"Where is the Urgency?!"

I preach that through Christ "God was pleased... to reconcile to himself all things... making peace by the blood of his cross." (Col. 1:19-20) And in fact that this is the "plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him." (Eph. 1:10) I preach it because the Bible says it in numerous places and numerous ways.

Yet when I merely suggest that God may ultimately reconcile all things to himself, people will often say, "Well where's the urgency in sharing the Gospel?" Recently, my dear friend and associate said, "Peter, I love what you're saying, but how would you respond to people that ask, 'If all are ultimately reconciled to God, where is the urgency?" The question *irritated* me and I realized that it's always *irritated* me, which made me think, "Maybe I don't respond well to this question and I wonder why I don't respond well to this question."

When asked this question in the past, I've often responded saying, "Well, whatever urgency was there, is still there." My background is reformed or Calvinistic. Calvinists don't believe they save anyone. In fact, to believe that you save anyone is the very heart of sin... for a Calvinist. It is to believe that you are God and Savior, Creator and Redeemer. It's the very rejection of God, who is Grace. So believers don't "save people," but rejoice in being used by God to save people. We share in his joy. And so his urgency is our urgency and all of that "urgency" remains exactly as it is.

If by "urgency" we mean that we must panic, acting in anxiety and fear, then we should never act in "urgency," for God does not panic. That urgency is not God's urgency it's our arrogance and fear. When I preach in fear, I don't preach that God saves. I preach that he may not save or won't save unless we save; that "we are salvation" and we save us from God... who is "not salvation." I testify to that horrifying notion with my arrogant fear.

But if by "urgency" we mean that the time is now and that action is required, then in obedience, God's urgency becomes our urgency. People are walking in to Hell and the Gospel is to be preached NOW—The Gospel; the news that God is sovereign and God is good and "God is Salvation," so we need not fear. Then, our urgency is God's urgency. All of that "urgency" remains exactly as it is.

Exactly where it's always been

I suspect that some think that if God ultimately reconciles all to himself, there is no Hell and thus no urgency (...either in the false and terrifying sense of *urgency*: "We must panic because God needs us to save people from himself" OR in the good and hopeful sense of *urgency*: "We must respond immediately and in obedience, for God wants us to know his joy and share in the wonder of redemption.")

Well as I was saying, I suspect that some think that if God ultimately reconciles all to himself, then, there is no Hell and thus no urgency.

Some say that I don't "believe in Hell," and yet I preach about Hell more than any preacher I know. I suspect they think I don't believe in Hell, because I preach that Hell is not endless. In Scripture Hell (Hades), comes to an End in the Lake of Eternal Fire (Rev. 20:14, 21:4).

I suspect that because I preach that Hades is not endless, people assume that there is no urgency in preaching the Gospel—no "urgency" because "Hell" comes to an end.

Yet preaching the Gospel is announcing the End... and when the Gospel is believed, it actually is the End... of "Hell."

Jesus is the End. (Rev. 21:6, 22:13)

Until people meet "the End," their "Hell" is Endless... yet there is an End to Hell. Heaven is all things filled with the End. And Jesus is the End. God is eternal. God is a consuming fire. God is Love. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the Decision of God. Jesus is the Judgment of God. Jesus is the Revelation of Love. Jesus is the End.

How much torment must your neighbor face before you feel the urgent need to proclaim the End, the End of darkness, death, lies and sin? And proclaim the beginning of light, eternal life, truth and Grace? ...proclaim Jesus, the "Beginning and the End?"

Hell begins on the surface of the earth and closes it's doors upon death. For in Hell no one loves and no one hopes, but God still loves and God still hopes. And the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the Lord's church and certainly not the Lord. But why would you want anyone to descend into Hell, unless of course your heart was already trapped by Hell?

How much torment do you require in order to feel compassion? Do you need thirty minutes of torment? A day? A year? A thousand years? Perhaps, all of time? Jesus is the End of time. Preach him now! Eternal Life is now! It's urgent for your own heart as well as urgent for those to whom you preach.

And if you think that the Gospel is gospel, that the Good News is good news, well don't you want to be urgent? Isn't it a privilege to be the one that announces Good News? See? All of that urgency remains exactly as it is.

