

LSB 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 17

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

We've just spent the previous 6 Sundays learning about the world's horrendous future judgement. Unrestrained evil world wide. It's frightening to even consider because of the unrestrained lawlessness devoid of God and any moral absolutes and restraints designed by God to make this world at least livable while Satan reigns and has authority in his usurped world.

I watched a documentary about Joseph Stalin this week. Part of his daily task of being premier of the USSR was endless lists of so-called enemies of the state, and thereby enemies of Joe Stalin. He would go down the list of names and put an X by each person who was to be executed. Sometimes up to 1800 names in a single day during the great purge period.

Ultimately the low estimate is 9 million with the highest estimate at 60 million people murdered by communism and Stalin. He beat Hitler by a longshot. Maybe 10 times the number that Hitler murdered. His own people.

We gasp at that atrocity but we're right there with him murdering our own unborn. Maybe we've got Joe beat at this point.

Satan is a murderer. He loves murdering God's image bearers. Loves it. We can't vote fast enough to murder even more while we slice and dice up

the surviving children.

People my age are next. Elders will be treated like the Air Force treats vehicles. You keep track of repair costs until the number gets to a certain threshold and then you abandon the vehicle to the junk yard scrap sellers. Except with humans it'll be more like, you've reached your numerical limit and your next ailment will be your last. We'll pay for death counseling. Or worse.

Satan loves murder. Physician assisted suicide will look pretty good when there's no more money to prolong your life with any kind of quality of life. Add to that the hopelessness and meaninglessness of secularism. You're just a cosmic accident flying through space on a rock that somehow landed in a zone where life could happen over a few trillion years of evolution. Nothing means anything. Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow Dr. Kevorkian is already scheduled.

Everything I've spoken of so far happened during a time frame when God's restraints on Satan were in place. What happens when all restraint is removed? The book of Revelation pictures half, one half of the worlds total population will perish in that seven year period of no restraint on Satan. Half.

So many dead people the living can't keep up with the burials. Not a pretty picture. Christians saved during that time frame advance to GO. Top of the list for anti-christ to eliminate. He'll make Joe Stalin and Hitler look like a Sunday school picnic in the park.

Why am I reminding you of all of the horrific negatives? Because there is balance here. These are the Pollyanna Whittier glad verses that Paul gives as balance against all of the horrific information given about THE final Antichrist. There's bad news, but, there's good news.

Even better, the bad news is about them, and the good news is about you. This is always Paul's method. Satan is horrific but God showers His own

with unspeakable wealth and goodness. Satan is the murderer but God is the loving redeemer. Balance. The bad news is absolutely horrific but the good news is God saves and protects and showers spiritual wealth and benefit on those who belong to Him.

It's pretty simple stuff. If the horror frightens you, and it should because we're witnessing the birth pangs with our very eyes, daily, as we speak, then the important thing to do, is to double down on making sure you've moved out of Satan's authority to reign and moved into and under God's authority to reign.

The safe place is being a citizen of His kingdom. You want to be adopted into His family. You believe that Jesus took all of the penalty you deserved, He died on the cross in your place, your debt of sin is removed, and in it's place, He gives you His righteousness, credited to your account.

My ledger used to say, Full of sin, deserves death and eternal damnation. But now, because of what Jesus did for me, in my place, my ledger says, Forgiven, sin removed, penalty paid, the memory of sin forgotten and in it's place the righteousness of Jesus is given to this man.

I want to show you this same idea, this same pattern of the horrendous and unthinkable balanced by the positive in the book of Hebrews before we begin to exegete our text this morning verse by verse and word by word.

Same idea. Hebrews chapter 6. A famously misunderstood passage that parallels our study in these previous weeks.

1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we shall do, if God permits. 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and

the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. 9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

The writer of Hebrews here, maybe it's Paul, there are lots of parallels, presents a problem that ends in disaster. The parallel here with what Paul calls the apostasy at the time of the Antichrist is identical, although this problem has afflicted the so-called church throughout all of it's generations.

People will come and be active for a while, everyone accepts them as fellow believers, and then they leave. They fall away. For whatever reason, it doesn't have to be the strong delusion during the Antichrists rise to fame with miracles. People regularly come for a time, identify with the church, then vanish. We've seen it here many times.

