

Ephesians 2:1-10, John 3:14-21  
Saved by Faith for a Purpose!  
Sunday March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

A little over a year ago I preached on these same 2 scriptures and gave you a prophecy from God that came frighteningly true. I preached on these verses on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020. This was before anyone heard the word Coronavirus. Two weeks later on January 21<sup>st</sup>, the first case in America was recorded.

A year ago, this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of March, was the last time we met together in something like the “old normal”. People were frightened, though, attendance was down and then one week later we went to Livestream only. As I wrote in my journal, “God in his grace and mercy had us prepared to go to Livestream worship.” We went from over 200 in worship to 10 to over 300 Livestream in one Sunday.

Here’s the prophecy I spoke of from my sermon last year. I said this:

*“I spoke with you 2 weeks ago (that was December 2019) about how God has spoken to me in dreams and visions at critical points in my life 3 times. God spoke to me again on Friday. I won’t go into the whole dream now, but it was a dream of **comfort, hope, and protection** for all of us here, on Live Stream and in San Manuel. It was a “word of knowledge” a term my Pentecostal friends would know.*

*That dream, that word of knowledge, that promise(prophecy) of comfort, hope and protection was followed up by this scripture that I know was a word of God to us all. There is a phrase in it that I am adopting for this year. It is a call to rest. It is a call to **wait on the Lord**. It’s Isaiah 40:30-31.*

***Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;***

***but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,***

***they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.***

*My friends, all the Ephesian's passage is in the plural just like the Lord's prayer. We are all in this together; so, let's begin conversations with each other and with God. Not with any sense of fear, or anger, but with faith!*

*We each begin the faith journey with our individual confessions of belief in Jesus, but now these are gathered together in our walk together in the Good works God has created us for.*

*God has a new purpose for us. **Let us wait on the Lord for it.***

That's what I said a little over a year ago. None of us knew we would be plunged into a waiting, isolation and quarantine, and rest that was supposed to be 2 weeks, became 30 days, became more than a year.

As you know, we as a congregation, nation, and world have been waiting. Some have waited with fear, and desperation and some have waited with hope and faith. I believe we have waited with faith; **we have been saved by faith for a purpose.**

A year ago, we were just finishing up our new Ed. and Admin. Building. It was the end of an exhausting 3-year process of dreaming, planning, and fund-raising that we thought would soon be over so we could take a short rest and discern God's new purpose for us.

*I also said this in that message, "We as a church have been pushing very, very hard over the last three years and in particular over the last two years as we discerned what God wanted us to do. We had a building designed to fulfill that vision. We picked a contractor to build, and the building is almost complete. And we raised a lot of money.*

*I believe it is time to rest. It is time to enjoy and celebrate what God has done through us. It is time to begin to reflect again how best to use this building and the gifts and graces God has given to us as a church. Maybe another "Dream Sunday"?*

*(I said this in that message) We are in a transition to a new normal. Our giving is up. Our attendance is up. We have more children and youth*

*running around than we have had for years. As we count our Live Stream audience our attendance in worship is probably up over 25%.*

*In the last 4 ½ years we have brought in over 160+ members. Just last year we brought in 37. Our total membership is around 330. So, if you think there are a lot of new faces here you are right.*

*So, what do we do! What big project is in front of us? Well, let's rest on it and find out. Let's seek God in our dreams and visions and have God guide us into the next phase of our life together.*

*Part of the Advent and Epiphany story is God guiding Joseph and the Wisemen in their dreams. So, let's rest. Let's look for where God is guiding us in our walk together. **Let's look for God's New Purpose.**" Words spoken then to us and repeated to us today!*

In this time of waiting, we have lost so much and so many. Vista Church lost about 40 to death and moving. We will not really know the total until we return in person. We lost Maurice, and John and the Kuhn's to the Virus and so many family holidays, celebrations and friends. People have lost jobs and livelihoods. This disease for many has taken a terrible toil.

A year ago, we thought with our new building and our growth; we were simply going to go from one glory to the next, but it all suddenly ended. (Sudden endings was another word from God that came to me last year, but that is a word for another day.) I thought we simply had to rest for a few months, have another Dream Sunday and then off we'd go.

But you all know what happened,... but now we are in a time again of transition. Over 113 of our members have had the vaccine. Rates of everything are dropping. We need to look to the future now because **we who have been saved have been saved for a purpose.**

It is not for us alone we have been saved. We need to take what we have learned from our time of rest and isolation and apply it to our church life together and for mission to the world.

**We can't just go back to the way things were.** Have we in our time apart developed a deeper appreciation for the loneliness of the stranger in our midst?

Have we in the face of our own mortality seen the importance of sharing faith in Jesus to others that issues into eternal life?