And yet, upon reflection, I realize that there may be a new "urgency." And I find that "urgency" rather *irritating*... perhaps even downright terrifying, especially for a good church kid like myself.

More Urgency?!

It is urgent. We must preach the Gospel Gospel means Good News. The Gospel is that, "God is Salvation"—In a word: Jesus, (*Ya-shua*)

The name, "Jesus" literally means, "Yahweh is Salvation" or "God Saves."

We must preach the Gospel because God calls us to preach the Gospel. **And** I think God calls us to preach the gospel because many "Christians" don't believe the Gospel. And to not believe the Gospel is to not be saved.

Let me be a little more blunt: We must urgently preach the Gospel because so many "Christians" don't believe the Gospel and are thus going to Hell or are even trapped by Hell already.

In other words, when people say, "If God redeems all, what's the urgency in sharing the Gospel?" I want to say, "The urgency is to save people from Hell, particularly to save Christians from Hell, even more to save you from Hell, because you obviously don't believe that the Gospel is gospel; that the Good News is good news. People want to share good news, so you must not believe the Good News is good news. Not believing the Good News is a ticket to Hell... and in a very real sense, already is Hell. It is the outer darkness 'Where sons of the kingdom weep and gnash their teeth.'" (Matt. 8:12)

People often point out that Jesus talks about Hell more than anyone in Scripture. I think that's abundantly clear. He warns about Hell. But we need to ask: "Who does he warn?"

Who goes to Hell?

I count eighteen warnings given directly to people about Hell in the New Testament. The Revelation warns of the "Lake of Fire and Brimstone," which can be also translated "Fire and Divinity." But it doesn't warn about Hell—in fact, "Hell" is thrown into the "Lake of Fire and Divinity," so it can't be the same thing as the "Lake of Fire and Divinity." Hell comes to an end in the "Lake of Fire and Divinity" (Rev. 20:14).

As I was saying, I count eighteen warnings given directly to people about "Hell" in the New Testament. All of these warnings are issued by Jesus and not one of these warnings is issued to a gentile, tax collector, sinner or harlot. One could say, "Of course he didn't warn gentiles. He came to his own people, the Jews." And that's correct, but he interacted with gentiles like Pilate, the Roman Centurion, the Canaanite Woman, the Gerasene Demoniac and the Samaritan Woman at the well. When we get to the Acts and Epistles, where the Gospel goes to the nations, not once

is anyone threatened with Hell. The Apostles speak of "Judgment," (even as a very good thing), but they don't threaten with Hell.

Jesus threatens with Hell. And whom does he threaten? Answer: Jews—that is, the members of Jesus's "church," the "people called out," the children of the Kingdom, God's people, the *ecclesia* of God. Even more startling, fifteen of the eighteen times these people are identified as followers of the Messiah. Perhaps even more startling, the other three warnings, arguable the most severe warnings, were issued to Pharisees. Some of these were hostile to Christ, some ambivalent and some sympathetic, but they were all part of the popular and zealous religious movement with whom Jesus had a very close affinity.

For three years I preached through the Gospel of Matthew where most of these warnings, can be found. About a year into it, it became abundantly clear to me: "Holy &%*#, The Pharisees—R—us!" We've turned them into unsightly monsters, but they were the Campus Life leaders, Young Life and Navigator Bible Study leaders of their day. Out of all the religious groups of Christ's day, many argue that their theology was the closest to that of Jesus. The Sadducees didn't even believe in an after-life—you would think Jesus would've warned them! But, He gave the sharpest warnings to Pharisees.

It was to Pharisees that Jesus told the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus. And here's a shock: Upon close reading, one realizes that Lazarus (a transliteration of "Eliezer") is most likely a reference to Abraham's faithful servant Eliezer—Eliezer, the gentile slave, first born in Abraham's house (Genesis 15:2-3), who sacrificed his rightful inheritance from Abraham by assisting Abraham in finding a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:2-3). Isaac fathered Jacob/Israel and Judah. Lazarus was a gentile. The Rich Man, in Hades, is called "son" by Father Abraham. Judah boasted of being the son of Abraham. He has five brothers, like Judah had five brothers with the same mother. They posses "Moses and the Prophets." Lazarus is a gentile and the Rich Man is a Jew—a model Jew—a member of Christ's Church, a "son of the kingdom."

