

Introduction

How many of you read what Newark Mayor Corey Booker did on Friday, April 13th? He came home in the evening and saw his neighbor’s house on fire. Fighting off his security team who tried to restrain him, he rushed into the house and up the stairs into a smoke filled hallway. He dropped to the floor to avoid the smoke and heard his neighbor, a woman, call. Despite hearing explosions and seeing **“sparks flying everywhere,”** he followed her voice to her bedroom. The bedroom was engulfed in flames, making it almost impossible for him to breath, but he was able to grab her, throw her over his shoulder, and carry her down the stairs and out of the burning house.

Mayor Booker’s heroic actions were highly publicized and rightly so. He did a noble thing that all of us admire. He rescued someone who was perishing. And you know what? God calls us to do the same. Today is the first Sunday of our “Rescue the Perishing” month, during which we’re going to focus on that theme and its implications to us.

Two texts comprise the foundation of our theme. They are Psalm 2:7-12 and Jude 22-23. Let’s examine both texts today.

Perish Defined – Earthly Life

I begin with the words **“perish”** in Psalm 2:12 and **“fire”** in Jude 23, both of which stand for the same reality - death. More specifically, according to the Bible, it’s spiritual death. Perishing people are dead to the God and the realities of His kingdom.

First, they’re dead to Him and them in their earthly life before death. There’s an idiom we use with regard to soundly sleeping people. We say that they’re **“dead to the world,”** and they are, as this photo illustrates. This father and his son aren’t engaging the world around them at all because they can’t. They’re dead to it. That idiom helps us understand the condition of perishing people. They’re dead to God and the realities of His kingdom just as soundly sleeping people are dead to

the world. They cannot interact with or respond to Him and them.

Take the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, for instance. I've experienced it many times in my life. He has given me flashes of insight, led me to do things, spoken words of comfort, and so on. It's an incredibly life-enriching thing. But perishing people are just as dead to His still small voice as soundly sleeping people are to the world.

The consequence of deadness is devastating. Perishing people can't attain the condition of life sought for by human beings through the ages – what Jesus called "**abundant life.**" They cannot know pervasive and habitual love, peace, and joy.

That then is what it means that people are perishing. They're dead to God and the realities of His kingdom in their earthly life before death.

Perish Defined – Eternal Life

But they're also dead Him and them in their eternal life after death. We see that in Psalm 2:9, which the Book of Revelation quotes three times (2:27, 12:5, and 19:15). Verse 9 teaches us that at His Second Coming, Jesus will "**break**" or "**shatter**" people as we do rejected pottery or glass. To break or shatter is to destroy, which is how Paul defines it in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. He writes about the perishing, "**These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.**" The word "**eternal**" there makes clear to what he's referring. It's hell.

A brilliant and renowned philosopher, professor, and writer, J.P. Moreland, explains well the reality that the metaphors break, shatter, and destroy express: "**The essence of hell is relational. In the Bible, hell is separation from God, bringing shame, anguish, and regret. The pain that's suffered will be due to the sorrow from the final, ultimate, unending banishment from God, His kingdom, and the good life for which we were created in the first place. People in hell will deeply grieve all they've lost.**"

I'd explain it this way. Hell's salient characteristic is that it will be

utterly devoid of God's presence and influence. First, He will bestow no common grace or blessing on the perishing as He does now. And second, He will not restrain human evil as He does now. The perishing in hell, in other words, will be left completely to their own devices in resurrection bodies that never die.

We can't imagine how dreadful a human society utterly devoid of God's influence would be, but we should try. I know a woman who is unbearably self-centered and narcissistic. Her defining behavior, as a result, is lashing out when she doesn't get her way. She's always angry with and retaliating against someone, which causes everyone around her to "**walk on eggshells**" as we say it. Imagine a totally godless society in which every person is like that: completely self-consumed. There is no pity for others, no sacrificing for others, no rooting for others, no yielding to others, and so on. There is only jealousy, rivalry, and domination instead. That is the eternal fate of the perishing.

We now know what it means that people are perishing. They're dead to God and the realities of His kingdom – now and forevermore.

Who the Perishing Are

But who are the perishing? What have they done that makes them that? The opening line in Psalm 2:12 tells us, "**Do homage to the Son.**" Psalm 2, as the New Testament makes clear, is messianic, which means that "**the Son**" is Jesus. The literal translation of the clause, "**do homage**" is "**kiss the feet.**" Kissing someone's feet is a human expression of total submission and that's what we have here. To do homage to Jesus means to totally submit to Him – to let Him run our lives. We make the decision to learn and do all that He says. We then arrange all of our daily affairs around carrying out that decision. The New Testament calls people who do that "**disciples**" of Jesus.

Now, most people don't do homage to Him. They don't submit to Him and verse 3 reveals why they don't. It's because they don't want Him running their lives. They want to run them themselves. They don't

want anyone telling them what to do including Him. The opposite of submission is rebellion, which defines what most people are when it comes to Jesus. They're rebels.

