

A PURPOSE FOR YOU AND US
“Being Saved to Share The Salvation”
First in a Series of Six
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 & Romans 10:8b-13
First Sunday in Lent, February 29, 2004

TBC 127

Sunday, February 29, 1976. Do you remember what you were doing on that day? If you were alive, you were in Bible study and worship, weren't you? I mean everybody is at the church house on Sundays, aren't they? Well, maybe not. 28 years ago today was the last time Tabernacle Baptist Church or any church gathered in worship and Bible study on Sunday, February 29. I was 19 years old and a freshman in college at Western Kentucky University.

I was home that weekend, leading the congregational singing in my home church in Cadiz during a special emphasis called “Five Fattening Sundays in February.” That's were we got the idea of “Five Fabulous Sundays in February” at Tabernacle this year as we've focused on something special each Sunday. It was a warm and sunshiny day for western Kentucky. Enough nostalgia. Let's get back to 2004.

This is a leap year – you know that thing that happens every four years when, instead of 365 days, there are 366 days – February gets an extra day: the 29th. Leap year signals the year of the Summer Olympics and a Presidential election. Most just come and go without any notice. There is, however, something interesting about this leap year. There are five Sundays in February. So what? Every other month has five Sundays quite often. But February only has five Sundays every 28 years. Last time there were five Sundays in February was 1976. Next time will be 2032. I'll be 75 years old. To put it into perspective for our students, Emily, who is 16, will be 44 and Nicholas, who is 13, will be 41.

Think about this. 28 years ago we were celebrating the Bicentennial of the USA. The Concorde airliner made its first commercial flight. Viking 1 landed on Mars. There was no Hubble Space Telescope, no AIDS epidemic, no Starbucks coffee shops, no *Star Wars*, no Harry Potter, no such thing as www.tabernacle.org or www.anything.org. Bill Gates was just 19, like I. There were no email, no cell phones, and no PDAs. I typed my college term papers that year, and in subsequent years, on a portable Royal manual typewriter that had a double color ribbon – black ink on the top and red ink on the bottom (or was it reversed?) – that I had gotten for Christmas a few years earlier.

Sunday, February 29, 1976. Did you have a clue as to what would happen during the next 28 years? You had no idea that you would be gathering in a different facility or even on a different piece of property – or if you did, you probably had no idea where it would be. It never occurred to me 28 years ago today in the faith community that nurtured my life, Cadiz Baptist Church, that exactly 28 years later I would be pastoring a wonderful group of people, worshipping with them, standing to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, reminding them that God does have a purpose for all. That was the farthest thing from my mind and Georgia certainly wasn't on my mind, let alone Carrollton.

Think of all you've seen change in the last 28 years – or the last 10 for that fact of the matter. Can you imagine what we'll see in the next 28 years if we live? I can't even begin to fathom what changes will take place. I wonder what I'll be thinking on Sunday, February 29, 2032?

Let me ask you: What do you think right now? Did God have a purpose for you and us back in '76? Of course He did. Does God have a purpose for you and us in '04? Of course He does. Will God have a purpose for you and us in '32? Of course He will. I pray that is what you are thinking right now and that all of us will think something similar in 2032 and each moment between now and then.

I like to think that, in the spirit of Psalm 91, we have dwelt, are dwelling, and will dwell “*in the shelter of the Most High*”(v. 1a). I like to think that, in the spirit of Psalm 91, we have abided, are abiding, and will “*abide in the shadow of the Almighty*”(v. 1b). And I like to think, in the spirit of Psalm

91, that we have said, are saying, and will **“say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust’”** (v. 2)!

Wherever we are, leap year or no leap year, five Sundays or four in February, we are to remember that there is a purpose for you and us – you as an individual and us as a collective people of the Most High God. As we have leaped into another Journey to the Cross during this Season of Lent, we do so, prayerfully, with undivided hearts as we journey for forty days, which began this past Ash Wednesday and conclude on Palm Sunday, with a purpose in mind.

Little did I know 28 years ago, that I would be challenged with a kingdom challenge – The Kingdom Challenge. Little did I know that, in the spirit of Psalm 91, I would be satisfied **“with a long life”** (v. 16a) by God and would be able to **“see...salvation”** (v. 16b). Little did I realize that a purpose for you and us was being saved to share the salvation. I suppose I knew that on Sunday, February 29, 1976, but, best I can recollect, it didn’t come to mind that day. Today I remind myself, as well as you, that, in the spirit of Romans 10, **“THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation”** (vv. 8b-10).

These words of Paul, the writer of the sixth book in the New Testament order, are located in the context of his discussion of Israel’s unbelief and God’s faithfulness in chapters 9-11, which are some of the most difficult passages in the Bible due to a long history of varied interpretations, dating back to the days of the early Mothers and Fathers of the church in the second century AD. Suffice it to say that a careful reading of these chapters reveals that salvation is for anyone and everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and those who believe are saved and are being saved for a purpose: to share the salvation.

