

**“Chosen to Salvation”  
II Thessalonians 2:13-17**

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I once heard the story of an old Navajo Indian in Arizona on whose land oil was discovered. He became a very wealthy man as a result, but wealth did not change him. He went on living just as he was before. The money piled up in the bank, but every now and then the old man would visit the bank and say to the banker, "Crops all dried up; sheep all dead; cattle all stolen." The banker knew exactly what to do. He would take the old man into the vault, sit him at a table and place several bags of silver dollars in front of him for him to count. After a while the man would come out and say, "Crops fine; sheep all alive; cattle all back." Why the change? He had simply reviewed his resources and reminded himself of what he had to fall back on. That is what believers must do when the pressure comes. When we feel like complaining and murmuring we need to remember who God has made us to be, and what he has promised us for times of stress.

In this passage the Apostle Paul is speaking to believers who were under stress and facing difficult times, and Paul is encouraging them to “stand firm,” based upon the great facts of our salvation.

Let’s consider these great facts this morning: These three verses have been called a system of theology in miniature, because they are so packed with great theological truth. They present to us Christian theology in a nutshell: READ verses 13-15, 16-17.

**Notice the past present and future of our salvation:**

1. Our salvation begins with the eternal choice of God the Father
2. It is brought about in time by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit
3. It is completed when we share in the very glory of the Lord Jesus Christ

**1. FIRST, OUR SALVATION BEGAN WITH THE ETERNAL CHOICE OF**

**GOD.** *“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved...”*

Notice that the verse begins with the word “*but*.” That takes us back into the previous section where Paul is talking about those who are lost. *“They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie, and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness”* (3:10-12). In verse 9 of chapter one Paul says, *“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”* BUT in contrast to the destiny of those who are perishing, because they have REFUSED TO LOVE THE TRUTH AND SO BE SAVED, we have been loved and chosen by God and we have a different destiny.

This first verse teaches one of the most profound doctrines in all the Word of God. Our salvation did not originate in human choice. It originated in God’s choice of us. God

willed our salvation before we were ever born. Ephesians 1:4 says, “He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world.”

God’s choice was based on his love. Before you ever loved the Lord, he loved you! I John 4:10 says, “This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” He did not choose us because he saw something in us he didn’t see in others. Why did he choose us? Simply because he loved us.

In John 6 verse 35-37 Jesus makes an amazing statement: *“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.’”* They had seen him, and heard his invitation, but they had rejected him. They refused to believe. Did that discourage him? No, because listen to the next verse: *“All that the Father gives me WILL COME to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”* This is the doctrine of election: *“All that the Father gives me will come to me...”* Those the Father has given to the Son will most assuredly come to him and believe. If you have believed in Christ, it is because in eternity past the Father chose you as a gift for His Son—as one of those who would come to him.

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine a gate. Over the gate are the words, “Whosoever will may come.” One day you are walking down the road of life and you see those wonderful words. God offers a full and free forgiveness for all your sins, if you will only come to Christ. You recognize your sinfulness before a holy God. You come to Christ. You walk through that gate. After you pass through you look up and on the other side of the gate are the words, “Chosen in him before the foundation of the world.” You discover that before you loved God, he loved you, and chose you to be part of his family.

This is a mystery that no one can fathom. It PERPLEXES our minds but I COMFORTS our hearts—to know that we were loved and chosen by God.

How can you know if you are one of God’s elect. Very simple. If you come to Christ, that is an evidence that you are one of his elect. John 6:37 *“All that the Father gives me WILL COME to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”* Jesus will never turn away anyone who desires to be saved. Anyone may come to Christ. The invitation is open to all. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” What Jesus is saying is that God’s elect will come! Those who refuse to come have only themselves to blame.

*So, first, our salvation begins with the eternal choice of God...*

## **2. SECONDLY, OUR SALVATION IS BROUGHT ABOUT IN TIME BY THE SANCTIFYING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*“...God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit...”*

This verse means that we were brought to realize our lost condition and our need of a Savior by the direct work of the Spirit of God in our hearts. The word sanctify means “to be set apart as Holy to God.”

Jesus spoke of how God the Holy Spirit works in our hearts in John 16:7-11: Verse 8: *“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement...”* We call this the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. The main work of the HS in convicting us of sin is not to make us realize what terrible sinners we are, but to convict us of a specific sin—the sin of unbelief in Jesus Christ.. The verse goes on to say *“...in regard to sin because men do not believe in me...”* He impresses upon us that we are not saved because we have not believed on Christ. He convinces us that our great sin is the sin of unbelief in Christ. Then he convinces us of righteousness—that is that only through Christ can we obtain God’s righteousness. Third, he convinces us of judgement because the prince of this world is judged. Through Christ’s death Satan has been judged. Those who Satan ruled are set free through faith in Christ and delivered from his power. Those who reject Christ are still under God’s judgement.

When we trust in Christ, the Spirit’s sanctifying work continues. We are BORN OF THE SPIRIT. Jesus said in John 3:5, “except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” It is the Holy Spirit that brings about this new birth. At the moment of faith in Christ, we are born again we receive a new nature from God. A nature that loves God and loves the things of God.

Not only are we born of the Spirit, but another aspect of the Spirit’s work is that we are INDWELT BY THE SPIRIT. I Corinthians 6:19, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you are bought with a price...”* He comes to live inside of you, to guide you and direct you and empower you to live for Christ.

So you have a NEW NATURE, AND A NEW PRESENCE in your life. Next, in I Corinthians 12:13 you have a NEW POSITION: “By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body...” We were baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. When you believe it is the Holy Spirit who baptizes you into the Body of Christ. You now belong to God’s eternal family, and are a part of His body.

