

ENJOY LIVING WITH YOURSELF

1 Thessalonians 2

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1 Thessalonians 2:1–20 (NIV)

“You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the

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Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

The difference that often occurs in our lives between what we desire to be and what we actually are, and what happens when we terribly, miserably fail. Someone has written “The life of everyone is a diary in which he means to write one story and instead writes another and his saddest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it.” Your life and mine has had its moments of “what we desired to be has not been.”

Therefore, the Word of the Lord is so vital for us this day because we come face to face with an individual who has the Spirit of God resting on him, whose life is consistent with his dreams. Who is the same person in secret as he is in public. Who has learned the story and the way to really be happy and successful in his life. The apostle Paul. It’s as if, in this second chapter of Thessalonians, he opens his life as a book for us all to read and see, so that we may derive truths to apply to our own life out of it, so that genuine enjoyment and enrichment of our personal experience can take place.

This man, Paul, has an incredible success story, as seen here in this Thessalonian letter. Can you imagine going into a major city like he did, the town of Thessalonica, a crossroad city between East and West, through which the major highways of his day ran? A city in which there were no

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believers at all? He simply goes into the town with two other individuals and, within a few months, a whole large community of believers has emerged. What an incredible story! What he is sharing in this chapter, therefore, is a story of success. Not an external kind of success, according to which the world measures it. But a success in terms of how God measures it. Success in communicating our faith. Success in being able to live with yourself. Success in being able to live with other people

Let's look at the story of this man and God, and see what in his life happens to touch on ours.

I. One thing that we see at the beginning of this second chapter is that here is a person—like all persons who are really in contact with God—a person who has a purpose.

He indicates, as he opens the second chapter, “You yourselves know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain” (verse 1). That word “vain” or “in vain,” came to be used in its original setting of an individual or a purpose that was empty in character, that had no meaning. It could be used also of a person who hadn't found direction in life, who frittered away his time in pursuits that were meaningless. Paul says that when he walked into this town he did not come in vain. That is, he didn't come guessing what he was going to do next or letting life happen to him. He experienced a clear, single, motivation of purpose as he walked into that town.

That motivation was to bring the gospel of God to persons who in that community, like our community, needed good news in their life so much. His purpose was so strong that he was able to maintain his purpose in spite of previous sufferings and in spite of present challenges. He indicates that there were things that threatened his survival. “We already suffered and had been shamefully treated at Philippi,” he says in verse 2. Acts 16 tells us what he had gone through. He had been very badly beaten in the town and he had been locked in prison and at midnight he and Silas, his co-partner, were singing praises to God. He had suffered physically and he had been

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shamefully treated. That is to say, that mentally he had known anguish for his expression of faith.

When you turn to 2 Corinthians 11, that letter being written several years after this, you find Paul saying things like, “Five times I have been beaten with the thirty-nine lashes.” He’d been shipwrecked three times, a day and a night he’d been in the sea. He was in constant danger for his life. He knew what it was to have his purpose tested in life. As a Christian, you will find that everything you want to do for God is going to go through a period of tremendous testing. The purpose of that testing is to cause inner strength in you, to be able to help you stand. God never allows anyone in His kingdom to exist without their being tested. Here is a person before us who can take the worst of physical and mental abuse and not lose his purpose. And not say, “I’m going to sit this next one out.”

What if Paul had come to the city of Thessalonica after he had left Philippi and gathered a group of people together and said, “I want to tell you how much I’ve suffered for Jesus?” They’d have laughed him out of town. He hadn’t come to tell the bad things that had happened to him. He came to tell the good news of the gospel. He came to that town, not willing to simply say, “I remember how the lash hurts and I don’t want to have to go through that again.”

