

11-6-22

Sermon- The Day of the Lord, First Crop

Scripture- 2 Thess. 2:1-5, 13-17, CTW- PS 145: 1-5, 17-21

Hymns- 473, 606, 102

Theme- In Scripture, the term "day of the Lord" is used in two ways. It can mean the end times, beginning with Christ's birth and continuing until today, and it can also mean the time of final judgement. Paul is taking this opportunity to present us with all the facts we need to know in order to own the hope we are supposed to have regardless of the date on the calendar.

**I. The "mystery of lawlessness is already at work," but God had revealed the truth to His people, the truth in which we must "stand firm."**

**A. God's people in Thessalonica were confused.**

**Someone they trusted had lied to them.** Someone had told them that the day of Christ's return had come and gone and that they had missed it. Christ's return is just one thread, of course, in the total fabric of doctrine, but, like all the other threads, it is important to get that one right.

In 2 Thessalonians, right at the beginning of chapter 2, Paul urges these dear people "not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed" about these things. He had already disclosed to them the truth of sound doctrine.

Of course, Paul is not surprised by the presence of false teachers. He says very clearly in verse 7 that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" because, as he points out in verses 9 and 10, Satan is at work "with all wicked deception."

**B. But we are not to be deceived.** In our text for today, Paul tells us to "stand firm" in the truth, to "hold to the traditions" we have been taught, and he gives us three reasons for doing so. We are to stand firm in the truth because the truth assures us (1)

that God is sovereign, (2) that He is gracious, and (3) that He is faithful. Let's look at each of these affirmations in turn.

## **II. Truth Assures Us that God Is Sovereign**

Scripture urges us to "stand firm" in the truth, first of all, because truth assures us that God is sovereign.

Paul writes in **verse 13**, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved". God chose you from the beginning.

This is the great comfort that Scripture gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ, that God has chosen us "from the beginning."

**A. Otherwise, we would never have chosen God, and we would be left in our sins.** Here is the truth: All of humanity is fallen, and outside of Christ we have lost communion with God and abide under His wrath. But God in His great mercy has appointed a means of redemption.

The whole world is under the spell of deception, perpetrated by "the father of lies" **John 8:44**, but God has chosen some out of this world "to come to the knowledge of the truth" **1 Tim. 2:4**.

This He has done, not on account of any special qualities that we have—the truth is, we have none—but simply because of His sovereign pleasure.

**B. So, how can we know that we are chosen?** Paul tells us in his first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 4 and 5: "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came not only to you in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." In other words, you believed that what we said was true, and it was the Holy Spirit who convinced you. It was the sovereign Lord. What great assurance is this, that "God chose you from the beginning"!

Remember being a kid at recess in school, we would often choose up teams to play one game or another. And, of course, the best athletes would be chosen first. Why? Because they were good.

**But God chose His people despite the fact that none of us is good.** As Paul says in Ephesians, **“God chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world” Eph. 1:4.**

This is the truth, and we are to “stand firm” in it. Otherwise, we are vulnerable to deception, and, like the people of ancient Thessalonica, we may find ourselves “shaken in mind or alarmed.”

### **III. Truth Assures Us that God Is Gracious**

This we must do, first of all, because truth assures us that God is sovereign, and, secondly, because truth assures us that God is gracious. We see this in verses 13 and 14. How do we know this truth? Paul gives us three pieces of evidence.

**A. God’s Grace Brings His People to Life v. 13b**—First, God’s grace brings His people to life. In the latter part of verse 13, Paul writes, “God chose you...to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit.”

**The New Testament uses the term sanctification in two senses.** In some contexts it refers to “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we...are, enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness”. This is what I learned to call progressive sanctification.

It is the process by which we “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,” greatly assured that “it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” **Phil. 2:12, 13.**

But there is a second sense in which the term sanctification is used, and its meaning is significantly different. In seminary we

learned to call this form of sanctification positional sanctification or definitive sanctification.

