

2 Thessalonians 2:13

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Carl Barth, arguably the most significant theologian of the twentieth century, was on a lecture tour in the United States in 1962, and following an address at the University of Chicago, was asked by a student if he could summarize his life's work in theology in one sentence, and he is alleged to have replied along the following lines, Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned on my mother's knee, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. It's a great story, and seemingly a true one, and like many good stories, it is an oft-repeated one. Indeed, I suspect I've mentioned it at least once in the past.

At the start of a new year, it is good to get our bearings to focus on what really matters, to remind ourselves of the heart of the matter. And this is the heart of the matter. Jesus loves me. Or even better, Jesus loves us. Jesus loves His people. Paul reminds the believers in Thessalonica of this central reality as he addresses them as brothers loved by the Lord. There in verse 13, where we begin our passage or the beginning of the text that we'll be thinking about this morning, but we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord. And we too are loved by the Lord. And with Barth, we know this to be true, for the Bible tells us so. And it tells us so powerfully and eloquently in this very passage. It tells us so in so many occasions throughout the Scriptures, but it does so in this passage that will serve as our text this morning. And in our text, Paul paints a portrait of the manner in which we are loved by the Lord. And it is this grand theme that will occupy our attention this morning. We are, says Paul, loved from eternity to eternity. If we had to summarize what he says in verses 13 and 14, we might use that expression, loved from eternity to eternity. Now, that's maybe not immediately obvious as a way of summarizing what Paul says in these two verses. But I wonder if you can see with me how in a few choice words, Paul transports us from eternity past to eternity future. There in verse 13, having addressed the believers in Thessalonica as brothers loved by the Lord and expressed how it is right that he should thank God for them, he gives the reason. He says, because from the beginning God chose you. From the beginning God chose you. We are loved from the beginning. Indeed, from before the creation of the heavens and the earth. And so, we look back to eternity past, and we're able to see that in eternity past, we are loved of God. But if in your mind's eye you can rotate 180 degrees and look forward to the dawn of the new heavens and the new earth, and what do we read that will be true of us when that occurs? In verse 14, we read, He called you to this, that is, to salvation through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in these words, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul is encouraging the believers to look forward to that great day of the Lord's coming in glory, a day on which Paul assures us we will share in His glory.

[4 : 58] Loved from eternity to eternity. But let's trace out the route that we will take as we travel with Paul from eternity to eternity, celebrating the love of God for us, we who are loved by the Lord.

Our journey begins in the past, it pauses in the present, and continues into the future. And the three headings that will serve to guide us as we delve into the eternal love of God are as follows. A love that decides, a love that decides in eternity past, a love that provides in the present age, and a love that shares in eternity future. A love that decides, a love that provides, and a love that shares. Thinking first of all then, of a love that decides. Looking at our text in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 13, we can ask the question, why is it that Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians? Why does he do that? Indeed, he uses very strong language about there being an obligation on him to thank God for them?

We ought always to thank God for you. Why? Well, we have the answer, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved. That is why Paul thanks God for them, because they from the beginning were chosen by God to be saved. From the beginning, or using Paul's own words in his letter to the Ephesians and in the first chapter, from before the creation of the world, God

decided to save a people for himself. This decision involved God involved God choosing us. He chose us. And let's just explore that. We're thinking about love that can be traced to eternity past. Before the creation of the world, God decided something, and this decision involved choosing us to be his people. And as I say, we want to just think a little bit about this. One thing that we can say is simply this, that God chooses period. This choice is all of God.

This is a choice that is grounded in God's sovereign prerogative. It is a choice to again use Paul's own language in his letter to the Ephesians. It is a choice in accordance with his pleasure and his will.

So, in answer to the question, if the question were to be posed, why does God love us? Why does God love you? Why does God love me? The answer is provided here by the Apostle Paul. He loves us because he decided to love us. He chose to love us. We love because he first loved us, and he first loved us in eternity past.

[8 : 42] God chooses period, but he chooses a people. In the language of Paul, as he speaks to the Thessalonians, he speaks of how God chose you. God chose you, and the you there clearly is a reference to those he is writing to, the believers in Thessalonica. He says, in the beginning, from the beginning, God chose you.