I think we, who aren’t persecuted, sometimes lose the feeling of what it must be like to be bodily abused for the sake of a relationship with Jesus Christ. It’s no funny or pleasant thing to have someone beating you within an inch of your life. Yet here is this individual, Paul, who doesn’t know the meaning of the word defeat. How we ought to set his example before us. How easily it is for us, within the comfy setting of twentieth century American Christianity, to let the criticism of an individual slow us down and say, “If that’s the way people are going to be, see if I’ll be involved!” Or to let a defeat or a failure or sin in our life be such that we refuse to come back

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from it. Our vision and our purpose just absolutely collapse in the midst of pressure. Here's a purpose that can be sustained through defeat and a purpose that can surmount present challenges. He says, in respect to his treatment at Thessalonica, "We had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition" (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul knew what was coming at Thessalonica the minute he stood up to preach. Indeed it happened. He was persecuted in that town, as well. In fact, a riot broke out and again his life was put in jeopardy. He said, "We had courage to present to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition." The word for "opposition" in the original language is the word "agony." It's the same word. It was a word that was associated with sports contests. In a sports contest, the one who exerted himself to win was the one of whom "agony" could be used. He wrought his victory through agony.

Paul is saying, in his experience in this town, the presentation of the gospel had involved great agony at personal cost. But he had courage in God—not self-courage, not a worked-up, pumped-up enthusiasm. But it was because he believed it was the good news and the truth that he had the power to declare it.

A purpose that was firm. It could survive past defeats and it could survive present challenges. God causes us to have a faith like this.

There's another reason why the apostle Paul is able to be at home with himself and live a life that is fruitful and effective and enjoyable for God.

II. He is a person, as verses 3–6 indicate, of unimpeachable character.

There were some individuals, evidently unbelievers, remaining at this town of Thessalonica in northern Greece, who were bringing some rather subtle criticisms against the apostle Paul. Thus his indication that his life is an open book before all. That he has not committed perjury. He says,

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“For one thing, our appeal does not come from error” (verse 3). That is, Paul is saying a very true thing about the gospel. That when he came to declare the good news about Jesus Christ, he was not wondering whether or not it was true. He was not just giving a part truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ conforms to things as they really are. Jesus said, “They that worship the Father must worship him in spirit and in truth” (see John 4:23-24). It’s not simply, “If you’re sincere it’ll be all right.” What we believe must be the truth. Just because you’re sincere does not mean you’re right. No one could be more sincere to lay down his life for the gospel than the apostle Paul. But sincerity did not prove a thing. It had to be right. It had to be true. The gospel was not in error. Neither did his appeal come from “impure motives” (verse 3), that is, immorality. You can see how easy this charge can be made because, after all, a number of leading women had been converted at Thessalonica. What’s more, Paul tells the Thessalonians to greet one another with a kiss of peace. You could see how people who weren’t believers—the pagans—who began hearing strange things about these crazy Christians in the town could imagine all kinds of things happening. After all, that was like the religion that was in Thessalonica anyway. Two of the major mystery religions of the ancient world were headquartered there. Sex symbols dominated the town. Paul says, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, “Not only are our heads clean but our hearts are clean as well.”

Also, Paul says, “Our appeal to you didn’t come from guile” (verse 3). “Do you remember, Thessalonians, that I didn’t try to con you into becoming a believer?” A cheap strategy to win people to the Lord perhaps produces cheap disciples. To come to Jesus Christ must be a decision which you fundamentally want to make with all your heart. It can’t come through someone conning you or tricking you or fearing you or scaring you into a belief in Jesus Christ. Not with God.

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The fact that it's not of guile comes from the fact that his message is so utterly from God—verse 4, “We have been approved by God and entrusted with the gospel.” Notice that the approval of God comes before Paul is entrusted. That phrase “approval” means Paul was put through the test of personal experience and God, in that period of testing, determined that here was a man in whom He could entrust with the gospel. So that Paul said, “We seek to please God rather than men.” The first goal of my preaching is to remember that the person I'm most concerned about is God—what is He thinking about what I say? So I don't preach to be a crowd-pleaser. I don't preach to trick people into belief. But I preach essentially to God and of God. What we hold and share together as Christians must be rooted in this very basic stark honesty of what is said and done within the life of an individual believer.

