on each door until I heard an answer. Some were irritated at first at being so rudely awakened. But once they understood my warning, their attitude changed. Once I knew

they understood the warning, I would go on to the next door.

Then I ran down the stairs at the end of the building opposite to the fire on the second floor, where I met up with the superintendent. He started warning people on the second floor, so I ran down to the first floor and started banging on the doors and warning those people about the fire and that they needed to get out right away.

STILL ASLEEP

When I finished, I ran back upstairs to get Zebo, and to my surprise she was fast asleep. I shook her and yelled, "Zebo, Zebo!"

She awoke, asking, "What, what? Why are you yelling?"

I answered, "BECAUSE THE BUILDING IS ON FIRE. WE NEED TO GET OUT RIGHT AWAY. YOU NEED TO GET DRESSED RIGHT NOW!"

Well, now she was wide awake, and don't you know, she was dressed and ready in about two minutes. We grabbed our important paper file, Zebo's purse and my wallet and opened the door.



By now the hallway was black with smoke. I went back in, breathed a quick prayer for the Lord's help, grabbed a couple of towels and wet them to hold to our noses so we could breath. We could hear people crying and coughing and someone saying, "Help me; I can't see!"

I shouted, "It's okay. We're going to get out. The fire is at the other end. Hold each other's hands, put one hand on the wall, get down low and feel your way until you get to the stairs where I am. You can use the hand railing to guide you down." The stairs were right outside our door, so we held hands and felt our way crouching down low where the air was a little better.

STILL TRAPPED

The others followed us down the stairs and out into the cold but clean air. As we ran out, we could hear the fire trucks coming. I told Zebo to start the car and turn on the heat to stay warm. Then we heard a man yelling from a second floor window. "We can't get out—there's fire in the hallway." I ran to the building just below the window and hollered, "How many are there?"

He answered, "Me, my wife and two kids."

I turned, pointed and yelled at one of the young men watching: "You're big enough—come help me catch these kids." Then I told the

man in the window, "Break out the screen and let down your kids and wife one by one, feet first. Lean out the window, drop them and we'll catch them."

One by one he let his kids and wife down, leaning out the window holding their hands. When he had let them down as far as he could, he let them go and the young man and I caught them. Last of all the man crawled out, held onto the windowsill by his fingertips and dropped. We caught him and with that everyone was safely out of the building.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH WARNINGS?

It's okay to wake people out of their sleep and warn them of danger when the building they are sleeping in is ON FIRE!

So it is with the gospel. It is okay to wake people out of their sleep and warn them of danger when they are in danger of HELLFIRE!

I warned those people in our apartment building about the danger they were in because I cared and did not want to see anyone get hurt or die in the fire.

If you are lost and in danger of hellfire, why would you ignore a warning? Even if you get irritated, want to fall back into spiritual indifference or are worried about what you might have to



leave behind, are those reasons to stay in the firetrap of sin?

“Flee from the wrath to come”
(Matthew 3:7).

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

“When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

A Christian has a serious responsibility to warn people about coming judgment, but it's a joyful privilege as well.

“The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man...hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand” (Ezekiel 3:16-18).

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7).

It's great to have warnings about danger, but warnings are incomplete without action. *Evacuation Alert: Will You Act on the Warning?* makes the point pretty clear. ◀

EVACUATION ALERT: Will You Act on the Warning?

In a blog about natural disasters, a writer asked a question about people in danger: “Why do people still refuse to heed hurricane warnings only to suffer in the end?”

The writer mentioned the threat of fires that were burning in Houston, Texas, and the calls that went out for the people to evacuate. They were calls that some people ignored. The writer noted his frustration about the reaction to this threat and one involving a hurricane.

“I don’t get it,” he wrote. “I really don’t. Houston and Galveston residents were repeatedly told about the dangers of Hurricane Ike, and still some choose to stay!”

Sadly enough, the same question can be asked about people who refuse to obey God and respond to His warnings about future judgment. The warning is clear:

God hates sin, and His judgment—eternal punishment—is awaiting those who die in their sins without Christ.

The Bible says, **“Because [God] hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man [Jesus] whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead”** (Acts 17:31).

Judgment for sin will be far worse than any natural disaster. Christ will deal out retribution to the people who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel. These **“shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power”** (2 Thesalonians 1:9).

Even though the warning is severe, people choose to ignore it—just like the people who ignore the warnings about hurricanes, wildfires and floods.

Unfortunately, they do this to their peril.

Despite the awful outcome of living and dying in sin, there is a way of escape.

