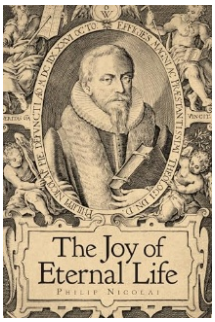
Wachet Auf! (Wake, Awake!)

Philipp Nicolai was a PK – that is to say, he was a Pastor's Kid. Philipp's father was a contemporary of Dr. Martin Luther. Philipp followed in the footsteps of the Lutheran Reformation. He studied at Erfurt and was ordained in 1583 as a Lutheran Pastor. He earned his doctorate in Theology in 1594 from the University of Wittenberg, the place where Luther once taught. From 1601-08, Pastor Nicolai faithfully shepherded a large congregation in Hamburg until the Lord called him home at the age of 52.

What really stands out about Pastor Nicolai, and what he's most remembered for happened in the years in between getting his doctorate and then serving in Hamburg. It was 1596 when he began serving God's people in the village of Unna, Westphalia, a town of about 2400 people. History looks upon those times as one of great tragedy, terrible sadness and loss. The Bubonic Plague decimated the population of Europe, as 25 to 50 million people died – which was literally about half of Europe's population! To be a pastor at that time… to shepherd God's people… to try and bring hope and comfort… That town of 2400 saw 1300 people die between July 1597 and January 1598. Nicolai's own records show 300 funerals in July (10 a day!), with another 170 in the first week of August! How does one process such loss!

Yet, in 1598, Philipp wrote these words, "There seemed to me nothing more sweet, delightful, and agreeable, than the contemplation of the noble, sublime doctrine of Eternal Life obtained through the Blood of Christ. ***This*** I allowed to dwell in my heart day and night, and searched the Scriptures as to what they revealed on this matter." He goes on…and the is in the preface of his book,



"Day by day, I wrote out my meditations, and found myself, thank God! wonderfully well, comforted in heart, joyful in spirit, and truly content! I gave to my manuscript the name and title of *Frueden-Spiegel des ewigen Lebens = The Mirror of Joy of Eterna Life…* to leave behind me, if God should call me from this world, as the token of my peaceful, joyful, Christian departure, or, if God should spare me in health, to comfort other sufferers whom He should also visit with the pestilence… The gracious, holy God has most mercifully preserved me amid the dying from the dreadful pestilence, and wonderfully spared me beyond all my thoughts and hopes, so that with the Prophet David I can say to Him, *"O how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee."* Ps. 31:19

God had not only filled Pastor Nicolai's heart with a deep spiritually mature faith, but he was a gifted musician and poet. During these tragic years, he composed two incredibly powerful hymns: **How lovely Shines the Morning Star** and, one which we heard and sang already today, ***Wachet auf*** – **Wake, awake, for night is flying.** Originally this hymn was entitled, *"Another Hymn of the Voice at midnight and of the wise virgins who go to meet their heavenly bridegroom, Matthew 25."* In the midst of such incredible death and darkness, as the land echoed with the cries of sorrow and sadness the likes of which none of us have ever known – there was "another voice" that Pastor Nicolai caused to ring out more loudly and more clearly: the voice of Jesus. *Wachet auf* – Wake, awake! Hear ***His*** voice. Listen to ***God's Promises!*** And beware, for there are a lot of *others voices* out there - that lead to no good.

The Apostle Paul was God's voice piece in the Greek city of Thessalonica, but only for 3 weeks. He wasn't chased out of town by the plague, but by persecutors of the Gospel. The believers who lived there were ravaged by persecution and ridicule from false teachers. They spread lies about death and dying and the end of time caused fear and doubt to spread like a disease – which is why Paul took the time to write this letter. The opening words of chapter 5 read, *"[1] Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, [2] for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. [3] While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

Paul's voice was the very soothing salve they needed. He assured them that they already knew everything they needed to know. By God's grace, they were "In the Know" about what happens when a believer dies; they knew how to be ready for Judgment Day. Yes, there were some voices shouting, "Peace and Safety – everything's alright; no need to worry about being Judged… live how you want, believe whatever you want to believe…" When that Day does come, and it will, they will not escape God's judgment.

"Peace and safety, everything's fine, no worries…" Paul exposes such false notions for what they really are: *"[4] But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. [5] You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. [6] So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night."* False teachings are Satan's lies. He does all he can to foster unbelief, to darken hearts, to confuse minds - causing people to be spiritually sleepy, drusy, drunk on the lies that lead only to death. And you can be sure his deceptive lies continue to plague and pursue us.

