



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 18, 2010 Released on Wednesday, July 14, 2010

"Chosen and Called"

Lesson Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Background Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Devotional Reading: Psalm 33:4-12

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to analyze the apostle Paul's thanks to God for choosing and calling believers and the desire to see the believers hold fast and be comforted.

Principle: to realize that salvation and sanctification are the awesome results of divine grace.

Application: to help Christians embrace the means of edification God provides for them.

INTRODUCTION

False Alarm

In August of 2008 alarms sounded in 20 government offices in Japan. Red lights flashed, and the central government's Fire and Disaster Management Agency broadcast a dire message: "This is information about a ballistic missile attack." The Japanese people had not forgotten that North Korea had fired test missiles over their island nation in 1998 and then again in 2006. They remained concerned about the Communist nation's intentions.

It turned out to be only a test, but a switch had been left on so the “emergency” message was mistakenly broadcast to the government offices. There was no ballistic missile attack; it was a false alarm.

As it turned out in Japan, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency was able to send a second message immediately so that no action was taken in response to the false alarm. But we’ve all heard of police and firefighters dispatched to emergencies that did not exist, rescuers searching for children who weren’t lost, and families upset and worried over reports that turned out to be untrue. A false alarm can create panic and confusion; it must be exposed as false as quickly as possible.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 51

Place: from Corinth

An alarm was sounded in Thessalonica. A letter or some other communication had been received, supposedly from the apostle Paul. It said the day of the Lord had already arrived (2 Thessalonians 2:2). The believers there were panicked. Had they missed it? Would they be caught in the destruction of the wicked? Was the persecution they were facing a part of God’s judgment? Had God left them to suffer for their sin instead of redeeming them?

Paul wrote to address this issue and to quell the panic. The Lord had not returned. In a nutshell, Paul said the fact that they faced persecution by the wicked was proof of that, for when Christ returns He will “consume” and “destroy” the evil one (v. 8). If the Lord had returned, evil would have been vanquished by now!

Most interpreters take this passage to refer to a rebellion in the far-off future (at least from Paul’s perspective). Some impressive figure will arise and lead a rebellion against God. Things will get worse and worse until Christ returns and leads in a great cosmic battle against this “antichrist,” resulting in the Lord’s eventual victory. Depending on one’s millennial view, this will either usher in the 1000-year reign of the Lord or bring it to a close.

THANKSGIVING AND COMFORT (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14)

1. For what reasons was Paul thankful for the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:13)?

Here Paul makes a dramatic shift from the work of Satan and those who are deceived by him (just mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) to the Thessalonian believers to whom he was writing. Paul is confident and thankful that his friends in Thessalonica are not among the deceived. The conjunction “but” indicates a connection with the preceding passage by way of a crucial contrast. The unbelievers are Satan’s followers, and their destiny awaits the final judgment of God. The future for believers focuses on the comfort and hope of God’s salvation.

2. What can a Christian do to be assured that he or she will not be deceived?

Satan is the master deceiver and offers a counterfeit faith. Just as counterfeit money can best be detected by knowing what the real thing looks and feels like, so counterfeit Christianity can be spotted when we know what true faith consists of. This means we must have a good grasp of the truth of Scripture. This involves truth

about Christ, including His virgin birth, His sinless life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection and promised return. It also involves knowing truth about Scripture, that it is the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21).

3. What does it mean that God's choice was "from the beginning?" (v. 13)"

This verse has been used to support the idea that God chooses certain ones for *salvation* without regard to their response—that, in fact, He has chosen them from before time. But the context of the passage as a whole does not square with that understanding. Indeed, if their election is guaranteed by God's choice alone and not their response, what is the point of telling them to "stand fast" in verse 15?

Instead, we understand God's calling to be conditional. God's plan "from the beginning" was to send Christ to defeat Satan and his deceptive work. As early as Genesis 3:15 God announces this plan. Revelation 13:8 speaks of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." God chose from that time that all who believe *the truth* and turn to Jesus will be saved and sanctified by His Holy *Spirit*.

