

# ***Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor***

*September 13, 2020*

*Lesson 2*

## **Forgiven, Rescued, Restored**

Romans 1:15-17, 5:6-11

By F. Belton Joyner

The New Testament words (*ěuaggělizō* and *ěuaggěliōn*) that are translated as “gospel” are formed from two other words: one meaning “good” or “well done,” and the other meaning “angel” or “messenger.” (That word, in turn, has come from the word for “message” or “announcement.”) Good news! Good message!

How do we measure which news is good? The winner of the lottery may rejoice at this fortune, but studies show that many of these winners end up in financial despair. If my favorite football team upsets a rival, I think that the season is saved, but what if Unknown Tech beats us the following week? Marriage begins with excitement and happy anticipation, but statistics reveal that half of first-time marriages end in divorce, and the rate is even higher for second or third marriages.

We can define “good news” by telling of something that is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Want a clue? Sneak a look at Hebrews 13:8.) Really good news is news that lasts. The good news of the gospel of salvation is that it does not wear out. The good news of the gospel is that it is constant even when I am not. The good news is that if I fall from grace, grace still invites me back.

For Paul (and for us), the message of salvation is that we have “a restored relationship with God” (Romans 5:11, Common English Bible). The King James Version says, “We have now received the atonement.” The New Revised Standard Version calls it “reconciliation.” Eugene Peterson in *The Message* refers to it as “this amazing friendship with God.” Today’s English Version says, “made us God’s friends.”

What seems to astonish Paul is that the gift God has given us comes while we are still broken (Romans 5:8). I can understand being rewarded for something I have worked hard to achieve. If I stick to my diet, hooray for losing weight. If I get to the gym regularly, hooray for better endurance. If I study hard, hooray for the top grade my professor gives. But what about this? God’s saving power in Christ Jesus does not wait for us to deserve it. It seeks us out “while we were still enemies” (Romans 5:10). And it lasts. No wonder it is called “good news.”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, help my life say, ‘thank you’ for the bountiful gift of Christ’s saving power.”

*F. Belton Joyner is a retired elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has served in a variety of local church and connectional responsibilities. His publications range from church school curriculum to theology popularization to mystery novels. He has written these weekly thoughts on the lessons in Adult Bible Studies for his conference newsletter since December 2001. They are printed here with permission.*