Blessed Assurance of Salvation pt. 8

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"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Tim.1:12

What a joy to be back in my pulpit this morning, no question I've missed you all and I've also have missed my pulpit, but what a joy to open up again 2 Tim1:12 today and speak again on the subject of Blessed Assurance of Salvation, this is part 8 of our series. We have spent some time in our third point from our outline on: Blessed Assurance in the Person.

III. Blessed Assurance in the Person: (...for I know whom I have believed...)

We have seen that Paul has clearly established that he knows and believes in that Person that has saved his soul who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. It was that relationship; that personal relationship with Jesus Christ that sustained Paul in all his adversities. This is why he can say with such conviction, "...for I KNOW WHOM I have believed..."

This has been the catalyst for our last 4 sermons on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. We have sought to cover His incarnation, that is, God was manifest in the flesh and to understand that Jesus Christ as the Second Person of the Godhead bodily was fully 100% God robed in the flesh. We must never lose sight or neglect this truth regarding His divinity and His Humanity. When Christ came in His incarnation He was 100% God and He was 100% man, the union of the two natures of Divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ.

We remind you again this morning that this topic of the person and work of Christ sets forth the importance of the Eternal Sonship of Christ, that is, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God by Eternal Generation. In other words He did not become the Son at His incarnation; He was, yea, He has always been the Son of God from all eternity. We looked at 1 Timothy 3:16 already where is says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." There is no controversy by those in the faith, they believe that God was manifest in the flesh and confess with their heart and soul that Jesus came in the flesh.

We went to the fall of Adam and Eve in order to understand why God had to be manifest in the flesh. He had to become man to die as a man for man, but not just any man, it had to be THE GOD MAN! Therefore, God had to become man so that He would be the perfect sacrifice, yea the satisfactory sacrifice. In other words SATIFACTION has to be rendered to the Father and only God the Son was qualified to accomplish this work on the cross. We also saw that man had no sooner sinned that God gave the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. From this point on we see the aspect of the history of redemption laid out for us in our Bibles,

pointing us to the coming of Christ to die on the cross for sinners. We opened up another text to help us understand the person and work of Christ in order to give us that good hope through grace regarding our Blessed Assurance in Salvation and that is 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

There were 3 things we set before you from this verse:

The Procurement of Christ,
The Provision of Christ,
"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins ..."
"the just for the unjust ..."

3. The Purpose of Christ, "...that he might bring us to God ..."

We saw in our first point that by procurement we meant that Christ obtained eternal redemption for all those whom He saves. Hebrews 9:12, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Christ purchase salvation for all those whom the Father had given Him from the foundation of the world. We saw that the word obtained has various meanings and one of them is procured, that is Christ secured, He acquired, achieved, He gained, He obtained the possession of salvation for all those whom He saves! Here we see the two aspects of the atonement: The Accomplishment of the atonement and the Application of the atonement, in other words Christ accomplished the work of the atonement and He also applies the atonement to all those whom He saves. Again, Christ did not die to make salvation possible, that is, that He tried to do all He could and now it's up to man, NO, HE PROCURED, HE OBTAINED eternal redemption for us! He secured, purchase eternal redemption for His people, ""And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21).

Secondly we saw the provision of Christ in that He died as the "...just for the unjust..." This is the whole essence of Christianity, that the Righteous and Holy Christ, the JUST ONE would die for depraved hell deserving sinners who are unjust before God. God sent His only begotten Son to be the only provision for sinners, this is why it is called the good news. The good news is that God did not leave us to ourselves in Genesis 3, but enacted His Glorious and wonderful plan to save sinners. When we consider the whole scheme of redemption, that is, when we consider everything that was done for our salvation even every step in the path of our blessed Savior's humiliation and death was foreordained in the eternal purpose of God. He who was the darling of heaven became the hatred of man; the Son of God undertook immeasurable sorrow, indescribable anguish and unspeakable pain as He bled and suffered the shameful death of the cross. "...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb.12:2. God allowed His Son to be crucified and to be made sin for sinners, that is, THE JUST died for the UNJUST!

The third thing we want to see is: **3. Purpose of Christ:** "...that he might bring us to God ..." Christ came for the purpose that He might bring sinners to God; He came as a Shepherd

seeking lost sheep to bring them to God. Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Notice the words of the prophet Ezekiel also in 34:6, 11 & 12, "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. 11 For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." Paul writes these words in 1 Tim.1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Jesus Christ came to bridge the gap between us and God, that is, to bring us to God.

