

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

New Year's Eve

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The Lord knows how to rescue you

¹There were false prophets also among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. ²Many will follow their depraved ways, and because of them the way of the truth will be blasphemed. ³In their greed they will exploit you with fabricated messages. Their condemnation announced long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned but handed them over to chains of darkness by casting them into hell, to be kept under guard for judgment; ⁵and if God did not spare the ancient world but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, along with seven others when he brought a flood on the world of ungodly people; ⁶and if God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, by turning them into ashes when he made them an example of things to come for the ungodly; ⁷and if he rescued righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the unrestrained immorality of the wicked people ⁸(while that righteous man was living among them, he was tormented in his righteous soul day after day by the lawless deeds he saw and heard); ⁹then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under guard until the day of judgment, in order to punish them. ¹⁰This is especially true of those who follow the defiling lust of the flesh and who despise authority. Daring and arrogant, they do not tremble when they blaspheme glorious beings, ¹¹whereas angels, even though they are greater in strength and power, do not bring a slanderous judgment against them before the Lord. – 2 Peter 2:1-11 EHV

Smoke filled the air as the home was up in flames. The family watched the blazing inferno that was once their family home outside of Fresno. Their hearts raced as they could not do anything at this point to rescue their brother and son. Alejandro tried numerous times to help his brother get out of the home, but amidst the smoke he could not find him. Finally, Alejandro needed to give up and save his own life. So he ran out of the blazing home. Inside of the home which was growing weaker by the moment, was a 12-year-old nonverbal, special needs boy. He was incapable of rescuing himself from the smoke and flames that surrounded him.

When he arrived on the scene, Deputy Alfredo Flores learned that the boy was stuck in the home. He went in once to try to save the boy. Yet, this first attempt was unsuccessful. He went in a third time to try to save the boy, This was again unsuccessful. However, on the third attempt Deputy Flores heard cries from the boy that was trapped inside the home. Heroically, he was able to pull the boy out of the home and carry him to safety.

Deputy Flores was able to do what the boy and his family could not do. He knew what to do and he went in and did it. Deputy Flores rescued the boy from the flames. This is a nice story to hear as many of such stories do not end well. Deputy Alfredo Flores rescued the boy from the flames who was unable to save himself.

The heroic work of Deputy Flores can cause us to think about the salvific work of our Lord. The world we live in may feel like it is ablaze with many problems and troubles. Like this young boy and many others caught in similar situations, we find ourselves unable to escape. In today's text, we see that the Lord knows how to rescue you.

We study a portion of Saint Peter's second epistle in which he describes a world ablaze. He shares the many problems that are found in the world that are faced by God's people. The flames that surround God's people are false teachings brought by false teachers and rampant immorality. The flames that

surround God's people are seen currently as well as in the past. Let's take a course in fire science to examine these flames that surround God's people in this world.

The first flame that we can examine is that of false prophets and teachers who share destructive heresies. Notice that these false prophets and teachers will be found among the people and among you. The dangerous flame that Peter gives a warning about is not simply people out there in the world, but instead those who are with and among the Christians. The false prophets and teachers may not even look like dangerous flames at first. We know that fire is not always dangerous. Maybe they look like a nice campfire. But you cannot just keep these flames in check. These false prophets and teachers deny the God who redeemed them in Christ. Although they preach and teach in his name, they ultimately and essentially deny what he has done to save them.

Where can we see these flames in our lives? Look for those who deny the redeeming work of Christ, yet still claim to be Christians. If I may be so bold, I am going to name names today. We have the Roman Catholic Church, which adorns itself in crosses and Christian symbols, yet tells people that Jesus' sacrifice is not fully sufficient for their salvation. They tell people that they need to work to appease God. This is a dangerous flame. We have the big box Christianity which tells people that they are for the gospel and that God is good. Yet, they tell people that two of the sources of God's goodness shown to humanity, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are instead man's work for God. Their message is more you for God than God for you. This is a dangerous flame. Then, we have the flame that can be found in Lutheran churches, one called gospel reductionism which convinces people that as long as we are preaching the gospel, other aspects of God's Word do not matter. Such false teachings have led people toward open immorality while still thinking they have not rejected Christ by their impenitent sin. We have another flame which can be found in Lutheran churches which is called legalism. Here, they take the good things that a church can do to glorify God and make it all about rules that God has not given. These flames of false teachings are not found just in distant lands, but in Christian churches. Some of them, could catch even in this sanctuary.

Let me quickly note, this does not mean that every person that goes to a non-WELS church is going to hell. There are happy inconsistencies. Many people will sadly hold to a false teaching, but happily will not follow it to the logical conclusion and deny the God who redeemed them. Yet, all false teachings are a big deal. All false teachings can be a salvation issue. Although it is true that right teaching does not save, God does, he is known through right teaching. False teaching is a dangerous flame.

