

1st Thessalonians 5: 9-11; “The Lord’s Appointments”, Sermon # 24 in the series – “A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 23rd, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.

These verses were written to comfort the persecuted Christians in the church in Thessalonica. Christians who believe that "in the world they would have tribulation". Christians who knew that there was a definite possibility that they might die at the hands of persecutors, and some no doubt did. As Paul instructed them that they should, "put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation", he sought to remind them of what God had destined them for. He had destined them for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. To these persecuted believers this was no doubt a great comfort. To many people today, verse 9 is a scary verse in the way that it plainly reads. They do not like to think about the doctrines of Election and Reprobation and they are quick to dismiss the idea from their minds. However, this is not what we want to do at this hour. We want to look the truth of these verses square in the face and derive a blessing from them. I would like all of you who are saints to be comforted by these words and all of you who are not sure, to think about what you must do to be saved. These verses are full of comfort. We will look first of all at God's appointments to wrath and to salvation. And then secondly we will look at how Christ's death in relation to both gives the Christian great hope and comfort.

1st of all – Let’s look at God’s appointments to wrath and salvation. (Verse 9)

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." It needs to be remembered as we move into this sermon that the context of these verses is the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are probably still some people in the Premillennial camp of Eschatology who believe that the wrath of God being referred to in verse 9 is the earthly wrath which God unleashes during that seven year period of time which they call the Great Tribulation. They believe that all true believers who are alive upon the earth will be delivered before this time period begins, by a secret Rapture of the Church. Their being taken away from the earthly judgments of that time period is the thing that seems to be of the greatest importance to many. I, too, believe in the Rapture of the Church. But I believe that the Bible clearly teaches that it will take place on the last day of the World when Christ returns. Every eye will see Him and everyone will be raised from the dead. And then will come the judgment of all men.

But when verse 9 speaks of wrath it is speaking of something that is far more devastating and awful than any earthly judgment which God may choose to bring upon the nations and peoples of the earth in a coming day. It is speaking of God's appointment to punishment; to the eternal wrath in the lake of fire for all sinners who would not repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when it speaks of the appointment to salvation, it is speaking of something that is far more comprehensively wonderful than being delivered from the earthly judgments of God which will fall upon men before, or when, Christ returns. He is speaking of being appointed to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ; the appointment that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him; both now, and forever.

Even though believers, as it says here, are most definitely not appointed to wrath, the implication of this verse is that there are some who God does appoint to wrath. This is the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine that is feared and detested by so many. But I think that we do not need to fear this doctrine, or deliberately try to misunderstand it, as though God had somehow created some persons only to destroy them. We need to have better thoughts of God than that, when we read words like this. We need to try to understand God's appointment to wrath in terms of other Bible verses which do teach us something about it. Let us begin with asserting this logical and Biblical truth. If there is a doctrine of Election; that is, God's choice of some persons to eternal life, then there is also a doctrine of God's not choosing the others to eternal life.

There is a theological term which is often used to describe this. It is called preterition. It simply means that God has passed by the persons that he has not chosen to inherit eternal life. At first sight, this may seem to be unfair to some. They reason this way; that since God has created all men, that it would only be righteous in God, if He offers salvation to all men, and then urges them, on the basis of their supposedly having free will to choose that salvation, to do so if they are inclined. But the problem is that nowhere in the Bible does it say that man has free will to choose in the whole matter and realm of salvation, but it very clearly states that all men since Adam's fall in the beginning, are not inclined by nature to give the gospel a fair hearing. They are not inclined to receive it by nature, but their carnal minds are at enmity against God. And what is even worse, that since they are dead in their trespasses and sins, they are unable and unwilling to come to Christ for that eternal life which is so freely offered in the gospel. So, it is apparent as you read the Scripture, that God therefore, knowing before the foundation of the world that Adam, left to himself and his own free will in the garden would eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He knew that He must choose.

Let us understand that God knew that in order to glorify Himself that He must choose. "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!" "For His mercy endures forever." "Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!" "For His mercy endures forever: to Him who alone does great wonders, for His mercy endures forever." "Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy endures forever; and rescued us from our enemies." The Bible clearly shows us that although God has a general love for all of mankind, that it was not His express intention to save all, but rather to save some, to the praise of His glorious grace. He would have mercy on a certain number of all that He created, and that would be a very great number, a number which would stagger us if we but knew it, or could know it. But I want you to see that God, because He is God, not only had every right as God to do this, But that this was the very best way that the truth about Himself and His infinite goodness and wisdom and justice and love could all be seen and set forth. God thought about these things and decided these things, as appointments, in eternity past. He thought of all the people who He would ever create, from His infinitely wise and holy vantage point in eternity past, before He created the World or any man or time. And He was able to see that the first man Adam, left to himself, would fall into sin and he would plunge our whole race into sin and misery.