Paul goes on to indicate that his conduct is unimpeachable because it does not proceed from flattery. I doubt Paul came into the town and gathered a few people together and said, “You wonderful Thessalonians. Wonderful people like you ought to have a wonderful gospel like mine.” I'm sure that he loved these people. That's deeply seen here in this letter. But I'm sure, also, that he had to say some very hard and true things. He had to talk about the fact that “there is none that is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). He had to suggest and say and teach that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In other words, if the gospel were to have any effect at all, it had to come from truth and not flattery. The very basic tenet of the gospel is that none of us can please God or be brought into a living relationship with Him on our own. There is only the way that Jesus Christ has provided, whereby God accepts His life as a substitute for ours. Once we accept Jesus, we have pleased God and are no longer in the standpoint of being recognized as a sinner in God's presence, but He elevates us to the position of His son and His heir.

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Paul had to say that at Thessalonica. It was not through flattery, by telling good people to be better. Rather, he was telling people who were lost that they can be found by God. Not only was the gospel not through flattery, but it did not proceed from a cloak of greed. He didn't preach in order to get a good offering to carry out of the town, so he could take it to the next place. In fact, I doubt he even gave away autographed copies of his epistle! Never once did he seek to bilk.

This is such a contrast with the roving sophist teachers of the ancient world who were in teaching because it was a profession. You were there to get paid. Paul says, "I didn't do this to get paid. Indeed, I worked in order to bring the gospel to you" (see verses 6-9). Not as a cloak for greed. "I'm not related to you because I want your money." He further affirms that he does not seek glory from men. He's involved in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the work of Jesus Christ, not from recognition.

Again, what a beautiful pattern of behavior this suggests for all of you who are actively involved in ministries in this church or outside the church with other believers. To do it whether there's recognition or not. In fact, to do it, not for the sake of recognition. Paul says, "Whatever I did wasn't so man could point to me and say, 'You're an A-number-one guy—really dedicated.'" Nor did he try to throw his weight around. It says, "We might have made demands of you as apostles of Christ but we didn't. We didn't try to throw our importance around. We didn't try to throw titles on you." No—an unimpeachable conduct.

The Lord creates within us a clean heart and pure motives. You know as well as I do that there is no happiness or enjoyment of life if your motives are not clean and if your heart is not pure and if you're trying to live on both sides of the fence, balancing your private life against your public life. Utter cleanness inside is a characteristic of enjoying life.

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III. A third thing that Paul had in relationship to the Thessalonians, that can be ours as well, is not only did he have a purpose and unimpeachable conduct, but he had a genuine love for people.

That's seen in the two models of relationship that he traces here in this letter. He says "I was among you gentle as a nurse taking care of her children" (verse 7). Then he goes on later to talk about his being a father. Verse 7 says, "We were gentle among you." The King James at this point reads "babes." Probably the best meaning here is "gentle." "We were gentle among you as a nurse taking care of her children." Underline "her" children. This may infer that they're not just somebody else's children that the nurse is taking care of. But the children are really hers and she is nursing them.

This suggests that one of the beautiful relationships in this letter to the Thessalonians is that it shows a close, warm, happy, emotional, loving relationship with other people. This was an incredible attitude. He wasn't some stiff theologian that was saying, "I have a doctrine I want you to believe." He had a heart. He shows this tremendous relationship toward others—as a nurse taking care of her own children. I think Paul was a person who knew how to fall in love quick. He fell hard when he fell in love. And he stayed in love. He was only with these believers a few months at the most. Yet he says, "We were affectionately desirous of you" (see verse 8). And he says, "You became very dear to us." Is that how you feel toward other people in this body of believers, if you're a regular part of this church? Are you affectionately desirous of one another? And does a concern for another person become very dear to you? The Lord wants us to have that kind of relationship with each other. God wants us to be in love with one another. And a love would suggest even a great concern for each other, if necessary.

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Paul's not only a nursing mother among these people—not only willing to share with them intellectual truths but also his own life. He's also a father. That's another relationship of love that Paul has with these Thessalonian believers. As a father, Paul shows a characteristic of, first of all, working. He says, "You remember our labor and toil" (1 Thessalonians 2:9). The word "labor," in the language which Paul is using, comes from a word which meant "to strike." In the noun form, it meant "a blow." Gradually, the word came to mean, in its noun form, "the kind of effort that is produced in either giving a blow or receiving a blow."