But of course, we can quite legitimately extend that you to all of God's people in every age and in every place through every generation. It is true of God's people that from the beginning, God chose you. And that, it goes without saying, but we'll say it, includes you and me if we are believers. If we are trusting in Jesus as our Savior, then we are included in those of whom the Apostle speaks. And God chooses with a purpose. We're told by Paul that he chose you, he chose the Thessalonian believers, he chose every believer, he chose you to be saved. Because from the beginning, God chose you to be saved. He chose you in order to save you. And let's be very clear on this.

God's purposes, God's purposes, his decisions, cannot and will not be thwarted. If God chose to save you, then you will be saved. There is nothing, there is nobody who could thwart the purposes of God in this great matter. And this reality of God's choosing or God's election provides the believer with an unshakable security. The Reformer John Calvin speaks of this doctrine as our true port of safety, even as he considers this passage before us. Our true port of safety, the doctrine of election, is a safe harbor for the soul. And so, brothers and sisters, you who are loved by the Lord. The love that the Lord bears for you is from the beginning. It's Genesis antecedes a Genesis. Its origin is to be traced to eternity past when he chose you. He chose you to be saved. So, this love with which we are loved is a love that decides.

We can also describe it as a love that provides. From eternity past, we hurtle through the millennia to the present, or in any case, to our present age, the gospel age. And the God who decides is also the God who provides. He decides to save, and he provides salvation. How has God, and how does God provide for the salvation of those he has decided to save? Well, he has done so through his Son and by his Spirit. First of all, then, this salvation provided by God is through his Son. God the Father provides his Son as our Savior. Now, this is not stated explicitly in our text, but can be discovered by means of a simple question directed to the text. Paul states there in verse 13 that we are saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. If we focus our attention for the moment in that second part, through belief in the truth. And the question that would emerge, a reasonable question would be, well, what truth? What truth is it that on believing in it we are saved? Well, Paul goes on to describe this truth in verse 14 as our gospel. He called you to this, to salvation through our gospel. The gospel that Paul declared, not that it was of his own creation, but that he was so identified with that he could speak of in these terms as our gospel. The evangel, the good news concerning our Savior. This is the truth that we believe that we might be saved. The good news concerning Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The good news concerning a Savior provided by the Father to die on Calvary's tree as an atoning sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the world.

God provides for our salvation. He determines to save. He chooses His people from eternity past, but in the time appointed by Him, He provides salvation. He provides a Savior, and He provides His Son, His only begotten as our Savior. But God does more in providing for our salvation. God the Father provides His Spirit to apply His Son's work to us. Now, the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the work of the Son is stated both implicitly and explicitly in our text. Notice what is said there in verse 14.

[14 : 55] We read, He called you to this, that is, to salvation, through our gospel. Now, the He, at the beginning of that sentence, He called you, refers back to the subject of the sentence, to God. And we can reasonably understand that to be more specifically to God the Father. But we know that God the Father makes the external call of the gospel, as it is preached, effective in our hearts by the work of His Spirit.

And so, the Holy Spirit is involved in the call of the gospel. In the gospel call, it is the Spirit who enables us to hear and to respond to the call that we might be saved, the call to repent and to trust in Jesus. And so, the Father, so God provides His Spirit that we might be saved, that we might respond to the call that is made. You see, God has purposed to save us and ensures that we are saved, even in this matter of making His call effective. But we can continue to identify how the Spirit of God is involved in our salvation in what Paul also says here. Notice in verse 13, when he speaks of how the believers in Thessalonica had been chosen by God from the beginning, we then read, to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

Through belief in the truth. How do we believe? How can we believe if we are, as the Bible very clearly portrays us, as spiritually blind? How can we believe? Even if the truth is the truth, how can we believe the truth? How can we believe the truth? How can we believe the truth? Well, only as the Spirit opens our eyes to see and to understand and to believe. We were thinking about this on New Year's Day when we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 of how Paul recognized that his preaching was accompanied by the Spirit's power, by a demonstration of the Spirit's power. And what did we suggest was that demonstration? Well, it was precisely the fact that those who heard, in that case the Corinthians, believed the message. That was the evidence that the message that was preached was accompanied by the Spirit's power. And so, belief in the truth is only possible by the enabling of God's Spirit.