Were those people saved and then they lost their salvation? No, the answer is in verse 9. *9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.*

The truly saved folks endure. Through it all, the good and the bad, the thick and the thin, the truly saved folks endure. *things that accompany salvation*. Falling away does not accompany salvation, endurance does. Falling away reveals that you were never truly saved. You tasted, with the saints, for a time, but you stopped short of regeneration. You enjoyed the presence of the Holy Spirit congregationally but you never really made Him yours. Inside.

The writer presents the horror of eternal loss, and then he says but we are

convinced of better things about you. Truly saved. True endurance. Those whom Christ has bought with His blood, purchased out of the world to be His own possession, are those who are kept. The same one who purchased you, also protects His own possession. We are kept. Guarded. Safe in Christ.

And that's where Paul goes after the horrendously negative teaching of the horrors of the world after the rapture, trapped by delusions, convinced by false miracles, to follow a Satanic messiah to destruction.

Before we launch into the positive, look again at the root cause of the negative. 2 Thess. 2:

*11 And for this reason God sends upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false,
12 in order that they all may be judged **who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in unrighteousness.***

According to Pew research almost 1/3 of the world's population identifies as christian. 32% Just shy of 1/3. Easy math. 2400 people in Tonopah so we should expect 1/3 of that number next Sunday. Get ready for 800 people to come to church. We'll have to reserve the football field and get some extra bleachers to hold everyone.

Beloved, we're down to about 1.5% percent of pew's number. Now, I know I'm not dynamic, but I faithfully teach God's word. If there were really 800 christians here, they'd all have an actual hunger for God's book.

What I'm saying is that when the rapture happens, don't look for 800 people in Tonopah to join you in the sky. 750++ of the 800 christians in Tonopah are going to be staying on earth. They'll click on their TV's and be astonished at the new messiah that's taking the world by storm with miracles.

The writer of Hebrews says; *9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better*

things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

And likewise, Paul says to the christians at Thessalonica;

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

But . . . That first word is the shift from negative to positive. Antichrist and false delusions and so-called false christians following him into hell is left in the rear view mirror with that first word.

Another famous passage with kind of dichotomy between the believers and unbelievers comes to mind. The horrific balanced by blessed with this word, but, used several times. 1 Cor. 6:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

It's the same pattern as our verses this morning. The horrific offset by the blessed with the word but making the division. Thesis ~ antithesis. Opposing opposites. In our text this morning Antichrist is the thesis, the truly redeemed are the antithesis.

Verses 1 - 12 were the thesis, vss. 13 - 17 are now the antithesis. Something awful . . . but . . . something good. Horrific negatives . . . but . . . not for you, if, the words that follow truly describe you.

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you,

The reason we give thanks to God for all true believers is crystal clear in what will follow. Every benefit, every grace, every glory of true salvation is caused by and given to believers by God alone. We thank God because true christians are what they are, not because of anything they've done, but because of what God has done for them and in them. It's 100% glory to God and 0% glory to us.

Here's a picture of a true believer;

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

read through that again and tell me what part I accomplished and what part God accomplished.

*we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, **because God** has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

brothers beloved by the Lord Before the foundation of the world, God loved me. Why? Way past my pay grade to tell you why. Here's what I know. I'm not very lovely. I was born in sin and when I grew up I excelled at sin. There was no good reason for God to love me. But before the worlds were made He purposed in His own good pleasure to love me.

***because God** has chosen you* The next part is equally unexplainable but it is a direct result of God's determination to love me before I ever was. He chose me. He chose me for salvation.

*chosen you as the **first fruits** for salvation* Now the Thessalonians perhaps just 20 years into the church age were the first fruits among the called. We may actually be the last fruits. The final fruits called, we don't know. We aren't the first fruits though. We're on the 21st floor of a 21

story building. The Thessalonians were at ground zero. First fruits of many more to come.

In years that I get apricots, I watch watch watch a certain branch where the fruit seems to be farther along than the rest of it all over the tree. I always pull the first couple off before they're really ready. First fruits with the promise of lots and lots that will follow it. Fig trees which are common in Israel are famous for having some first fruits, finished before all the rest. The hope of what is to come soon.

We are chosen by God who determined before we ever existed to love us, in spite of our sins, and because He loved us He chose us, as fruit whether first or final, He chose us for salvation.

He loved us by choice and He called us to salvation. How did He do that in the fullness of time?

God has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

The Spirit sanctified us. Here, sanctification means we were separated from the rest of the perishing world, by the Spirit, and we learn in Ephesians that even the faith to believe the truth was the gift of God's Spirit who calls us out of a perishing world and into the kingdom of Jesus.