These false teachers and prophets are motivated by greed. They want to gain more money, fame, and popularity rather than be faithful to God's Word. This leads them to share the false doctrines that go against God and his way. This leads them to speak the words for those who have itching ears. Sadly, these false teachers lead many astray from the God who redeemed them. These false teachings are shared in massive cathedrals, large auditoriums, and go viral online. Many people are led astray. Just as the condemnation for those who lead people astray is not asleep, the condemnation that they lead people into is not idle.

As we continue our course on fire science, let us examine another dangerous flame that we see surrounding us. This dangerous flame is the blatant immorality in the world. Peter writes about those who pursue the lust of the flesh and despise authority. Look around, these flames are burning around you.

Consider those who pursue the lust of the flesh. Approximately 69% of men in the United States watch internet pornography. Approximately 40% of women watch it as well. Internet pornography is a dangerous flame around you. Some studies suggest that roughly 1 in 5 people commit adultery by cheating on their significant others. Many in our world claim that monogamy is an outdated concept. Rampant immorality is a dangerous flame around you. Turn on a television and go to a streaming

service, explicit nudity in film grows increasingly common. Go to TikTok or Instagram and you will see that this immorality is widely available and viewed. Those who pursue the lust of the flesh are all around you.

Consider those who despise authority. To be quite frank, I don't care at the moment who you voted for, we can see that people despise authority. From memes mocking the current president to people defaming the president elect, our society demonstrates that they despise authority. This is a flame around you. Children do not listen to their parents. Adult children do not respect theirs. Our world is ablaze. People have grown in their distrust of authority it seems. People do not respect the law enforcement. People do not trust government officials. People despise authority within the church. There is this flame around you.

What makes these flames so dangerous? This is dangerous because you may be tricked into believing that everything is okay that happens around you. When many people around you engage in sexual immorality, you may be deceived into thinking their acts are not depraved. You may be led into joining in on other such depraved acts. When many people around you demonstrate dishonor toward authority, you may be deceived into thinking their words are not dishonorable. You may be led into joining in on their disrespect.

When the flames blaze around you, you may be tricked into becoming like a popular meme which is of a dog sitting down with a cup of coffee. As he sits there, he says "This is fine." Yet, everything isn't fine because the room around him is burning up. Let us not be tricked into thinking the flames around us are fine. Peter gives warnings about these flames for a reason. They are destructive and dangerous. Do not grow comfortable amidst the flames and therefore be consumed by them.

The flames that burn around us are nothing new. Peter notes that similar flames have been burning around the world throughout history. He uses the example of Noah before God sent the flood. Noah was a pious man and preacher of righteousness, false teachings were preached all around him. The world was ablaze in rampant immorality. About this it is written, "*The LORD saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that all the thoughts and plans they formed in their hearts were only evil every day.*" (Genesis 6:5) While the world was ablaze in these flames, the Lord rescued Noah and seven others by putting out the fire with the rainwater of the flood.

Another example that Peter points to is the rescue of Lot. Lot was distressed as he lived in Sodom and Gomorrah. These were cities ablaze as such immorality was visibly present. This tortured Lot's soul to see such lawlessness. God knew how to rescue Lot. The Lord put out the blaze of immorality by removing Lot and his family from these towns and then caused sulfur and fire to pour down on the cities.

Let us know that God punishes evildoers. God punished the angels that rebelled against him. God punished the evildoers through the flood. God punished the evildoers in Sodom and Gomorrah. God will also punish the evildoers of our day. This should be a terrifying concept, but as people clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, we don't fear this punishment. When Scripture speaks about the righteous, it speaks about you and me. As friends of God, we therefore desire what God desires. God is sovereign and just. God punishes the wickedness of this world. This is something we can take comfort in. God puts out the flames around us.

Dear friends, as God knew how to rescue Noah and Lot from the flames that burned around them, he knows how to rescue you as well. Like a firefighter, God came into the flames for you. God however did not need a halligan bar, breathing apparatus, or thermal imaging cameras to bust into this inferno of a world to come and save you. Instead, he sent his only-begotten Son to take flesh to live for you and die for you. Then, he sends other tools, the means of grace, by which the Holy Spirit works to bring the results of this rescue to you. On the last day, God will ultimately spare you from the flames of this world

as he sends fire to ultimately destroy this world and he brings you to live in the new creation in your resurrected body. The Lord knows how to rescue you.

As we end the year 2024, we may feel frustrated to see the flames around us. We are encouraged to recognize that this life and time is not forever. As one more year passes, we are that much closer to the time in which God will ultimately rescue us from the flames of this burning world. We therefore ask God to teach us to number our days aright as we wait upon his ultimate rescue of us. Amen.