We are saved through belief in the truth. And at this point, it's right that we should pause for a moment and ask ourselves the question, and I ask you the question, do you believe in the truth? Or as that expression could be translated, do you trust in the truth? Do you trust in the truth concerning Jesus and who He is and what He has done for you? In this letter, Paul lays out a solemn and critical choice.

Believe in the truth or believe the lie? Language that he uses in this same chapter that we've already read. In verse 11, for this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion that they will believe the lie, the contrast is a stark one. Do you believe the truth or do you believe the lie? Will you be saved, to use the language of our text, or will you be condemned, the language in verse 12? Will you share in His glory the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, or will you perish? Again, to use language that Paul uses in the preceding verses. So, we're thinking about how God demonstrates His love for us by providing salvation. He does so through His Son. He provides a Savior, but He also provides His Spirit.

[19 : 13] And the Spirit is the one who accompanies the call of the gospel, who enables us to believe, but then explicitly we're told that the Spirit also is involved in sanctifying us. There in verse 13, we have this language, but we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

The Spirit, having enabled us to believe, indwells us that He might continue His work of sanctification in us, making us holy, making us evermore like Jesus. And notice that Paul says that we are saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit rather than what we might have expected, saved for the sanctifying work of the Spirit. We may perhaps would have thought that would have tied in more with our conception. We're saved in order that the Spirit would then work in us, subsequent to our salvation, making us holy. But that's not what Paul says. He says that God chose us to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. And the language that Paul uses reminds us that our salvation is much more than a moment when we are saved. Though that is, of course, legitimate, a language that we can use to speak of our coming to faith. But it is so much more than that.

In a real sense, God continues to save us day by day as the Spirit sanctifies us. Indeed, in similar language, Paul wrote to the same Thessalonians in his first letter. In 1 Thessalonians in chapter 5, we read, May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

He's writing to those who, in a very real sense, have already been sanctified, set apart by God for a special purpose, and yet he can use this language of being sanctified through and through.

And it is on this theme that he picks up here in this second letter, chosen by God to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Can you see how our salvation, your salvation, is unmistakably Trinitarian in character? God the Father decides. God the Son secures. God the Spirit applies. The love of God is a love that provides. A love that decides. A love that provides. But then thirdly, a love that shares. We now cast our eyes forward to that which is to come, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We've already noted that at the beginning of the sermon. In verse 14, He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 34] Now, are we right in identifying this as a future experience to be realized at the Lord's coming in glory? I think the language that Paul is using points in that direction. But this conclusion is further buttressed by the context of this letter, something that we've hardly noted thus far. We've read the chapter, which gives us the context, but we've not really made much mention of it. But if you were listening carefully to the reading of 2 Thessalonians in chapter 2, you will notice that Paul's concern, his primary concern in what is a very short letter, is a particular false teaching that was swaying and deceiving the believers in Thessalonica, or certainly some of them.

And it was a teaching that contended that the day of the Lord, to use Paul's language, had already come. And we read that at the beginning of chapter 2. Now, Paul, in what follows in that same chapter 2, has already explained to his readers that this is not so, and has identified some of what must occur before that day comes. Now, that's not our concern this morning.

Now, the Thessalonians, rather than foolishly buying into this lie that was being peddled by false teachers, that the day had already come, what they should be doing rather is to look forward with hope, with a certain hope, with an expectant hope, to the future day of the Lord's appearing. When they will, says Paul, share in his glory. Now, we need to pause for a moment and consider what is being said by Paul when he speaks of this future demonstration, if you wish, of God's love in which the believers are enabled to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to pause and consider because what is being said by Paul is nothing short of breathtaking. The Greek word translated glory there in verse 14 is a word *doxa*, and it is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament word, also translated almost invariably as glory, the word *kabod*. Now, the Hebrew word *kabod*, without getting into too much detail, is a word that served to give expression to the sheer majesty and splendor of the eternal God. The eternal God invested with all dignity and authority and power, a glory unshared by any other.