In Mathew 8:10-12, Jesus gets most explicit about folks in "Hell." Right after marveling at the faith of a Roman Centurion, to His followers, He remarks:

Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Notice that it's gentiles from the east and the west, who have faith in Christ's ability to save, that sit at table with Abraham. And notice that it's "the sons of the kingdom," who believe that gentiles can't be saved, that are thrown into the outer darkness.

It's "the sons of the Kingdom," "good" religious Jews from Jesus's church, that lack faith in God's ability and willingness to save, that are offended when he does save. It's "the sons of the kingdom" that are cast into outer darkness; It's the early workers in the parable of the Vineyard, so offended at their master's grace, who cast themselves out of the Vineyard; It's the self-righteous older brother, offended at his Father's Grace for his prodigal younger brother, who casts himself out of the party and into the outer darkness.

So who is it that most urgently needs to hear?

It seems abundantly clear to me that the folks whom Jesus warns about Hell, were "good" religious folks convinced that they'd never go to Hell and offended with Jesus for suggesting that others might not go to Hell. They were self-righteous religious people offended at Grace. They were people offended at the idea of God saving—offended at that very idea in the flesh; that Word, that *Logos*, in the flesh. They were offended at "God is Salvation," Jesus... and they were "sons of the kingdom."

So, do they stop being "sons of the kingdom?" NO! Will they ever enter the kingdom? YES!

Jesus said they are "sons of the kingdom."

In those eighteen warnings, Jesus speaks about "outer darkness" four times. In the remaining fourteen warnings Jesus uses one of two words, translated as "Hell" by the KJV. He uses *Hades* three times and He uses *Gehenna* eleven times. Neither of these words are exact equivalents to the English word, "Hell." And even though some Bibles translate both *Gehenna* and *Hades* as "Hell," it appears that *Hades* is actually destroyed in *Gehenna* (or at least the Lake of Fire, Rev. 20:14). *Hades* is that place of death and outer darkness where people hide from God who is a "consuming fire." *Gehenna* is literally the valley lying outside the walls of Jerusalem. It is a place of Judgment, the boundary between the outer darkness and the Fire that fills the temple, which is the New Jerusalem. *Hades* is temporal. However that Fire is eternal. *Gehenna* is the place where temporality meets eternity; it is Judgment.

If we don't surrender to Judgment at the cross on Calvary, it appears that we will face it in the valley of *Gehenna*. *Hades* is weeping and gnashing of teeth until it's devoured with the Eternal Fire that is God. People do go to *Hades* and bodies will be devoured by fire and consumed by worm in *Gehenna*, (Isaiah 66:24)... and yet all will be reconciled to God in Christ Jesus (Isaiah 66:23). My "New Man" will walk out of the City and see my "old man," my arrogant man, the one that believes "I am Salvation" rather than "God is Salvation"... my New Man will see my old man, this body of flesh, consumed in the valley of Gehenna. It's best to confess that old man, at the cross, right now rather than to be thrown into that valley with him... later.

No one comes to the Father except through the Son, but it appears there is a sweet and glorious way in which this happens and a horrifying and extremely painful way in which this happens. In other words, one can surrender to God's judgment of grace in Christ Jesus right now... or one can run from it and be burned by it on the last day.

And Jesus warns of another day, which isn't the last day, on which the master shuts the door (Luke 13:25, Matt. 25:10). In one parable, the foolish virgins don't put their hope in the bridegroom. In the other parable, the people who enter simply won't tell the master "where they are from." I think these people are those people who don't hope in Grace, long for Grace and depend on Grace; they are self-righteous religious people who trust in themselves and so hide their sin. AND they are "sons and daughters of the kingdom." They are shut out.

But that doesn't mean that they will never enter. It means that the time is now, that "today is the day of salvation." Why be shut out at all? That message is urgent.

Will they ever enter the Kingdom? YES! But should we warn them about Hell? YES!

Is the message urgent? ABSOLUTELY!

And so, for whom, is the Gospel most urgent?