4. What is God's call in the most basic terms? (v. 14)

The instrument to call people to faith is the preaching of the *gospel*. As Paul writes in Romans 10:13,14, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

The gospel was foremost in Paul's heart and mind and ministry. It was so much a part of Paul personally that he embraced it as his gospel. It was the gospel of God's grace (Gal. 1:6).

The purpose of this call is, in this context, the *glory* to be shared by the faithful when they are gathered to the *Lord Jesus Christ* at His return. If the Thessalonians are worried that they have missed out on this, Paul assures them that the promise is still theirs. They need to stand firm and to resist the temptation to quit. The persecution they face is nothing compared with the glory they will share (Romans 8:18).

5. Paul mentions some important facts about our salvation in this text. Which ones stand out to you or give you the most comfort? Why?

Paul reminds us that salvation is of God, that is, it is His plan. That should be a great reassurance to us, knowing our salvation does not depend on our feeble attempts at righteousness. The fact that salvation is brought about in our lives by the working of the Holy Spirit is another fact that gives us assurance. Again, it is clearly not a matter of "being good enough" or working hard enough. That God calls us by the gospel is an interesting fact that should be challenging to us. It is imperative that the gospel be preached everywhere we can send a preacher so that others can hear. Finally, the idea of sharing in Christ's glory is a marvelously comforting fact. No matter what our trials here, someday they will be as nothing!

EXHORTATION (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

6. What imperatives did Paul give the Thessalonians regarding Christian practice? (v. 15)

What was implied in the previous verse is now stated explicitly. The disciples in Thessalonica need to *stand fast*. They need to persevere. They can do this, in part, by being careful to observe what they *have been taught*. The word *traditions* here does not mean customs and rituals handed down from one generation to another, such as we speak of when we talk of our holiday traditions. Nor is it a reference to human tradition such as the Pharisees elevated over God's Word (Matthew 15:3). Paul does refer to something passed on from one to another, particularly by word of mouth. Printed Bibles are not available in Paul's day (and most of the New Testament has not even been written yet), so they cannot look things up as we do. They have to be careful to recall what Paul and other faithful teachers told them when they were present (compare v. 5). They also have Paul's first *epistle* to which they can refer. It deals with some of the same matters they are concerned about now. Of course, by the time they read this, they have the second epistle as well!

The admonition to hold fast to the traditions they have received addresses the problem of listening to the wrong people. The language imitates that of verse 2, where Paul says he wants them not to be troubled "by word, nor by letter" about the second coming. Now he tells them to hold fast to what they have been taught, *by word, or our epistle*. The different translation, "letter" in verse 2 and "epistle" here, mutes Paul's similarity of expression somewhat; in the Greek the words are the same. Any word or letter that contradicts the word and letter they have from Paul is false! The same is true today. Any teacher who has a message that contradicts what we have in the Bible must be rejected as a false teacher.

7. Many Christian leaders lament the high level of "biblical illiteracy" in the church today. Why do you think Bible knowledge is as low as it is? How can it be increased?

It is apparent that the Bible does not hold a high priority in the lives of many today. For some churches, the authority of the Bible is balanced against the wishes of the people, especially those who have the most influence. At other times, the Bible is compromised for the purpose of bringing in more people. As Christians, we sometimes forsake the truth and admonitions of Scripture for a more "feel good" approach to Christianity.

To overcome such biblical illiteracy, we need to make a commitment to accepting the Bible for what it is: the authoritative Word of God. That means we need to know what it says, and then we need to do what we know. It means we have to make a commitment to changing our lifestyle when it conflicts with the clear teaching of Scripture.

8. What made Paul's teaching authoritative?

Paul's teaching was fully authoritative (1 Cor. 15:3). He was an apostle (Rom. 1:1) on the same level as the other apostles (2 Cor. 12:11). His preaching was attested to by the miraculous signs of an apostle (v. 12), which authenticated him as one. Christ, resurrected and glorified, had confronted Paul on the road to Damascus to call him to be His witness to the Gentiles (Acts 9:3-6, 15; Gal. 1:15-16).