That’s one of the purposes with which we’ve been entrusted. A part of our calling as saved people is to share the salvation and it’s shared in multiple ways – words, deeds, attitudes, you name it. A purpose for you and us is to provide the world an opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ, affording anyone and everyone the chance to confess Him as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead. We are summonsed to invite people to call upon the name of the Lord because we know that whenever that happens salvation comes. So this purpose for you and us is to be taken seriously and Paul tells us why it is to be taken seriously in verses 14-15.

“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!’”

I do believe salvation was being shared on beautiful feet back in ’76. I do believe it is being shared in ’04. Specifically in the upcoming days for Tabernacle we will share it in the Mississippi Delta. Our national mission venture will be April 5-9 and it’s for children in the Fifth Grade-Adults. There are abounding needs in Greenville, Mississippi. We’re partnering with a church in that community. The pastor’s name is Bob Pitts. This is an all-inclusive opportunity to **“bring good news of good things”** (v. 15)! There’ll be other opportunities as well this year. That’s the most immediate one.

Look into the future. I do believe that salvation will be shared in ’32. Leap year or not, a purpose for you and us is being saved to share the salvation. And what a salvation it is! Now if you don’t believe that, then go see the movie, “The Passion of The Christ.”

I’m glad that in this year of an extra day and in this month of five Sundays, that another phenomenon is occurring. People across this nation are talking about Jesus Christ. They are specifically

talking about His death. Recent issues of Newsweek, Time, and US News & World Report have focused on Jesus – especially His death. Believe it or not, the talk has been there all along – even back in '76.

Yesterday's "Faith and Values" section of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution mentioned various films and stage productions on Jesus as far back as 1927. Some, if not all, were controversial. I grew up in the late 60s and early to mid-70s and well remember when the stage productions of the musical, "Godspell" and the Broadway rock opera, "Jesus Christ Superstar" were each performed for the first time. I saw the movies in 1973 and much later, the stage presentations. I can still remember as a teenager how controversial those were in portraying the life of Jesus in radical ways. Yet, people got saved as a result of "Godspell" and "Jesus Christ Superstar." I remember when the timeless musical by Reagan Courtney and Burl Red, "Celebrate Life," was released and the controversy it stirred in many Baptist churches, at least in Western Kentucky, because it wasn't the typical John W. Peterson cantata. Yet people, especially students, got saved as a result of "Celebrate Life." Yes the talk has always been there. I think, though, we're a bit more attentive and observant in 2004 than we have been in times past.

Now it's focused in "The Passion of The Christ." Jackie and I saw it with Charles and Donna Cox on Thursday evening at Arbor Place Mall. To say the least I was moved. It engaged me. It drew me into the Passion, and *passion*, by the way, is an old Middle Latin word, meaning "suffering." I was drawn into the suffering of Jesus from Gethsemane to His death on the Cross. I highly recommend you see this movie. It is excellent. Be advised it is violent. It's a judgment call as to whether or not teenagers be allowed to see it. Jackie and I have concluded it will be OK for Emily and Nicholas to see it. There are some things in the movie that need to be clarified. Yes there are some troublesome things in the movie from the biblical, historical, and theological perspectives. I plan to address them in the near future and set the record straight. Nevertheless I think Mel Gibson achieved the purpose of showing the Passion of Jesus.

This movie "*brings good news of good things*"(v.15). It has the potential of allowing people without Christ to hear and see and then call upon Him to bring salvation into their lives. But "The Passion of the Christ" is not a movie for non-believers in Jesus to attend by themselves. I'm not an authoritarian, but I am going to be authoritative with you: don't any of you dare say to a non-believer, "You need to go see The Passion." What you need to say is, "I want to take you to see The Passion. I want you to be my guest and after you've seen it, if you have any questions, I'll do my best to answer them." That's the purpose – yours, mine, ours. We have been saved to share the salvation. Here's an excellent opportunity in a most poignant film to help someone else understand that there is room at the Cross for anybody and everybody.

As you and I commit to finding God's purpose during these days of Lent, may we go beyond the forty days. Let's go the whole of this leap year – all 366 days. Let's go believing and confessing that Jesus really is Lord and part of His purpose for us is to share the salvation because as the movie indicates, there is always room at the Cross for one more. And maybe that one is in this worship room right now.

Sunday, February 29, 2032. The fifth Sunday in February. It will be the Third Sunday in Lent. 28 years from today. Where will I be? I don't know. In fact I'm not going to worry about it. I'm just going to pray that between now and then I'll be about God's purpose for me and us – sharing the salvation. I pray you will too. If we'll share the salvation, we'll go gladly leaping through each year, whether it's leap year or not. Who knows. Maybe it will start getting crowded around the Cross. I hope it does and even if it does get crowded around the Cross that will be OK. Why? Because there'll still be room for one more. Yes. Always room for one more at the Cross. Now that's something to share, don't you think?

**Sermon by Dr. Jimmy Gentry, Pastor
Tabernacle Baptist Church
Carrollton, GA**

All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995