I have periodic contact with two people, both of who are competent professionals. They aren't hostile to Jesus, but they are indifferent. Both have a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency that excludes Him. One of them, for instance, said **"I respect Christians but I don't need to be one. My life's fine just as it is."** I know what he means by **"fine."** It's that he's in charge of it. He's a rebel.

But notice, in verse 12, what the consequence of rebellion is. Jesus **"becomes angry"** with rebels and they **"perish in the way."** That identifies then who the perishing are. They're people who rebel against Jesus. They want to be in charge of their own lives and are either indifferent or hostile to Him because they do. They're perishing.

Rescue the Perishing

And we need to rescue them. God calls us to do just that in Jude 23. He exhorts us to **"snatch them out of the fire."** Just as Mayor Booker rescued the perishing woman from the literal fire, so God wants us to rescue perishing people from the fire of His judgment.

Psalm 2:7-9 teaches us how to do that. In verse 7, Father God says to Jesus, **"Today, I have begotten you."** Acts 13:33 reveals to what that refers, His resurrection. In that event, Father God **"begot"** Him. He brought Him forth to receive His inheritance. Verse 8 reveals what that inheritance is. It's **"the nations"** and **"the very ends of the earth"** as **"Your possession."** That means that all people in all parts of the earth will be subject to the word and will of Jesus – either voluntarily on earth or involuntarily on Judgment Day when He casts them into hell.

Now, listen to a critical insight. Those terms, **"the nations"** and **"the ends of the earth,"** appear again in the post-resurrection charges of Jesus to His disciples. In Matthew 28:19, He commanded them to make disciples **"of all the nations."** In Acts 1:8, He commanded them to

be His witnesses **“even to the remotest part of the earth.”** He almost certainly had Psalm 2:8 in mind when He spoke those commands.

The linking of Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8 with Psalm 2:8 reveals an exciting truth. You and I as individual Christians and we together as a church have our fair share in subjugating the nations to Jesus. That fair share is to make perishing people disciples of His. As disciples, they subject themselves voluntarily to Him, which in turn rescues them. They come alive to God and the realities of His kingdom and, as a result, experience abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

So, let's rescue the perishing by making them disciples of Jesus.

Make Disciples

That's our call and here's how we answer it - by doing two things.

First, we intend to make disciples. You might think that's a **“given”** but it isn't. Consider these anecdotes. The mission statement of one Friends church reads like this: **“Our purpose is to meet people's spiritual, psychological, and material needs in the name of Jesus.”** An elder of a church said that the purpose of its spring revival services is, **“To get people to say the sinner's prayer.”** And finally, a Friends pastor told me, **“I live to grow this church and I'll do anything that isn't illegal or immoral to do so.”** All of those things have their value and place. The problem is that not one of them or even all of them together constitutes making disciples.

Listen to a penetrating insight from Henri Nouwen about the established order of things: **“We simply go along with the many ‘musts’ and ‘oughts’ that have been handed down to us, and we live with them as if they were authentic translations of the Gospel of our Lord. People must be motivated to come to church, youth must be entertained, money must be raised, and above all everyone must be happy.”**

Nouwen is right on target. The tradition of client or consumer Christianity now dominates the thought and practice of Christians and

churches. Making converts, inducting members, raising money, instituting programs, constructing buildings, and more are now our primary concerns. Making disciples? We hope it happens and even pray it happens. But it isn't something to which we really give much effort or even thought. It isn't something we actually intend to do.

But we should. We should purposely set the making of disciples as our only primary aim - as individuals and as a church. We do have other aims but we give making disciples priority over them all.

We've done that as a church. Our mission statement, which is in all of our newsletters, is this: **"Bethel Friends exists to make disciples of Jesus by teaching and training people to do all that He says."**

We should also do that as individuals. Stop for a moment and think of our families, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. Our chief aim with regard to them all should be to make disciples of them if they aren't. I have four grandsons - Malachi, Eli, Zechariah, and Jude. I have numerous aims in my relationships with them. But I have one aim that's above the rest. It's to make them disciples of Jesus.

So that's the first thing that we do to rescue the perishing. We intend to make disciples.

The second thing we do is, act to make disciples. We carry out our intention by doing three things. We *proclaim, manifest, and teach* Jesus and His kingdom at hand, all of which I'll explain in next week's sermon.

Conclusion

Not long ago, I was in Wendy's and noticed its mission statement on the wall. That statement articulates what it exists to do: **"Give our customers quality food, a comfortable dining experience, and affordable prices."** Well, Psalm 2:7-12 and Jude 22-23 gives us our mission statement as individuals and as a church. They communicate what we exist to do. Simply put, it's to rescue the perishing by making them disciples of Jesus. So, like Mayor Booker, let's just do it!