Paul, we know from Acts 18, was a tentmaker. That was hard work. Labor and toil. A lot of sweat. A lot of grind. He worked night and day. He probably got up while it was still night, still dark, and began his tent making work. He worked into the morning, laid it aside and began witnessing in homes at night. But he worked. As a father, he set an example. He didn't have to tell these Thessalonians, in chapter 5, to get to work, not be idle. As a father, he had shown them that work is important. He taught them the value of hard work.

No believer—in fact, no unbeliever—can enjoy life if they're lazy. I defy you to enjoy life if you're lazy. You might enjoy it for a few days, but you are sick mentally if you enjoy being lazy. You really are. You've got to have something to do. Jesus said, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me"

(Matthew 11:18). How did Jesus give rest? By finding the right job for us to do that fits us well. Maybe the only thing you can do at this point in your life, in terms of work, is to show some kindness toward another person or to pray. Others of you, because of age and ability, can do a whole lot more. But work is a quality that Paul has. It's a quality that expresses love.

Not only is work a quality, but Paul indicates that he has had a character which is unblemished in the presence of these Thessalonian believers. He is "holy, righteous and blameless" (1

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Thessalonians 2:10). “Holy” shows that, as a father, he is devoted to God. “Righteous” shows that he doesn’t fall below any certain line of behavior. And “blameless” shows that no one can fault him as a person. He has lived the gospel.

Then Paul indicates he talked to his children. As a father, he talked to them. What did he say when he talked? He said, “I exhorted you.” He said, “This is what you ought to be doing...this is the kind of life you ought to be living.” So he taught them to live that. It also says that Paul, as a father, encouraged them. That word “encouraged” is only found three times in the New Testament, the particular word which in the original language stands behind this. The other two times it’s found is in John 11 and in reference to Mary and Martha being encouraged after the death of Lazarus. In that context, the word meant “to control.” That’s what a father does a lot of times. Kids come in crying and they’re bruised and hurt. Somebody needs to encourage them. To sit down and love them and kiss them and care for them and listen to their problems. Paul says, “As a father, this is what I did.” That suggests a relationship of believers to one another. We have that kind of role, where we console one another from time to time.

Then Paul says, “I charged you to lead a life worthy of God.” And “to charge” means “to solemnly declare.” The King James, I think, translates it better. He says, “I charged you to walk worthily of God.” The verb means “to walk.” Some fifty times in the New Testament the verb “to walk” is used in reference to our relationship to God.

Do you have a walk with God? The Scriptures say, “Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). How do you take a walk with a person? What do you do? You both go in the same direction, I hope. And to walk with God means you know the direction in which He’s going. Where is God going? Look at Jesus. Jesus was going away from sin. He was

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going away from unrighteousness. Jesus was going to the way of the cross, to the way of suffering, to the way of truth.

If you walk, you also take a step at a time. In your experience, or walk, as a Christian you don't take a few steps then stop and say, "I think I'll stop for a while. This walking is too exerting."

Or, "I think I'll lie down." How easy it is to live the Christian life by herk and jerk! What is looked for in life is consistency. Every time you take a step, you just about fall down. If the leg didn't land, you'd fall down. Walking can be defined as avoiding a fall. Walking with God.

Progressively. Step by step. Neither running nor sleeping nor laying down, but going with Him.

That's the kind of day-to-day living that had been experienced at Thessalonica. God is calling you in His kingdom and glory. That's why we walk worthily.

But Paul also chose this ability to enjoy life, to get the most out of it, by his thanksgiving to God.

We've seen what a tremendously thankful person he is in chapter one. But here again the theme is addressed. He thanks the Lord for two things: that the Word of God has been received by the believers at Thessalonica and it's been received, not as the word of a man, but as it really is—the Word of God. Paul says "you received and accepted the Word" (see 1 Thessalonians 2:13). The word "received" simply means "somebody hands something to you." But the word "accepted" is the same word used in Paul's culture to refer to the kind of a way that a person had when a guest came to his house. He accepted the guest, which means he made the guest feel welcome and right at home. That's our response to the Word of God. We make the Word of God feel right at home. "Jesus, come in, with Your Word and Your Law. It's going to be in my life."