And the word also serves to describe the wonder evoked by that majesty and splendor, as we are enabled to capture even a glimpse of it. The glory of God was and is of an intensity and radiance that it could not be withstood by creatures, not even those made in God's image and likeness. Moses boldly asked of God, now show me your glory. We read of that in Exodus chapter 33. And let's just, as we pause, to consider this matter of what Paul is saying, what Paul is saying, that we will share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 23] Let's just ponder on how God responded to that bold request made by Moses, now show me your glory. We read in Exodus 33 and from verse 18, and the Lord said, in response to this request of Moses, and the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. Then the Lord said, there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock, and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back, but my face must not be seen.

We notice the great care that God lovingly takes to ensure that Moses is not consumed by his own glory. And he states so clearly and so definitively, you cannot see my face. You would not be able to survive such an experience, such an exposure to my glory. And so, this arrangement is determined by God to enable Moses to see the back of God as he passes by. Soon after, in the same book of Exodus, in chapter 40, we read of when the tent of meeting was set up by Moses in the desert to house the Ark of the Covenant, the Ark serving as a symbol of God's presence with his people. And there in that chapter, in chapter 40 of Exodus, we read, Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar, and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And then what are we told? Moses could not enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Moses could not even enter into that place, because the glory of the Lord was filling it. A further and necessary feature of the glory of God is that it was unique to God. The Lord expressly says that he will not share his glory with another. In the prophet Isaiah, and in chapter 42, a passage that speaks of the coming Messiah, we hear the voice of God declare, I am the Lord. That is my name.

[29 : 21] I will not give my glory to another. So, in the light of all that, in the light of that brief excursion to what we read and discover concerning the glory of God in the Old Testament, in the light of that, how are we to understand Paul when he speaks of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in our text, there in verse 14. Did the Father give his glory to the Son? Well, such a transaction was not necessary, for the eternal Son is possessed of an eternal glory. But of course, the astounding truth is not that the Lord Jesus Christ is possessed of the glory of God. It's not astounding once we understand who Jesus Christ is who Jesus Christ is, but the astounding truth is that the love of God for us, sinful creatures, finds expression in sharing His glory with us. In the first chapter of John's gospel that we were considering last Sunday evening, we are presented with the eternal Word who was both with God and was God, and how that Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And then what do we read? And we beheld His glory, the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth. Now, that sinful creatures should behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is remarkable enough. But Paul, in our text, goes further.

He assures the believers that God's call has as its future goal that they might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He called you to this, to salvation, through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And you ask me, well, what does that mean? And the best answer I can give is, I don't know.

We are given glimpses in the Scriptures. We're not going to consider some of these glimpses. You ask me, well, what will that be like? On that great day when the Lord Jesus comes in glory, what will it be like to share in His glory? And I certainly can't answer you that question.

[32 : 00] But I do know that it is a delight that awaits us. And I also know that the wonder of the eternal God, in some sense, yet to be fully discovered, shares His glory with us, serves to wonderfully magnify the love that God bears to us.

He so loves us that He purposed not only to choose us, not only to call us, not only to sanctify us, not only to save us, but also, wonder of wonders, to share with us the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a love that shares. Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so.

We are loved by the Lord, and the Lord's love for us is deep and wide. It is a love that decides, a love that provides, and a love that shares. Praise be to God. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we do indeed come as we can do no other but come, and thank You for so great a love that You bear towards us. We are conscious that in considering Your love for us, we but scratch the surface. We thank You for the great truths that we can discover and ponder on and delight in, in this great theme, in this great subject matter of Your love for us. We thank You for how the depth of Your love finds most powerful expression in the giving of Your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior.

[33 : 56] We thank You for the wonderful way You have so ordered circumstances and our own lives and everything in such a manner that as we are called to believe, You even enable us to believe by Your Spirit.

And we pray that You would help us to stand in gratitude and in humble gratitude before You for so great salvation. And we thank You that we also can look forward to that which yet awaits us, that there is that which we have yet to experience and enjoy of Your salvation and of Your love for us, and help us to be expectant as we look forward to that great day. Lord, we pray then that You would help us to guard these truths in our hearts, that they would inform our thinking and our living. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.