Jesus Christ came to suffer as the substitute once and for all; He came as God manifest in the flesh to procure salvation for us. He also came as the sacrifice and surety to die as the just for the unjust, that is, He became provision for sinners. Thus, we shall see this morning that He came for the purpose to act as reconciler so that He might bring us to God. The doctrine of reconciliation is for the purpose of Jesus Christ bringing us to God, because we are unable to bring ourselves to God. As mediator, Christ removes the barrier that is between us and God. The glorious work of Christ as our substitute, as our sacrifice, as our surety, as our mediator, as our reconciler and as our Great God and SAVIOR is seen the Person and Work of Christ which gives us the Blessed Assurance in our Salvation. Again this is why Paul can say without a shadow of a doubt: "...for I know whom I have believed..."

Thus, the PURPOSE of Christ is to bring us to God. The fact that we need to be brought to Christ presupposes that we are far removed and separated from God. By separation we mean that every person born into this world is born estranged and alienated from God, but the question that needs to be asked is, what was it that separated us from God? Well, the answer again is sin which was brought about the fall. Thus, SIN was brought into the world, Roman 5:12 states, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In Isaiah 59:2, we are reminded "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Then of course we have that text by Paul in Eph.2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Because we are born into this world spiritually dead in trespasses and sins we are separated from God and in dire need of someone to bring us to God and that is one of the reasons and purposes of why Christ came in order to bring us to God. This again is called theologically, the doctrine of reconciliation. We were afar off from God and therefore a reconciler was needed to bring us to God. In order for reconciliation to work we were in need of a mediator to go between us and God and that mediator and reconciler is none other than Jesus Christ our LORD!

- 1 Tim.2:5: "For there is one God, and <u>one mediator</u> between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."
- Col.1:21&21, "And, having <u>made peace through the blood of his cross</u>, by him to <u>reconcile all things unto himself</u>; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things

You notice that in that in verse 21 it says that they were alienated and enemies by wicked works before they were reconciled to God. This is the condition of all men before God saves them. It says that they were sometime alienated; the word 'were' is in the present tense which means that this was our continuous state in alienation from God. The Psalmist makes this interesting point in Psalm 58:3, "The <u>wicked are estranged from the womb</u>: they go astray <u>as soon as they be born, speaking lies.</u>" This is our condition when born into this world, we are separated, alienated and estranged from God and as soon as we are born we come out speaking lies. Listen to the words of Spurgeon, "The wicked are estranged from the womb. It is small wonder that some men persecute the righteous seed of the woman, since all of them are of the serpent's brood, and enmity is set between them. No sooner born than alienated from God -- what a condition to be found in! They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Every observer may see how very soon infants act lies. Before they can speak they practice little deceptive arts. This is especially the case in those who grow up to be adept in slander, they begin their evil trade early, and there is no marvel that they become adept in it."

Here again we see the need for reconciliation because of our estrangement from God. The word alienated in Col.1:21 is the Greek word, 'apallortrio,' it comes from 'apo,' which means a marker of dissociation that gives the idea of separation and from 'allotrioo,' which means to basically alienate entirely and be estranged. This word is in the perfect tense also and in the passive voice. This means that we have been in a continuous alienation from God from our birth, but also that something in the past caused us to be estranged from God. Of course this is speaking of the fall at the garden which we have already mentioned in an earlier message cause this awful effect that is upon all men. The perfect tense speaks of permanence and continuous action. Remember the text in Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Each individual born into this world is infected with the depravity of sin which makes it universal in scale and completely impossible for any man to live in such a way to please God. Why? Because we have all missed the mark, we are all infected with a deadly and lethal virus that condemns our souls to hell if we die without being reconciled to God by the only mediator of sinners: JESUS CHRIST! This is the only cure, the only antidote for sinners. With man salvation it is impossible, but with God it is possible. Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Therefore all those outside Christ are in a continual state of separation, being alienated and estranged from God and are in dire need of being brought to God through Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us that in our state of alienation we are by nature enemies of God. Notice also the words of Romans 8:7 & 8, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." The reason we need to be reconciled to God is because we came into this world as enemies of God, we were/are hostile in our mind towards God. In our natural state we are hostile towards God

and we refuse to subject ourselves to His law. The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God and as Paul says, "...neither indeed can be." This teaches us of the necessity of being reconcile to God in our lost estate. In other words you do not want to die in this state, that is, you do no not want to die being an enemy of God! We need to understand that we are all enemies, every single one of us; we all lived in active rebellion against Him. Please check in your self-righteousness this morning, this is what might keep you from Christ. Most people do not believe that they are enemies of God; they think that by their own good works they somehow will be accepted by God. But what they don't understand is that we can only be accepted to God through Jesus Christ. Notice the words of Paul in Ephesians 1:6 & 7, "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