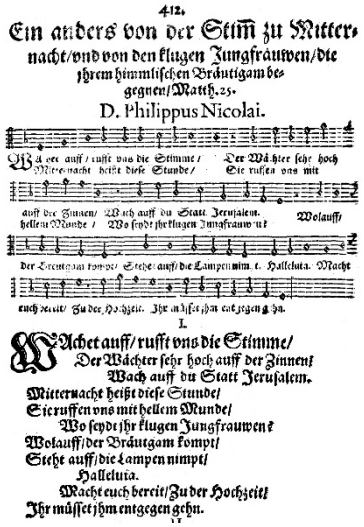
I feel spiritually fine… It's no big deal if I don't go to church… I've read the Bible before, I know what is says… Life is just really busy right now… the sports, the activities, the trips… the overtime pay I get at work… I just don't have time right now – I'll get around to it later. Those are all just repackaged cries of "Peace and Safety." Those are clear examples of what it is to not carry extra oil in your lamps. That's what it is to live life pretending that The DAY isn't going to come like a thief in the night… but that I'll have plenty of time later on, when things settle down, to get my soul and that of my family ready… Peace and safety – no worries! Friends, that's not the voice of the Lord, that's the deception of the devil, and the consequence of being spiritually unprepared is worse than any bubonic plague.

With his hymn, Pastor Phillip Nicolai was that faithful voice for his people. Death was literally on their doorsteps each day – and so the faithful cry rang out, *"Wake, awake! for night is flying," The watchmen on the heights are crying; "Awake, Jerusalem, arise!" Midnight hears the welcome voices, And at the thrilling cry rejoices: "Oh, where are all you virgins wise?* For the believer, death brings to us the joy of eternal life – of finally being home with our Savior Jesus. *The Bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take! Alleluia! With bridal-care, yourselves prepare, To meet the Bridegroom, who is near."*

The Apostle Paul was that faithful voice for the Thessalonians – just as he is for us today, *"[8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.* That's the Bridal-Care Philipp Nicolai was speaking of! As you and I are in the Word and in God's house and receiving his gifts in the sacraments – that is God arming us and equipping us with the spiritual clothing our souls need… the faith and love and hope that come from the Gospel… This is the oil that keeps our faith burning brightly, that keeps us spiritually alert to recognize the devil's lies, that keeps us self-aware and on guard against laziness and spiritually apathy – all things that lead to eternal death.

How graciously Paul reminds us of what God's will is for us, *"God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. [10] He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

That's just flat out incredible! We have given God every reason to send us to hell where we should rightly suffer wrath for our sins – but what did God do instead!?! God has given us Salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ!! What incredibly powerful words – ***He died for us*** – Jesus endure the plague of God's wrath so that we may live together with him. It's these words of Scripture that Pastor Philipp Nicolai immersed himself with, that allowed him to write, "There seemed to me nothing more sweet, delightful, and agreeable, than the contemplation of the noble, sublime doctrine of Eternal Life obtained through the Blood of Christ. ***This*** I allowed to dwell in my heart day and night." (Preface to Frueden-Spiegel)


4.12.
Ein anders von der Stim zu Mitternacht/vnd von den klugen Jungfrawen/die jhrem himmlischen Bräutigam begegnen/Matth.25.
D. Philippus Nicolai.
Wachet auff/ruefft vns die Stimme/ Der Wächter sehr hoch auff der Zinnen/ Wach auff du Statt Jerusalem. Wolauff/
Mitternacht heißt diese Stunde/ Sie ruffen vns mit hellem Munde/ Wo seyd jhr klugen Jungfrawen?
Der Bräutigam kompt/ Stehet auff/die Lampen nimm. e. Halleluia. Macht euch bereit/ Zu der Hochzeit/ Jhr müsset jhm entgegen gehn.
I.
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Jhr müsset jhm entgegen gehn.

In this way, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us encourage one another as we regularly, frequently weekly, even daily gather together in God's house, as we come to his table to receive his sacrament of pardon and peace, as we immerse ourselves in the study His Word, as we join our voices together to sing hymns of praise to our Savior, and as we encourage one another to – ***Wachet Auf!*** – Keep Awake – arming and equipping ourselves with the True Words of Peace and Safety that come only from the voice of our Savior. With bridal-care let us continue to prepare for the coming of our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.