One of the compartments of our life we find most difficult to give to God is the compartment of our heart. Where we turn it over. Maybe another is the compartment of our mind. Another is the compartment of our feelings. Another, the compartment of our doing—our hands and our feet.

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But in all of it, the Word is at home. The Word of God, not the word of man. But the Word of God. And that Word of God is at work in you.

The word which Paul uses for “work” is the word from which we get “energy.” The same word. Energy. The word is “at energy” in you. That word, in the New Testament, is only used of a supernatural source. Never a human energy. It’s used for satanic or for godly energy. What Paul is simply saying is, “When you walk through the doorway of receiving Jesus Christ and begin welcoming the word into your life—not simply reading it as a duty or reading it in a hurry, but taking the time to really welcome it and act on it—when that happens, you’ll find a supernatural power at work in your life. An energy which effectively changes you.” There is an energy crisis in Christians when the Word is left undrilled. There is no energy crisis when the word is being welcomed. It is at work.

Another thing Paul gives thanks for, in addition to the Word being at work, is that these believers have become imitators of Jesus Christ, of Paul and of others who have suffered for their faith in Jesus. Paul goes on to articulate the many difficulties he’s had among his own fellow people, witnessing for the gospel. I suppose, in looking at it, persecution provides three positive things. When one is persecuted for his faith, it causes him to really identify with Christ if he’s a true believer.

When we left China in 1949, and the church that was left in China, we soon got some reports out. Immediately, when the Communists took over the town, those who were really believers in Christ stayed with it and identified themselves. But a second factor set in. There was a purging of the church. Those who were simply there for the convenience of it or for the economy of it left. And a third thing happened. When persons began living and dying for their faith, in the midst of

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persecution, it inspired other people to make commitments to Christ. So good things come out of persecution.

There are some of you here who, because of your commitment and stand for Jesus Christ, have been persecuted and alienated, even by your own family. Good is coming from it. You're identifying with Christ. What's happening in you is inspiring others. Persecution, pressure can bring forth the most profound and beautiful Christian experience.

Paul closes the section we're considering today by noting the condition of men without God as compared to the tremendous position that those who are believers in Jesus Christ have. He indicates that, when there is resistance to God such as have been exemplified among his own fellow countrymen, they always fill up the measure of their sins. "God's wrath has come upon them at last" (verse 16). That word "at last" means to come upon them "to the full."

What is Paul speaking of? What is the wrath of God? And how does the wrath of God come upon an individual? There are two ways we can understand what the wrath of God is. And, by the way, this is one way. Paul certainly came to Thessalonica without flattery. He declared the whole counsel of God, which involves the fact that God has a day in which He will judge the world. We don't try to hide from that at all. That's a factor of the gospel. It's why Jesus Christ came—to intervene between us and impending doom.

What is the wrath of God? There are two ways we can understand the wrath of God. The wrath of God, first of all, is the absence of God in your life. The absolute absence of God. Paul talks about it in Romans 1:18 and following, where he says of the pagan world—which had sought idolatry and immorality to such a gross extent that they had so utterly turned from God—Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all manner of wickedness. What does that mean? That God had an x-ray gun in heaven, and when someone would do something

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wrong, He'd zap them with fire and get them for it? Is that the wrath of God? No. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven. Paul goes on to say, "And God gave them up...and God gave them up...and God gave them up..." (see Romans 1:24,26,28). In other words, the wrath of God is absence of God from human experience. The absence of God from your life. God knows how to create distance. When you look at this universe in which we live and start looking at light years and trillions of light years, God knows how to make distance. If God knows how to make distance in a physical sense, God knows how to make distance in a spiritual sense. He knows how to make distance in respect to sin. "As far as the east is from the west, so far shall your sins be removed from you" (Psalm 103:12). They can't get to you for millions of light years. They can never get to you. The God who can make that kind of distance between you and your sins also can make the distance between you and Him, if you remain in your sins. The wrath of God. There's opportunity now to escape the wrath of God through a relationship with His Son Christ Jesus.