It's most urgent for those who don't trust God's power and desire to save... even more specifically, those who hate the fact that God does save, in a word "Jesus." It appears to be most urgent for those who are convinced that they are saved and also convinced that God won't save or can't save others... which usually means that they believe they have actually saved them selves—saved them selves with a good choice or some good deed, because they themselves are good.

I suspect that many "Christians," including myself, often don't trust "God saves." We don't trust Jesus, who is "God Saves."

We trust "I save," which means we aren't saved, because salvation is faith in "God Saves."

Salvation is a good choice called faith and that choice is a gift. And it comes through a proclamation that "God is Salvation," the proclamation of Jesus.

- If you rejoice in the fact that "God is Salvation," you rejoice in the idea of God doing a lot of saving.
- If you rejoice in the lie that you save, just the idea that God saves burns you like fire... because it is fire.

God is Fire. God is Love. God is One. God is burning hot Grace.

Perhaps "Christians," of all people, are in the most immanent danger of *Hades*—that place where people hide from Grace, weeping and gnashing their teeth.

And perhaps "Christians" are in the most immanent danger of suffering the pains of *Gehenna*—that place, where *Hades* is devoured by Eternal Fire;

that place where trust in self is consumed by Faith in God;

that place where self-righteousness is devoured by God's righteousness;

that place where the illusion that we have created ourselves is consumed by the Truth that is our Creator;

that place where pride is consumed by Grace;

that place where my judgment is consumed by God's judgment;

that place where my old man is annihilated in the presence of the New Man, the *Eschatos* Adam, Jesus, "God Saves."

"It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God." (1 Peter 4:17)

In 2 Timothy 4:1 Paul writes that God in Jesus will "judge the living and the dead" by "his appearing." In verse 8, he talks about the saved as those who "have loved his appearing." In 2 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul writes that those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction from (NOT "away from") the presence of the Lord." You see Paul believes that Jesus is The Eternal and Consuming Fire and Jesus is "God is Salvation." Jesus is Grace. Our judgment is Grace.

If you don't like Grace, you'll run from Grace and hide in Hell, eventually to be burned by Grace right down to faith... and if there is no faith, perhaps you are destroyed and remade, like Sodom is destroyed and remade (Ezekiel 16:48-58).

If you hate Grace you'll be burned by Grace OR you may surrender to Grace. Right now at the cross you may surrender to Grace; you may "love his appearing."

Perhaps some, who have never recited His name—the English letters: J, E, S, U and S—will absolutely love "His Glorious Appearing."

And perhaps some, who for all their days have recited His name, will be horrified at "His Glorious Appearing."

They will see what the name means.

And perhaps, it's just the opposite of all they thought it meant.

At His appearing...

And you know He doesn't change.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever" (Heb. 13:8)

That means that Jesus the Lamb is Jesus the Lion.

His very Lion-ness is his very Lamb-ness and His very Lamb-ness is his very Lionness. In <u>The Revelation</u>, "the kings of the earth, the great ones, the rich and powerful" run and hide from the face of the one on the throne. They hide from "The wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16). Did you get that? They're terrified of a lamb not a lion.

Once "Christians" become "kings of the earth, the great ones, the rich and powerful," once we think we save ourselves, "God is Salvation" becomes the greatest offense—the offense of this world, that is "Jesus Christ and him crucified," that is the Glory of God, that is His Glorious Appearing.

He doesn't change.

Never forget just who it was that was offended at his appearing, that hated his appearing, and tried to stop his appearing the first time? It was his "church." It was Israel, the Jews and in particular the Pharisees, who believed "they saved," and so hated "God saves"—In a word: Jesus. They crucified Jesus, "God is Salvation."

Why do so many in the Church teach that God doesn't want to save or God cannot save, so God will not save and reconcile to himself all things in Christ Jesus?

Why do so many ignore Scripture, which clearly states that God will reconcile all to himself and make all things new? (Col. 1:20, Rev. 21:5)

Why do they refuse to even wrestle with the Word that might seem contrary? (Gen. 32:24)

Perhaps, they hate the Word. He has a name.