Salvation comes by faith alone. And even the faith that saves us is given to us as a gift. You just can't get away from the fact that all of salvation from God's determination to love us in eternity past, before we ever were, to the call by faith to come away from this world and into the kingdom, all of it is caused by the determination of God. We did none of it. Why? How??

*14 It was for **this** He called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul and company did one little part here. They showed up with the

gospel. Paul was the vehicle that God used in order to bring the truth to Thessalonica. But even that was controlled by God. Paul was trying to go somewhere else. He had no plans to go to Thessalonica but God blocked him in all directions that he was trying to go and then sent a dream. Some guy in Thessalonica saying come up here. So off Paul went to Thessalonica.

So Paul went to Thessalonica and presented the gospel and how many believed? We have the answer in Acts 13:38

*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as **had been appointed to eternal life** believed.*

Christians get nervous when someone broaches the subject of election. You should be nervous if I said I understood it. That would be cause to be nervous. But I'm just like you. Why God chose to love me and save me is beyond my grasp.

All I know is that Paul is clearly telling the Thessalonians that the reason they're not going after Antichrist is because God purposed to love them and as a result, they were called, set apart by the Spirit, heard the message, believed the message with a faith that was also a gift, it didn't originate in them, it was the gift of God, and as a result of all of what God determined and caused, they will be with Christ in His glory.

Here's what's fantastic about that doctrine. Lots of fantastic. Guess what. Since absolutely none of it originated with me, in me, I can't screw it up. God did all of it. I did none of it. God gets all the glory. I can't undo what God purposed in His heart to do in eternity past.

Every piece of my salvation is entirely dependent on God's love and God's choice and God's cause. None of it is dependent on me. He did it all. In spite of me, I might add. I did none of it. All of the glory goes to God. None of the glory goes to me. And yet, by His choice, He pours out glory

upon me!

14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He did it all so that I could obtain the glory of Jesus. Listen to the crystal clear explanation of pre-destination Paul gives in Romans chapter 8. It all goes to the same end. God has determined to dress us in the glory of His own Son!

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are (the) called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Romans 8:28-30

Listen, I woke up one morning in August of 1970 and I got picked up and deposited on a train and that train isn't stopping short of God's purpose in His love which is that I am going to be glorified, an adopted brother to Jesus. I did none of it. He did all of it. And I'm not there yet, but the train isn't stopping until I get there. I'm not worried about any of it. I can't mess it up if I tried. It's a good thing. Because if I could I'm sure I would.

Although, if I turn my back on it and walk away, you can all safely say, he was with us, but he was not of us. People who depart only prove they were never really saved at all.

Jesus says something very telling in the Olivet discourse about antichrist and the effect of the strong delusion.

*Matt. 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, **if possible**, even the elect.*

Why do you think Jesus had to put that little disclaimer in that statement . . . *if possible* . . . because it isn't possible. All the tares are going to follow after antichrist and his miracles. All of the elect, in that time frame, after the church is removed to heaven many will still be saved, will refuse to follow antichrist, and for most of them, it will cost them their heads. It'll be a ticket out of this horrific world, a ticket home.

The delusion of false miracles that the antichrist will bring upon the world after the church age is closed and the church leaves in the rapture are so strong that things will become very black and white.

Only the elect, the chosen of God before the foundation of the world-ones, the called out of this world ones whom God set His love upon before the worlds began, only those folks chosen and elect by God to a salvation given by God, caused by God, will not follow the delusions of the miracles of the Antichrist.

It'll be black and white because choosing Christ in that time frame will be a death sentence. No more tares in the wheat field. When the cost to be a christian is death, there won't be any pretenders hanging around.

Someone has walked into Thessalonica after Paul has left and told them, Oh, you didn't get the memo, the rapture is canceled, and you are already in the *day of the lord*. Paul tells them, no, you're the first fruits, not the last ones.

In a way, in the situation they were in, they sort of did the right thing. They do not yet have the written word of God. They don't have the new testament. Paul was only with them a few weeks, maybe some months before things got so hot that Paul had to get out of town to preserve his own life.