The second way the wrath of God is to be understood in the Scripture is by reading Revelation 6:15-17. It's the picture we have at the very end of time, when God brings an end to all human affairs. Great men and small men of the earth hide in caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne. And from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand it?"

What is the writer of Revelation saying? He's saying that the ultimate fear in the universe, by human beings like you and me, is not fear of death. Ultimately, that's not your greatest fear. Your greatest fear is not the fear of the future. Your greatest fear is not some fear of failure or personal catastrophe. Your greatest fear is not your health. The greatest, most unresolved, fear in

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all the universe is the fear of God. Ultimately, when God is seen for who He is, with the naked eye, you would rather die than meet God. Which means that death is a lesser fear than meeting God. The wrath of God outpoured. How fitting, therefore, is the word of Scripture that the beginning of all wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Psalm 111:10). That is reckoning with the most fundamental fear and what you must come to grips with: “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). And because God so loved the world, there need not be any fear of God in your life at all. Only reverence.

The Book of 1 Thessalonians says, “God’s wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:16). Notice that that phrase, “has come upon them,” is in the past tense. I want you to see something distinctive about a word of Scripture. Scripture has a way of describing a future event through a past tense verb. It’s like saying, instead of “The world will end someday,” it’s like saying, “The world ended.” When the New Testament writers talk about the future of God’s judgment, many times, rather than talking about it in the future tense, they talk about it as if it had already happened in the past tense. Because so certain are they of the word of Jesus, that the event is going to take place, that as far as the Christian is concerned, it’s not simply in the future. It’s a settled thing. It has happened.

The wrath of God has come. It has already been pronounced on the fearful and the unbelieving, on those who go their own way. It is an action which has occurred, which shall yet occur.

But if that can be said of the wrath of God, it can also be said about salvation. We have been saved. Has that happened yet? Yes, it has. Is it happening now? Yes it is. Shall it happen? Yes.

We shall be saved—completely, totally, free at last—from any temptation, even of sin. Any moral failure. Totally with Christ. So secure is salvation in Jesus Christ that even though the confirmation of it is in the future, it can be described as happening in the past. You were saved.

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Changed. Transformed. What a life to be in God and in Christ Jesus. There is no other way to live.

Closing Prayer

How clearly Your Word comes to us today, Lord. Showing us the difference between night and day. How much You yearn for us to be at one with You. Your servant, Paul, who was like a nursing mother in respect to other believers is only a poor picture of how You, as our heavenly Father, care for us. How many times You would gather ourselves to You, seek to draw us in. How much You want us to simply feel the warmth of Your embrace, the kiss of Your delight upon our lives. How You want us to, like children, sometimes simply come to You and say, “Papa.” Instead of being big and formal with the word “Father,” You’d have us say “Abba, Papa.” You want us to be that close to You. We praise You today, that we can be so close to You, who made the stars, the heavens, the width and breath of the universe. You are so great, so near to us. My deepest prayer, Lord, today, is that we would all as people here this morning come to the utter conviction of the truthfulness of what has been declared. My prayer is for persons who are outside a saving experience with You, who have never confessed You or recognized You as their own personal Savior and Lord. My prayer for them would be to come this very day into belief in You and to an experience with You, which brings forth everlasting life. My prayer for every believer here would be to thank You for what You’re already doing in each one’s life. It would also be to put into the fabric of our experience as Christians these very kinds of things—the purpose, the unimpeachable conduct and love relationships and thanksgiving. Those kinds of things, which make for a life that really flowers and matures. Sometimes You want to hug us as children—and You always do that, I suppose, no matter how old we get. But other times, You would also like to see us no longer be babes. But You would

ENJOY LIVING WITH YOURSELF

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like to see us come into maturity. So we bend our wills and our prayers to that desire this day, our Father, that we might be Your sons—wholly and completely—and that we might be conformed to the image of Your only Son, our Savior, Christ Jesus. In His name, we give thanks.

Amen.