Our verses from John begin with that strange reference to Moses lifting up a serpent in the wilderness; do you know that strange story? The Israelites in the wilderness were being bitten by snakes and dying. God told Moses to put a bronze snake (which was a cursed animal) on a stick and lift it up. Anyone who looked up to the snake and believed that God would save them; God did save them from the snake bites.

In the same way Jesus was saying he would be cursed and lifted up on a cross and that anyone who looks up to him and believes in him will be saved. That was his calling, that was his purpose.

And the word for **“lifted up”** has a double meaning. It also means **“exalted.”** So, to speak of Jesus Christ as being lifted up on the cross also speaks of his ascending into heaven.

When we look up to Jesus on the cross and believe;... we are **“born again from above!”** We too are lifted up, exalted with Jesus. We are saved.

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whosoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”**

The idea here is that we judge ourselves by our belief in Jesus Christ. If we believe, then we enter the Kingdom of God. If we refuse to believe, we judge ourselves and God merely ratifies the judgment we have made. The light has shown in the darkness and we have refused to see. We have chosen the darkness instead of the light.

Both our scriptures today have good news and bad news. John 3:16 is the Gospel, the good news in miniature. All you have to do is believe and

you will be saved. The bad news is in verse 18, “but those who do not believe are condemned already,…”

In the Ephesians passage it starts out with the bad news. It tells it like it was for us before we met Jesus. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, we followed the ruler of the air, and we simply lived by our passions and desires. If it felt good, we did it.

The Good News, the Gospel here is that God’s grace has never abandoned us despite how far we may have strayed! Verses 4-6 say, “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us,

even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ

—by grace you have been saved—

and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Not only has Christ been “lifted up” into heaven, but we also have been lifted up with him into heaven the moment we believe. The moment we believe our eternal life begins.

And the Good News gets even better for verse 10 says, “For we are what he has made us,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

We are called, saved, and gifted for a purpose! God has already prepared good works for us to do, and we need to step into them.

And we step into the plan that God has for our lives and live out that plan as we in faith serve God and neighbor.

One-way verse 10 is also translated is that “we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God prepared beforehand for us to walk in them.” There is an obvious sense of predestination here. God predestines those who believe for good, good works, not evil. The walking sticks we get upon joining Vista Church are a symbol of us walking together in these good works.

Now many of all ages search for a purpose. This is not just a quest for young people. Ron Bartlow, who is now a pastor, told me this when he was 17, “The reason adults are always asking us what we want to be when we grow up is that they are looking for a few good ideas!”

Now some have a clear purpose for a lifetime, and some have it only for a while.

Many young moms clearly see their purpose in life as being a mother to their children, but that is a purpose that passes with time even though our children will always be our children no matter what their age.

My transition to be a head pastor was an odd transition for me. I had worked for more than 2 decades as a youth pastor and expected to do that until I retired. By the time I became a head pastor, I had spent over 1000 Sunday nights at church with the youth group and then suddenly that ended.

When I became a head pastor, I was lost and restless on Sunday nights for many years thinking I needed to be somewhere else; thinking I wasn't doing something I should be doing. But youth ministry was a good work God had chosen for me... to no longer walk in. God is now calling us out of this time of isolation slowly week by week to something new. What is God calling us to?

It's times like these, the transitions in life, that what we need to be doing is resting, praying, and letting God direct us. In the spiritual life we don't work, work, work and then rest. We rest, and then it is out of our rest that we work and serve others. God built this into the fabric of creation and into our very inner being from the beginning.

And we all have been resting for quite a while. We've had a yearlong Lenten fast. What have we heard and learned?

Jesus didn't begin his ministry by preaching and casting out demons. He began his ministry with 40 days in the wilderness in prayer with God. His first act of ministry and power was to attend a party and turn an enormous amount of water into an enormous amount of wine. His public ministry began with celebration. Vista might want a big celebration when we all get back together.

My friends, soon this time of rest will be transitioning back into work. What are you called to do? You have been saved by faith for a purpose. What is that new purpose now? What is God's purpose for us together?

Now in this time of transitioning from isolation and quarantining to working, worshiping, and fellowshiping together what should we do?

Our good works won't save us, but they are evidence of our salvation. How will we share with others the faith that saves us for a purpose? Maybe our next good work, our renewed purpose is the next person we see in need.

Our mission committee is recognizing this, in that as this pandemic comes to an end, the needs created by it are far from over. They are seeking ways to help those who have been hurt.

At their recent Mission's meeting they set aside funds for the food bank here in Catalina and for our sister church's needs in Mexico.

They set aside funds for the homeless woman's shelter here in Tucson to feeding hungry Christians in Cuba.

The Easter Mission offering is going to people suffering from the effects of the Virus.

We have been resting for a long time now. What have you learned? What compassion have you grown in?

My friends how will you live differently when you can go out the door of your home or apartment? Who and how will you share the faith in words and deeds that grant's eternal life?

Indeed, what is God saying to you and what are you going to do?

Amen.