God’s evacuation plan is found in

Jesus Christ, His Son. We must

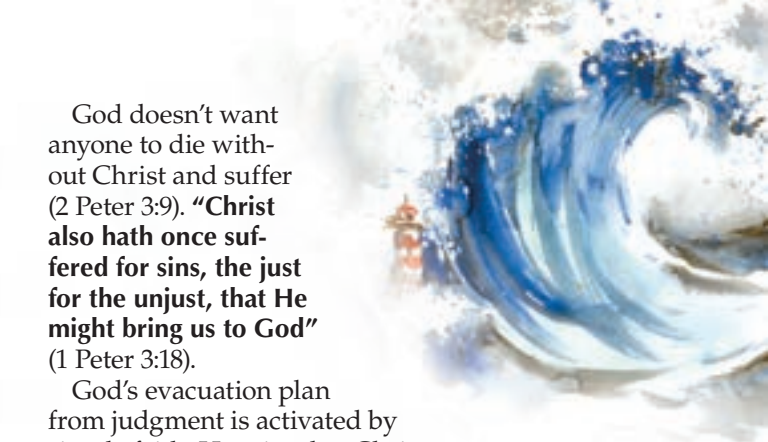
put our trust in Him alone

to save us. He said, **“If ye**

believe not that I am He,

ye shall die in your

sins” (John 8:24).



God doesn't want anyone to die without Christ and suffer (2 Peter 3:9). **“Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God”** (1 Peter 3:18).

God's evacuation plan from judgment is activated by simple faith. Here is what Christ promised: **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”** (John 5:24).

God offers us eternal life as a free gift that can only be received by faith. But if we reject it, we endanger ourselves. **“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation”** (Hebrews 2:3).

What will you do? Will you ignore the warning? Will you procrastinate and risk your future? Or will you pay attention and trust in Christ to be saved?

Warnings wake us up, but not just to get away from bad consequences. They let us listen to good news like the good news you'll find in *“The Bad News First.”*

“The **Bad News** First”

It isn't difficult to find bad news. There are worries about Iran having nuclear weapons, Islamic State militants, the economy, political intrigue and power plays. Unfortunately, the good news that could be printed likely wouldn't earn much attention.

You may know the word “gospel” simply means “good news.” To be sure, the message of the Bible has its share of bad news as well, but the emphasis is on the good news. It reminds me of the doctor who says, “I have good news and bad news, but first the bad news.” The patient needs to hear the bad news first or else he will only be daydreaming when the details of the good news goes sailing on past his head.

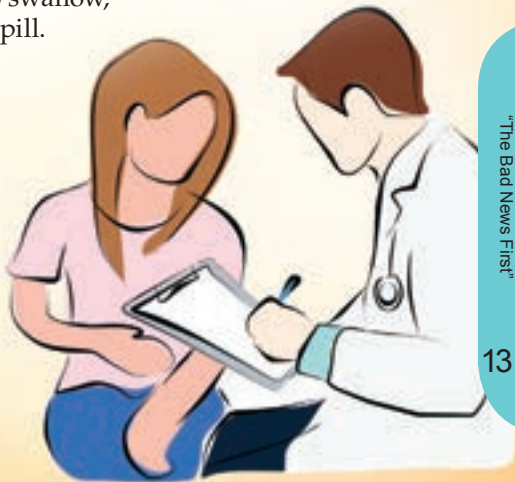
The good news may not even be relevant unless it is stated in the context of the bad news. Who wants to hear that open heart surgery will make

you a new person. “What? Just leave me alone, and I’ll be happy as the old me, thank you.”

But if I hear, “You have a problem with your heart and we’ll give you three months.” What? Now I am listening. “Please, doctor, get on with the good news, if there is any. I’m all ears — hurry!”

Even so, the gospel does present the bad news. It examines the human condition and our problems and states the conclusion plainly and pointedly. And you won’t be pleased. Whoever said you would like “bad news”?

You might check, for example, Romans 3:23. It says, **“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”** How do you like that? Can you argue? Rather direct, rather obvious, and hard to swallow, like a large pill.



But the good news also comes to us in plain and simple terms as well. The gospel has as its heartbeat the person of Jesus Christ. His coming, His life and death and resurrection are all at the core of the good news. It really is worth checking. It is relevant.

While you are there in Romans, check out chapter 6 and look down to the last verse, number 23: **“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

The bad news is first, and the glorious good news is second. Read it again. Isn't it amazing! Does God have your attention? Did the good news just sail on past? Have you embraced it?

Have you ever said, “Thank you”?



If ye

BELIEVE NOT
that I AM HE,

ye shall die in your sins.

John 8:24

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59 Industrial Road, P. O. Box 649
Addison, Illinois 60101, U.S.A.

Periodical Postage
Paid at
Addison, Illinois

“The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