In the work of reconciliation Christ removed the enmity that was in our hearts towards Him. In regeneration the Spirit of God removes the old heart that was against God and puts in a new heart that now loves and wants to serve God. In reconciliation Christ removed the wrath of God that was against us in His glorious work of propitiation. John 3:36 states that, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Romans 3:24 & 25, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his **blood**, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Again the wrath of God is removed by Christ's work of propitiation which brings forth reconciliation. God has provided everything necessary for a sinner to be right with Him. God sent His only begotten Son to bring us to Him. This again was the purpose of Christ's coming, not to establish some Jewish political, ethnic rule in a physical kingdom, but to bring us to God, to save sinners, to established His SPIRITUAL kingdom. We have to understand that it is about GRACE not race. Christ's work of reconciliation was to bring both Jews and Gentile to God! Eph.2:11-22, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us: 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Therefore reconciliation is that work of Christ emphasizing the removal of our enmity towards God that resulted from the fall. As mediator between God and man, Christ brings us to God in the grace of salvation. Notice again the words of the Paul in Romans 5:6-11, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from

wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." This word atonement is compounded of AT and ONE, thus the meaning of reconciliation, because Christ brings together those who are at variance.

The problem with most people is that they don't see the need for reconciliation with God because they don't see themselves as sinners undone, they don't see themselves at enmity with God and they refuse to see the need of grace and seek out some sort of works salvation to make themselves feel good. In simple terms the self-righteous religionist refuses to be saved by grace alone and sees no need for a mediator to reconcile him to God. Men and women will accept any other method of salvation other than by grace through faith. Now, it is interesting to note that these religionists will show tolerance for any other doctrine and any other religion but they rebel against the blessed doctrine of free grace. This is where we need to be patient with such people and continue to share the gospel with them because unto us also has been given the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Cor.5:17-21, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. 21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

This text clearly shows us the importance and necessary aspect of our responsibility. Everyone that names the name of Christ is an ambassador, but there is also a particular call to those who are preachers. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation and unto us has been committed the word of reconciliation. In simple terms our message and mission is to preach the message of reconciliation. It is incumbent on us to share and let people know that they need to be reconciled to God. This again is the essence of the good news, that is, the gospel, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." 1 Tim.1:15. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that is, to bring us God and this can only be done as mediator, substitute and reconciler. Again the precious words of Paul in Hebrews 9:12, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Christ procured salvation for all those whom He saves; this again was part of His in reconciliation. I like what John MacArthur says, "It is then the greatest work in the world, for it deals with the greatest issue in the world. It is the greatest calling, it is the greatest privilege to be given the responsibility to preach the message of reconciliation. That's what we live for. That's what we die for, that's what we preach for, that's what we serve for, that's what we nurture the saints for, in order that in the end the message of reconciliation might effectively reach sinners. And certainly we would all agree that no message equals this one in importance, so that the Apostle says we have been given, the end of verse 18, the ministry of reconciliation, the diakoneon(?), the service of reconciliation. We are waiters, that's what the word often was used to express, and we bring to the table of sinners the meal of reconciliation. We serve them the truth of reconciliation." Therefore, we are ambassadors of God with a particular message. This then is the message of salvation, the message of hope, the message of grace, the message or RECONCILIATION! Our message of reconciliation is bidding sinners to be reconciled to God. We have a ministry of reconciliation. We proclaim reconciliation that has been accomplished by Christ and seek to persuade sinners, that is, compel sinners who are by nature haters of God, to be reconciled to God.

Let me ask you this morning, have you been reconciled to God? If not, why not? What is your excuse, what is your reason for not being reconciled? If you die without being reconciled to God, you will meet God face to face as your enemy. If you die without Christ you will face the awful judgment of God and if God asks you why were you not reconciled to me, I sent my Son Jesus Christ to make provision, why did you neglect such great provision? What are you going to say? Thou art inexcusable o man; your doom is sealed in the awful darkness and torments of hell, without hope, without mercy, without grace, without God, without a reconciler! Oh my dear listeners, do not put this off any longer, bow down you knee to Christ and own Him as Lord and Savior, throw down your arms of rebellion against God, take sides with God against yourself, repent and believe the message of reconciliation. 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

Here again we have:

1. The Procurement of Christ,

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins ... "

2. The Provision of Christ,

"...the just for the unjust ..."

3. The Purpose of Christ,

"...that he might bring us to God ..."