This understanding of sanctification is “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God”. **It is what we understand as our “effectual calling.”**

Here, the Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our “effectual calling.”

**Effectual calling** is the work of God’s Spirit whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

**In short, sanctification in this sense is regeneration. It is the new birth.** And it is solely the work of God. And this, I believe is what Paul is referring to when he says in verse 13, “God chose you...to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit.”

**B. Next, God’s Grace Brings His People to Faith v. 13b—** The truth, we are saying, assures us that God is gracious. And we have seen here in 2 Thessalonians that God’s grace brings His people to life.

We also see that God’s grace brings His people to faith. **Still in the second half of verse 13, we read, “God chose you...to be saved, through...belief in the truth.”**

Belief and faith, of course are synonymous. Once we have been sanctified—that is, once we have been effectually called out of the tomb of our spiritual deadness—we are then enabled to believe in Jesus, who is the truth.

**Then by faith We are empowered to trust Him who alone is our salvation.**

This act of faith is the instrument of our justification. That is, when we believe in Christ, not only are our sins transferred to Him but also His righteousness is transferred to us.

**C. God's Grace Brings His People to Glory v. 14** So, what we are seeing is what has been called "the golden chain" of salvation.

Or, as we have it stated in **Romans 8:30**, "Those whom God predestined He also called, and those whom He called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

**That's exactly the order of the links in the chain that we have here in 2 Thessalonians.** The God who chose us brings us to life. He brings us to faith. And now, in verse 14, we see, He brings us to glory.

**Look again at that verse 14:** "To this he called you"—that is, He called you to the truth that is in Jesus—why? "So that you **may obtain the glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ."

**This is just one of the "benefits" that we receive from Christ.** "At the resurrection"—that is, at the end of the age—"believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity."

Isn't this exactly what Jesus prayed for in His great high priestly prayer, recorded for us in John, chapter 17? He said to His Father, "The glory you have given to me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one."

**That's verse 22, and in verse 24, we read where Jesus says,** "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory...."

Oh, the marvelous, matchless, wonderful grace of God! The truth assures us that God is gracious.

#### **IV. Finally, The Truth Assures Us that God Is Faithful**

In our text, at verse 15, we read Paul's application of these eternal truths.

**"So then, brothers," he says,** "stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us"—those traditions being what Paul seems to refer to as the doctrines of grace—"stand firm and hold to [these] traditions that you were taught by us, either by spoken word or by our letter."

**A. What we are dealing with here is the perseverance of the saints, or what might be equally well understood as the preservation of the saints.** Both things are true. We stand firm, and God gives us strength to do so. We persevere because He preserves us.

In speaking of the benefits of the grace of God in this life, **John Wesley says that:** "The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and" perseverance therein to the end".

Oh, what assurances the truth gives us! We are assured that God is sovereign. Nothing can interfere with His plans for us.

**In Job 42:2,** Job says to God, "I know...that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

If you have put your faith in Christ and Christ alone for your salvation, you can be assured that "God chose you from the beginning to be saved." Isn't that a great assurance?

**B. Along with that assurance, we have the comfort of knowing that God is gracious.** He brings His people to **life**. He brings His people to **faith**. And He brings His people to **glory**. If He is our hope, we can rest assured that "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" **Col. 1:13**.

**And nothing can ever change that.** Not only does the truth in which we stand firm assure us of God's sovereignty and grace, but it also assures us of His faithfulness. He will carry us to the end. We will persevere because of His faithful preservation.

So, Paul has in detail, given us all the reasons why and how we can and must stand firm in this truth.

Hold on to it. Acquaint yourself with it. Immerse yourself in it. And then **let nothing move you from this solid footing.**

Let the words of **Psalm 62:6** be yours. David says this of God, "He is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken." He should be ours as well!

This is the truth. This is the tradition that we have been taught. **Hold fast. Stand firm.**

Amen? Let Us Pray...