Let us further understand that God's appointments are not like the appointments of men, which might be changed or forgotten. They have been very sure from eternity past; they have been most certain. The Fall of man was not only foreseen by God, but it was also ordained by God the Father in order that all things might be "summed up" in Jesus Christ and so that salvation would not be by man's works, or based upon his ability or strength or wisdom, but rather salvation would be all of God and all by grace; God appointing that the men and women whom He would save would be utterly dependent upon God and our Lord Jesus Christ to give it to them. Turn with me to Ephesians Chapter 1, verse 3 and following. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved." "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ...."

The New American Standard says in verse 9 – "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth." And verse 11 it says, "In Him also we have obtained an

inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will....” I hope that you noticed as I read these verses to you that in terms of who would be saved according to God’s purpose, and how they would be saved, that man’s supposed free will does not enter the picture. The reason that it does not enter in, is because man’s will is bound by sin, just as much as his mind is deceived and blinded, just as much as his feelings about the whole matter of salvation are not right, before God comes and causes him to be born again. Man’s free will to stand in his original righteousness and to keep his original righteousness, was lost in Adam’s sinning against God’s one good commandment to him. He could not and did not, stand the test. He broke that commandment which was for his good and which, had he kept it would have resulted in his being confirmed and established in that sinless and holy life which God had created him in. But I am trying to show you that God had ordained, that He had already decided long before this, that He would be glorified more in man’s not being able to do this. And so He also ordained the fall; permitting it for the most holy and wise of reasons, that He would be better glorified in man’s dependence.

The sin of Adam and Eve was not of God’s creation. God willed and ordained the circumstances, and the test, and the outcome, without in the least causing Adam or Eve to sin. It was man’s one act of disobedience that brought sin into the world; not God ordination or appointment. Romans 5: 17 and 19 – “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” And so when God thought of saving any person; as He contemplated in eternity past what should and would transpire in the history of the world. He thought of the whole race of mankind as being under His wrath because of Adam’s sin. He saw them in Adam, but He also infallibly saw that each man would confirm by their own sins, the sin of Adam, and thus all men are under the condemnation of God, being guilty and defiled by sin; unwilling and unable to save themselves.

This is why God had to choose. God saw all men as lost and Himself as the only one who could save them. He purposed to do this, the Bible tells us, by electing a certain and definite number of persons to eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. The Election was out of the whole mass of mankind; they all being under His wrath. You can see this if you turn with me over to Ephesians 2. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest.” This is how God conceived of all of humanity in the mass, before time began. He thought of them in light of the fall, which He infallibly saw would take place and so, knowing this, when he chose the elect, He saw them as He saw the others; they were children of wrath. Indeed, He continues to see them this way during that whole time of their life before their conversion to Christ, which He has appointed. They are loved with an everlasting love according to His election, but He sees them as children of wrath when they are born, and as they live their lives according to their own sinful thoughts and conceptions and pleasures before conversion. They are children of wrath, even though His eternal purpose is love.

God has this secret purpose of having chosen them, and so He will most certainly save them. He will bring them out from under His wrath through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He does this by free, distinguishing, love and mercy which He appoints them to. And with those who are reprobate, His secret purpose from all eternity is to pass them by. They are not chosen to eternal life. His appointment of them to wrath is to leave them under His wrath, and leave them to themselves, based upon His purpose in regard to them; to demonstrate the glory of His justice. Turn with me to Romans Chapter 9 and we will look at some examples of those appointed to wrath and those appointed to salvation. Here in Chapter 9, Paul tells us of his great desire for the

salvation of his kinsmen according to the flesh, the Israelites, who had been given so many outward spiritual privileges and blessings, but still so many of them were not saved. After saying that it was not as though the word of God had failed, (verse 6), he shows that part of the reason was because of God's purpose in Election and reprobation.

From the standpoint of election, in verse 8 he says, "It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of promise are regarded as descendants." And then he also mentions Rebekah having the twins, Jacob and Esau. Verse 11 states, "For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.' "Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." "What shall we say then?" "There is no injustice with God, is there?" "May it never be!" "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

In other words, He appoints them to wrath. He appoints them to wrath, long before in eternity, according to His secret counsel and purpose not to show that person saving mercy, but to leave them to their sins which they love more than Him. Those persons, thus appointed, freely confirm their sinnership and they fulfill the fact that they are deserving of the sentence of damnation at the last judgment. John 3: 19 says, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." They did not want Christ or salvation through him. They would rather have their sin. In this case, here in Romans 9, two people are mentioned as being appointed to wrath. One is Esau in verse 13. God's purpose was the "hatred" of Esau in the sense that He did not Elect him, and He did not let him inherit the birthright or the blessing even though he was the first-born in the family. It was the usual custom for the first-born, the older, to inherit these blessings both temporal and spiritual. It was God's purpose in Election that Esau not inherit.

The second person mentioned is Pharaoh. God, it says, raised him up in order to "demonstrate His power in him, that He was stronger in His purposes than Pharaoh was in his, and that He would prevail over him. Pharaoh freely lived the life that he wanted to live as an oppressor of God's people and one who opposed God. And yet in God's decrees, God raised him up to show His power over him. Indeed God proves this to every man, and proves that His justice is right and true. He will be vindicated in the Day that He judges. Then in verse 18, Paul says, "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault?' "For who resists His will?" In other words, if it were a matter of power, it is obvious that God is the greater. Then why doesn't God simply overcome every man with grace instead of judgment? That is the question that is being asked. And Paul answers it by saying, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" "The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this, will it?'"