**A summary of the work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of the believer:**

You have a **new nature**, born of the Spirit.

You have a **new presence** in your life, indwelt by the Spirit.

You have a **new position**, baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ.

Finally, you have a **new destiny**, sealed with the Spirit for the day of redemption. This is seen in Ephesians 4:30. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The presence of the Holy Spirit in you is God’s seal of ownership, until the day of redemption when he comes and claims you as his own.

In addition, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. As we yield ourselves to Him, he controls us and produces the character of Christ in us. These character traits of Jesus Christ in our life are called the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23: Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control.

So we have seen then, that our salvation begins in the eternal choice of God. It is worked out in time by the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. He convicts us of sin and brings us to Christ. We are baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. He indwells us and seals us unto the day of redemption.

**What is our part in salvation?** Our part in salvation is simply to believe on Christ. *“God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”* In John 6:28 some people had come looking for Jesus and they had a question for him: *“Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”* There is no work we can do to earn favor with God. There is nothing we can do to merit our salvation. Salvation is a gift of God that comes through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. His death on the cross fully paid for our sins.

**What is the truth of the Gospel which we must believe?** Paul explains the gospel in I Corinthians 15:1-4: *“...For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”*

Christ the Son of God has come and has DIED for the sins of the whole world  
He was BURIED

He was RAISED on the third day from the grave

His resurrection PROVES that He is indeed the very Son of God (Rom. 1:4)

His resurrection GUARANTEES that God will SAVE all who put their trust in Christ (Rom. 4:24-25)

### **3. THIRD, OUR SALVATION IS COMPLETED WHEN WE SHARE IN THE VERY GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

To the Colossians, Paul said, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with him also in glory," {cf, Col 3:4 KJV}. The writer of Hebrews says that God is "bringing many sons to glory," {Heb 2:10b RSV}. That is God's work throughout history and in our world today.

They were going through real persecution and difficult times. But Paul lifts their eyes beyond their circumstances and reminds them that they have a great salvation, and they are bound for glory.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, had a gift for putting things in brief format. I want to share with you such a statement he would use from time to time.

We have a relationship that can never be changed:  
we are children of the Most High.

We have a righteousness that can never be tarnished:  
the very righteousness of Christ himself.

We have a resource that can never be diminished:  
the power of the Spirit of God.

We have a peace that can ne'er be destroyed:  
it is the God of Peace himself.

We have a joy that can never be surpassed:  
the Scriptures call it "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

We have a love that will never let us go:  
God's unconditional love.

We have an Intercessor whose prayers can never go unanswered:  
the Spirit of Christ within us.

We have a Sovereign Lord who can never lose control:  
the King of kings himself.

If all that is true, then it is no wonder that the apostle goes on to say to the Thessalonians, "So then, brethren, ..." "As a result of all this, brethren," Paul is saying, "*stand firm and hold (lit. hold fast) to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.*" Two activities, says Paul, are possible despite the hard times they were going through. They could "stand firm," and they could "hold to the teachings passed on to them." In other words "Do not give in under pressure," and "do not give up the truth."

More than anything else, our generation of Christians needs to hear these words again. "Stand firm." Paul is saying that we already have what it takes to do so. What we need to do is to draw upon the resources he has made available. Take God at his word! There is no reason to quit, or to give in to evil.

## CONCLUSION

One of my favorite hymns is "It is Well with My Soul," written by Horatio Spafford. He was a believer who lost his law practice in the great Chicago fire in the 1800s. he decided to send his family to Europe—his wife and four daughters, while he tried to sift through the ruins of his business. On the way to Europe the ship was sunk. His wife was saved but all four of his daughters were lost at sea. When word reached him he got a simple two word telegram: "Saved alone." His heart was heavy as he took a train to NY and then boarded a ship to join his wife in Europe. On the way over, the captain came to his cabin and told him they were nearing the place where the ship had gone down. Put yourself in his position. You have lost everything financially. Your business is in tatters. Your four children are dead. And the one you want to put your arms around is far away. You are alone at sea, with memories flooding back. How do you make it through something like that? We know Horatio Spafford did—for two reasons... First, he wrote a letter to one of his sisters, Rachel, and said, "*On Thursday last we passed over the spot where the ship went down—the water three miles deep. But I don't think of our dear ones there. They are safe, placed in the fold, dear lambs, there before long shall we be too. In the meantime, thanks to God we have an opportunity to serve*

*and to praise Him, for his love and mercy." Then he quotes from the Psalms, "I will praise him while I have my being." "May we arise, leave all, and follow Him."*

Don't you wish you could have that response to adversity! How could Horatio Spafford keep going like that?

Well, he not only left that word to his sister, then he jotted down his thoughts in a poem that was put to music, that is before you this morning. Here it is:

It Is Well With My Soul  
*Horatio G. Spafford*

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll.  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*Tho Satan should buffet, tho trials should come, Let this blest assurance control, That  
Christ hath regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin—O the bliss of this glorious tho't—My sin not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

Notice the last words:

*And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, The clouds be rolled back as a  
scroll: The trump shall re-sound and the Lord shall descend, "Even so—" it is well with  
my soul.*

It was the knowledge of the soon return of Christ that kept him going. He knew that the separation was temporary—that Jesus was coming, that he would see his children again—that God would explain the reasons and wipe the tears from his eyes. And that's why he could face the problems. God wants us to do the same.

As we face challenges and heart aches and pressures in our own lives, may these truths we have studied today grip our hearts:

May we be thankful that God chose us to be in his family  
thank him for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit  
thank him that someone gave us the gospel  
thank him that we were brought to faith in Christ  
thank him that our destiny is secure—there is glory ahead.  
Amen.

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