Someone walks in and they've got all the credentials. Hey, I'm Peter's wife's brother. Me and Peter have been fishing together since we were 6 years old. Our families have been doing that for generations. I'm

practically an apostle. I was with Peter almost every day that he followed Jesus. My dad's the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum. We all live on the same street. I've been around a lot longer than this Paul guy. *Phony credentials.*

Here's the latest memo from Jerusalem that the apostles got in a vision from angels. Jesus canceled the rapture. Actually He didn't cancel it, Paul got that part mixed up. Pauls got a lot of things mixed up. We're actually **in** the day of the Lord.

And on and on it goes. Pam and I have been watching a netflix drama series called inventing Anna. Great story. A girl in her mid twenties convinces all of the uber rich people in New York that she's a german heiress worth multi millions. She swindles people out of millions of dollars with a false identity. False credentials.

She looked like the real thing. She sounded like the real thing. Her taste and demeanor and look were more impeccable than the real thing. She pulled it off for almost 3 years.

Have you ever been taken in by someone who is a phony. A sham. We all have. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Everyone's had that happen I'm sure.

Luckily someone at Thessalonica said to themselves, this whole deal smells like 4 day old fish. We need to dispatch a courier to find Paul and ask him if this guy and this teaching are legit. That was the right response.

But they didn't have I-Phones and texting in those days so meanwhile, there's a bunch of disturbed people who have bought into what some false teacher is telling them. We don't know how much time passed before Paul could get the answer to them that we have in our hands, intact, this morning.

We've spent 6 weeks studying Paul's response. The doctrine of the final

Antichrist, and how the church departs for heaven, but some who thought they were OK but who had stopped short of a spiritual living relationship with Christ as Lord and King because they loved their sin too much to turn their backs on it and go completely with Jesus.

Those folks who loved their sin more than Jesus will apostasize and follow after the Antichrist. Coincidental with the rapture. Some will go up, some will depart and follow antichrist. And Antichrist will be revealed. Israel will enter into a treaty with him. Israel, not the church.

Paul says, none of those signs have happened. You were lied to and troubled by a false teacher. Step away from that guy.

That pattern has gone on continually from the day Jesus ascended into heaven until this morning. Satan never gives up. And Satan's method is to cripple the saints with destructive dangerous false teaching that causes harm. That's always Satan's method. Nothing new under the sun.

In the garden, the first two humans, Adam and Eve and Satan shows up and says; ***Hath God said?*** Gen. 3:1b

What was the end game for Satan in *this* particular incident of false teaching. I can think of several off the top of my head. I'm sure there are more, but think about what Satan can gain with this particular false teaching brought to the Thessalonian believers by some false apostle.

No rapture. No apostasy. No Antichrist. But this IS the DAY of the Lord. We're in it.

First damage from this: God didn't rescue you out of this world before He brings final judgement. He didn't keep His promise. He didn't save you. Maybe He can't save you. Maybe His apostles oversold this whole thing and God is helpless to do what He promised.

OR. How about this; Paul isn't legit. If Paul got this stuff wrong and

we're actually in the midst of the DAY of the Lord, what else did Paul get wrong? We're in the Day of the Lord end times events. Paul got that wrong. Why would we believe anything else Paul said. Maybe all this stuff about Jesus and forgiveness outside of judaism, is all baloney.

False teaching undermined Paul's apostolic authority, and it undermined the confidence these folks had in Jesus, period. Everything they believed and understood about Jesus the Messiah is based in this man, Paul. No Paul, no christianity, no faith, no nothing.

On the other hand though, Paul's doctrine resulted in something very real. The Holy Spirit totally selected a group of people who did believe and they came out of the world, and they have life, fellowship with God, through His indwelling Holy Spirit. The words Paul brought caused something very real to happen in them. This false prophet is trying to undo something we know intimately is very real.

Luckily, or perhaps we shouldn't say anything is based in luck, By God's gracious providence and protection, this tiny church, just a few months old, already had good shepherds who immediately spring into action. This doctrine stinks to high heaven. And they get to work in whatever old testament scrolls they have available while other shepherds set out to find Paul.

Paul's gospel brought something very real. This false teachers words would strike at the very foundation of the words they believed, the words that changed them. They got upset. Rightly so.

If Paul's a phony what is it that we would go back to? Dead judaism for some of them, or multiple gods of greek culture for most of them. Satan disturbed this church. It was their first big test. Paul's letter preserved them and speaks to us still, today.

Next week I want to consider vs. 15 and build a doctrine of what our barriers of safety are that protect us from the onslaught of Satan undoing

what God has done with false doctrines. Lies from hell. We need these truths now more than ever.