In other words God's purposes in creating each man are way above our puny understanding. Therefore we should not judge God when we understand that He will not save every man, or think that there is injustice in Him. "Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?" The New King James says, "one vessel for honor and another for dishonor". "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" "And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory..." Now notice, brethren, that both the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy were prepared beforehand. This shows that there is an appointment to wrath from before the foundation of the world that will not be changed.

Much earthly good may be shown such vessels, by God who is essentially good in His being. He causes His sun to shine on the just and the unjust. He is kind to even ungrateful and evil men. But He does not always save them. He actually demonstrates much patience toward the vessels of wrath.

In the outworking of their lives this is seen to be so, and the Scriptures verify it. God is very patient with the wicked. He endures their wickedness, sometimes for a long time. He will displaying His justice in letting them have their time of pursuing their sin, but they are storing up wrath for the day of wrath by the way that they live their lives. He endures them with much patience. Some who are moral people stumble over the idea that they must be shown God's mercy in order to be saved. They think that their good works will be enough. But look over at 1st Peter 2: 7 with me. Here Peter tells us of the value of Christ to believers, but not to those who disbelieve. "Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.'" Then comes this amazing comment by Peter: "They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they were appointed." (The New American Standard translation says – "And to this doom they were also appointed", the word doom being supplied there.) "But you are a chosen generation...." But let us consider together this wonderful fact; that if you believe in Jesus Christ for your salvation, if you can say that Christ is precious to you, and that your heart has been regenerated, taking away the love of sinning; then you can also be assured that God has not appointed you to wrath, but for the obtaining of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is interesting that in Romans Chapter 11, if we turn over there to verses 6 and 7, we find a good example of God's appointments to both salvation and wrath. Speaking of the election of grace of some among the nation and people of Israel, Paul says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace." "But it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work." "What then?" "Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded (or hardened)." "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." "And David says: 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.' "Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always." But God even had a purpose in this, that was greater than themselves. "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?" (That is that God should forever cease to have dealings with any of physical Israel, and not save any among them) "Certainly not!" "But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles." "Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" (That is, when God stretches forth His hand to save them in their national conversion.)

Verse 33 says, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" So, the apostle Paul is saying here in Romans 11 that the Gentiles "obtained salvation" while the Jews are still in "a partial hardening." Did Jacob, their first forefather, deserve to be chosen and elected while Esau was passed by and reprobated? No, they both deserved to be condemned forever in the lake of fire. Have you come to see that this is what you deserve as a sinner in the sight of an infinitely holy God? Jacob came to see this because of God's grace. He said in prayer to God, in Genesis 32: 10, when he afraid and distressed about his brother Esau coming to meet him, because he thought Esau would kill him for stealing the birthright and the blessing, "I am unworthy of the least of your mercies and all the truth which You have shown Your servant." Is this you, my friend, this morning? I pray that each of us who are believers would have this kind of attitude as we live our Christian life, because we recognize the reality of God's having chosen us in Christ; that we would be humbled by it, to see how much sovereign control God does exercise over our lives. May we acknowledge it and be thankful.

Then 2nd – We want to look at how Christ’s death in relation to both gives the Christian great hope and comfort.

1st Thessalonians 5: 10 – “The Lord Jesus Christ died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you are doing.” Whether we “wake”; that is, whether we are alive here upon this earth, living out the days which God has given to us, which are all numbered before there was even one of them; or whether we “sleep”, having died and gone to be with the Lord; we should understand that we “live together with Him”. He died for all believers and therefore He is vitally united to them all in His resurrection life, which He gives to each one. The comfort of all this is that we can never be separated from Him either in life or death. His life sustains our soul all through this life, after we have been joined to Him in conversion. His life sustains our soul until the resurrection, as our souls are close by His side as He sits on His throne guiding and governing the affairs of this fallen world to their mighty climax where He will judge this world and then recreate it to be righteous.

It will be far better to die and to depart and be with Christ. It will be a fuller manifestation of His presence to our souls than we have ever experienced here. But how much greater value yet, will it be for the believer to “live together with Him” on the Day of the Resurrection of all the believing dead; when we shall see Him with new physical eyes, face to face; when we see that we have a glorious new body and a glorious new life which will never cease and never end, and everything of the former life has passed away! It is with these kind of thoughts that we ought to comfort and encourage one another as we live our Christian lives. Do you do this? Do you comfort and encourage others with the thought that Jesus is always there, always with the ones whom you are trying to minister to in His name, because His life is in their life, if they are trusting in Him? This is what the Jews will sing about in the day that they obtain the salvation that they are appointed to, in the day of their national conversion. Isaiah 26: 1 says, “In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.” “Open the gates that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.” “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.” “Trust in the Lord forever, for in YAH, the Lord, is everlasting strength.”