Why do so many hate the idea that God can save, God wants to save and God does save? Is it because we like to think we save? Or at least we mediate or broker "God saves?" That is we think that we control Christ, which makes us Christ. That's the spirit of the Anti-Christ. That's the lie of the snake in the Garden: "You can create your self. You can save yourself, with the knowledge of good and evil, the law."

Why do so many in the church hate the idea that God saves? Maybe we've believed the lie that "we save" and want to propagate the lie that "we can save others" and so control others and so become "kings of the earth, the great ones, the rich and powerful." So we seek to crucify "God Saves" for the sake of "we save."

When you crucify the idea—the *logos*—that "God Saves," you crucify Jesus. And when you crucify Jesus, you damn (*katakrino*) yourself to Hell.

It's ironic I know, but if you don't believe that "God Saves" you cannot be saved. For salvation is believing: "God is Salvation"—In a word: Jesus.

And yet, Scripture says "all will be reconciled," which sounds like "all will be saved," which means that those who don't believe "God saves," will one day believe "God saves," for they will have been saved... from Hell. They will have been saved by Jesus, who has "descended" into Hell... their Hell. Scripture says that he plans to "fill all things." (Eph. 4:10) And you may be filled right now, with Holy Fire, the Spirit of "God is Salvation"—In a word: Jesus

We damn ourselves to Hell, but he is damned to Hell for us. "If God is for us... who is to condemn (*katakrino*)?" (Romans 8:31-34)

But isn't it ironic? "Christians" are afraid to believe "God Saves," because they think it may mean that they're not saved, which means they don't believe "God Saves," which means they actually aren't saved. And for these people, "Christian People," the Word is especially urgent. Speak it: "God is Salvation."

Perhaps it's "Christian people" that most urgently need to hear "God Saves."

It's one thing to be ignorant of "God is Salvation."

It's quite another to reject "God is salvation" in the name of "God is Salvation."

In other words,

It's one thing to be ignorant of Jesus.

It's quite another to damn people to endless Hell in the name of Jesus, who is, "God is Salvation."

Jesus said, "The judgment you pronounce is the Judgment you receive."

And I think that's why I got *irritated* at the question: "Peter if all are ultimately reconciled, where's the urgency in preaching the Gospel?"

I got *irritated* because I wanted to make a *pronouncement*:

"We must preach the Gospel, because so many 'Christians' are going to Hell."

"We must preach that God reconciles all to himself in Christ Jesus.

because Christians don't believe He reconciles all to himself in Christ Jesus, because Christians don't believe God wants to save or that God can save.

Christians don't trust 'God is Salvation.'

They think He's sometimes 'God saves,' and sometimes not 'God saves.'

They think He's Jesus Christ and Anti-Christ.

They think He's two. But God is One.

Most Christians don't have faith in 'God is Salvation.'

Most Christians don't have faith in Jesus, and so...

They're going to Hell."

I got *irritated*, for I got tempted to make that pronouncement. But "the judgment I pronounce is the judgment I receive." So maybe I better just keep preaching the Gospel: "God is Salvation."

But it is urgent.

"The Judgment you pronounce is the judgment you receive."
God pronounced a judgment on Israel.
Jesus pronounced a judgment on his Church.

Jesus is God's Judgment pronounced upon his people. God in Christ Jesus didn't just get irritated.

The Judgment he pronounced was the judgment he received. Jesus warns with Hell. Then descends into Hell for those he's warned. He descends into Hell and fills it with Eternal Fire. He makes all things new. Jesus said, "My Father's commandment is Eternal Life." (John 12:50) And Jesus is that commandment. Jesus is God's Word of Life:

"God is Salvation."

That Word is urgent.

That Word is eternal.

That Word is now.

That Word is the place that eternity touches time, where Heaven invades Hell.

But that Word is not my word, so I don't have to panic or live in fear. It's not my Word, but I belong to that Word. And with my flesh, I get to speak that Word.

It's urgent.

The urgency is not to convince folks to agree to some proposition at the back of a pamphlet explaining the "plan of salvation."

The urgency is to help folks trust that "God is Salvation."

Jesus said, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord Lord, did we not do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity." (Matt. 7:22)

It's not urgent that we do things in his name, answer a test question with his name or even that we can recite his name after reading a pamphlet. It's urgent that we are known by him and trust him; Trust "God is Salvation;" Trust Jesus... that's his name.