Paul taught God's truth revealed to him by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-13) in conformity to Christ's commission to the twelve apostles (John 15:26-27; 16:13-14). They were to teach those things that the Holy Spirit would deliver to them following Christ's return to the Father.

BENEDICTION (2 Thessalonians 2:16,17)

9. How does Paul's reference to Jesus and God the Father emphasize Their unity? (v. 16)

Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would remain steadfast in their commitment to Christ. He prayed for God's strength and encouragement for them; without it, they could not stand firm.

Jesus Christ and God our Father are joined together in extending love and in giving eternal comfort to believers. Paul's reference to both stresses the unity of the Father and the Son, for They are one in essence and purpose (John 10:30; 17:21).

Paul also spoke to the personal relationship we have with Christ and the Father. He emphasized that it was Christ "himself" (2 Thess. 2:16). Further, Paul referred to God, "even our Father." We have a personal relationship with the Creator God of the universe, who is our Father.

God's love is foundational for the eternal consolation, comfort, and encouragement He provides for us. The present persecution and distress that God's people experience are only temporary. God's present comfort is unending. Heaven will be a place of continual delight and joy as we experience God's blessing upon blessing (Psalm 16:11; Rev. 21:3,4).

10. What is the believer's hope for the future? How did this hope encourage and strengthen the Thessalonians? (v. 17)

God's love also gives us hope for the future. Hope does not imply something plaintively wished for; rather, it speaks of confident expectation for those things that are good and beneficial. Our hope is based on the promises of God (Rom. 15:4). We have the confident expectation of Christ's return and all the benefits of His grace that He brings (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). God's comfort and hope will never leave us disappointed.

The Thessalonians needed encouragement at that moment (2 Thess. 2:17). This was due to the recent false information they had received that they were in the Day of the Lord (vs. 1,2). This report contradicted the promise that believers would not be in the Day of the Lord, with its outpouring of divine wrath and judgment (1 Thess. 5:2-4,9). Further, they were undergoing continual persecution due to their faith in Christ (1 Thess. 2:14). Persecution brings pain and suffering and weariness to the body and the soul.

The Thessalonians also had need for God to establish, or strengthen, them. There are those who are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). The strength to stand firm is from God. God's strength is needed for every good word spoken in proclaiming the truth and for every deed done in His name.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** The salvation of fellow believers is reason enough to thank God for them and to encourage them (2 Thessalonians 2:13).
- 2.** God has chosen and called us by the gospel of Jesus Christ– this should encourage us in times of trial (vs. 13,14).
- 3.** Because we are assured the glory of heaven, we can stand fast against any foe or trial in this world (v. 15).
- 4.** Encouragement and hope are gifts of God to all His children (v. 16).

5. Our words and our works must always conform to God's will (v. 17).

CONCLUSION

Don't Believe Everything You Read

On November 3, 1948, people in Chicago picked up their morning edition of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and read in the headline the results of the previous day's Presidential election: "Dewey Defeats Truman." It was a reliable source; it was the expected outcome of the election; but it was false.

Apparently some in Thessalonica had read a letter or had other information supposedly from a reliable source (2 Thessalonians 2:2). But that information was also wrong. It alleged that the return of Christ had already occurred. But that was wrong.

Today many will claim to have insight into the Lord's return. They will set dates. They will identify world leaders or political candidates with the antichrist. They will write books and fill columns on their blogs. But don't believe everything you read!

There is one source of reliable information. Return to the Scripture and see what God has to say through His inspired writers. Then hold fast to what you've been taught. By the grace of God, and until the Lord *does* return, be diligent in every good word and work.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the promise of our Lord's imminent return. We sometimes grow anxious for His return. But we trust You and know that You are in control. When we suffer, may we bring You glory with perseverance. When we have rest, may we thank You for Your gifts. And when He returns, may we find the realization of Your promises even more wonderful than we have imagined them to be. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Until the Lord returns, be diligent in every good word and work.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**God's Own Faithfulness**" and anchors the church to the faithfulness of God as it challenges believers to live righteously and industriously. Study 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18.

LESSON SUMMAIZED BY

Renee Little

Jesus Is All Ministries

www.jesusisall.com

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