I am going to ask you the question Pontius Pilate asked in Matthew 27:22, "Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified." I ask you this morning, what shall YOU DO with Jesus who is called Christ?

Listen to this quote, "Reconciliation has been made for sinners by the death of Christ. The way is open for sinners to come near unto God and come with full assurance of faith. The way is Christ, — His Propitiation, — and His Atonement. God Almighty sends his servants with the Word of reconciliation to persuade sinners to be reconciled to him. The motive by which God urges sinners to be reconciled to him is redemption accomplished and the blessed promise of all things new in Christ. Propitiation is the appearament of God's wrath by the blood of Christ. — Atonement is union made between God and sinners meeting at the Mercy Seat ("the throne of grace" – Hebrews 4:16), where Christ's blood covers our sins. — Reconciliation is the reuniting of God and his elect in the person of his dear Son, both looking to the blood of atonement." We are brought to God, because of the grace, love and mercy of Christ!

Those of you who come to our Wednesday night services know what I think of the 70 weeks of Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27. I don't have time to cover this, but one thing for sure is declared in these verses and that is the work of redemption. You see Daniel's prophesy is a profound declaration of redemption, an affirmation of Christ's great work of redemption to which He whole heartily satisfied the justice of God by putting away the sins of His people. In this Daniel's prophesy there were some things promised and one of them is very applicable to

our studies this morning, i.e., reconciliation. This has been effectually accomplished by the glorious sin-atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. 25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood. and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." We are told in these verses that 70 weeks that is 70 times 7 which is 490 years are determined until the Messiah is cut off. Look at verse 26, it says, "...not for himself..." He was cut off for His people. In verse 27 I believe that verse is talking about Jesus Christ not he anti-christ and that this covenant is the everlasting covenant. Christ confirmed the covenant with His blood. In Matthew 26 when our Lord gave the ordinance of the Lords table it says in verses 26-28, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. 27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." This is the application also to Hebrews 13:20, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." Again, our Lord Jesus Christ confirmed, not made a covenant, He confirmed that is ratify, prevailed, strengthen the covenant. Jesus Christ confirmed the covenant with His blood. When He died on the cross our blessed redeemer caused the sacrifices and oblations of the Old Covenant to cease and that forever. What did Christ confirmed in this covenant made with many? Jesus Christ confirmed the covenant with His blood, that is, confirmed it to all those whom Christ saves, His elect. We see clearly that our Lord Jesus Christ by His obedience as our blessed substitute finished the transgression for His people. He made as end of sins, that is, an end for all the sins of His people when He died as our substitute. Notice again the words of verse 24, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." Jesus Christ made reconciliation for iniquity, in other words, the just died for the unjust to bring us to God. Thus, by His obedience in dying as the just for the unjust, Jesus Christ brought in everlasting righteousness for all His people and therefore sealed up the vision of Old Testament prophecy. He completely fulfilled the vision of Old Testament prophecy and is anointed both as Lord and Savior. There's more here in Daniel 9:24-27, but our subject is the atonement of Christ and in particular, RECONCILIATION.

Let me ask you, do you have a blessed assurance of salvation? You can only have a blessed assurance of salvation by being reconcile to God by Jesus Christ. So in closing we ask again: Have you been reconciled to God? If not, why not? What is your excuse, what is your reason for not being reconciled? If you die without being reconciled to God, you will face the awful judgment of God and if God asks you why were you not reconciled to me, I sent my Son Jesus Christ to make provision, why did you neglect such great provision? What are you going to say? Thou art inexcusable o man; your doom is sealed in the awful darkness and

torments of hell, without hope, without mercy, without grace, without God, without a reconciler! Oh my dear listeners, do not put this off any longer, bow down you knee to Christ and own Him as Lord and Savior, throw down your arms of rebellion against God, take sides with God against yourself, repent and believe the message of reconciliation. 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

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2. The Provision of Christ, "...the just for the unjust ..."

3. The Purpose of Christ, "...that he might bring us to God ..."

We ask you again what Pilate asked, in Matthew 27:22, "Pilate saith unto them, <u>What shall I do</u> <u>then with Jesus which is called Christ?</u> They all say unto him, Let him be crucified." I ask you this morning, what shall YOU DO with Jesus who is called Christ?

I put a quote on face book that has a blessed hope but also a fearful recompense if you are not reconciled to God before you die: J C Ryle says, "As surely as God is eternal, so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day."

What a blessing for the child of God, but oh my, my, what a condemning woe to that person who dies without Christ.

There is no excuse for anyone in this auditorium to die without Christ; oh I beseech you this morning: Come to God in repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Let's Pray.