It's urgent

I can get people to agree to a statement in the back of a pamphlet by threatening them with Hell... but when I do, perhaps I make them "twice as much a child of Hell," just as the Pharisees made their proselytes "twice as much a child of Hell." (Matt. 23:15)

And Even More Urgency?!

If I don't trust "God is Salvation," I won't be able to testify that, "God is Salvation." I may say, "God is Salvation;" I may say, "Jesus is Lord." But with my intimidation, anxiety and fear, I'll testify that I am salvation, or they are salvation, or their choice

based on their knowledge of good and evil—their knowledge of my pamphlet is salvation. I'll testify that our will power (I think the Bible calls this "flesh")... I'll testify that our will power, combined with our knowledge of good and evil, will save us from God. In other words, I'll convert someone to believing that they are salvation, or the church is salvation, saving them from God who is "Not Salvation," and I'll do it all in the name of "God is Salvation"—In a word: Jesus.

If I get people to agree to a statement in the back of a pamphlet by threatening them with Hell, perhaps I'm convincing them that they're saved *because* they trust that God is not salvation and "the knowledge of good and evil" in the back of my pamphlet is salvation... from God, who wants to send them to Hell.

Now God can use anything and ultimately does use everything to testify to "God is Salvation," that Jesus is the Christ. But maybe sometimes we've been converting people to the Anti-Christ rather than the Christ. "Anti-Christ" means "imitation Christ." Perhaps a large part of what we call the church isn't worshiping Christ, serving Christ and testifying to Christ, but trying to become Christ and convince the world: "We are Christ; The Church is Salvation; We are Salvation."

It's absolutely urgent that we stop.

We must warn people of the wrath to come. It is wrath poured out on those who do not trust "God is Salvation." It is the very lifeblood of "God is Salvation." That's the liquid that is poured out of the seven bowls. It will utterly burn away the lie that we are salvation. It will burn away our "flesh." It is a lake of "fire that is divinity"—a lake of Light that will consume the darkness, Way-ness that will consume lost-ness, Truth that will consume the lie, Life that will consume death and annihilate Hades. It's the blood of "God is Salvation" and it will consume the lie that "we are salvation."

Every time we come to the table of the Lord we surrender that lie, so that we won't be cast into the fire with it.

Well.

I can get people to agree to a statement in the back of a pamphlet by threatening them with Hell... and perhaps it's urgent that I don't.

I can get people to agree to a statement in the back of a pamphlet by threatening them with Hell...

But.

I can't get people to trust that God is Salvation, by threatening them with the idea that sometimes, God is not Salvation.

Jesus is never not Jesus.

Jesus never stops... seeking and saving "the lost."

Not ever... until the end of time and He is the end of time.

And you know,

Jesus didn't just pronounce a judgment on us. He bore his judgment for us. He became our judgment.

He didn't just speak a word. He is the Word. And He became the Word in flesh for us. He didn't just proclaim Good News with his voice.

He proclaimed Good News with his own Body Broken and Blood Shed.

And maybe that's the reason I really got *irritated*. I'm not called to simply speak Good News. I'm called to embody Good News. And the principalities and powers of this world, that keep us in fear and bondage, that want us to spread that fear and bondage... the principalities and powers of this world hate the Good News. And so they try to break the Good News, even in my own body.

Once they did break the Good News. Once they did nail him down. Once they did crucify the Good News in human flesh. And when they did... Good News spilled out and that's the Good News.

See? I'm not only called to preach to the Church. I'm called to die for the Church.

And that can be *irritating*...

It's irritating, until I remember I am the Church, I am His Body. So when my body is broken and my blood is spilt, "God is salvation" is broken and the life of Jesus is spilt. And then, I don't only know about Him, I begin to know Him... and maybe even trust Him.

Not trusting "God is salvation," is Hell. But trusting "God is salvation," is Heaven. "God is Salvation" is Jesus.

That Word is the Word of God. That Word creates all things. That Word creates you... even as you preach it.

It's urgent. And nothing else is.

And now... I don't feel Irritated.