

Appointed to Salvation

Deuteronomy 7:6–11, 1 Thessalonians 5:8–11

Salvation is a large theme in Holy Scripture. As the angel of the Lord told Joseph, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will *save* his people from their sins.” I have an encouraging message this morning for you who are trusting in Christ alone to save you from your sins: “Appointed to Salvation.” I have three points: (1) hope is not a wish; (2) God’s appointment; and (3) the Christian’s glorious future. First,

1. Hope is not a wish.

Look with me at our New Testament text. Paul writes: “let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the *hope* of salvation.”

Here is a reference to hope. Paul develops the theme of hope in this little epistle. Strong defines *hope* as the “joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.” This joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation is the possession of the Christian alone. Only the Christian can joyfully and confidently expect eternal salvation in the presence of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Concerning those who had experienced the death of friends and loved ones and fellow members of the body of Christ—men and women who had drawn their last breath, who had fallen asleep in Jesus and had been ushered into the very presence of their Lord—Paul had affirmed that we “sorrow not, even as others which have *no hope*” (1 Thess. 4:13). What he was teaching was that Christians alone, of all peoples dwelling on the face of the earth, have hope of eternal life. We sorrow differently than those who do not know Christ. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19). But the Christian’s hope is not limited to this life only. We have hope beyond the grave! Because Jesus died and rose again, we have confidence that we too will one day rise again and spend eternity beholding the face of the Savior who died for us.

We often use *hope* in the sense “I *wish* it were so.” People say, “I wish upon a falling star,” as though chancing to catch sight of a falling star—a rare occurrence—guarantees that one’s wishes will be fulfilled. We might ask the wife of a person with cancer: “Is he going to get better?” and she might say, “I hope so.” What the wife means is *I’ve been watching him suffer, day after day. How I fervently wish that he would get better, and we can go back to the way things were before he got sick!*

But for the Christian, hope is the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation. When the person who rejected Christ dies, he has no hope of life beyond the grave—only of eternal torment that will consume the enemies of God. I have been in hospital rooms when a man, woman or child has taken his or her last breath. Their loved ones are devastated. Sometimes they take the news with

detached stoicism, thinking: *people die every day; this time it hit close to home*. But I've also seen cases where there was uncontrollable weeping, wailing and sobbing. Perhaps it was a beloved son that was expected to carry on the family name. Now he is gone! *All* hope is gone—or so it seems. One time it was an auto accident at the busy intersection of Grand River and Hagadorn Road. A young man had been drinking and ran a red light. He was struck broadside and was rushed to the emergency room, where he was pronounced dead. Even though it was late at night, a large family group gathered. When the doctor pronounced the man dead, the family immediately began sobbing. They had such great hopes for the young man. Now, their hopes were dashed. The family carried on with such intensity that security guards were hastily called in to try to keep things from getting out of hand. I tried to pray with the family, but they were inconsolable.

Another time in Israel two young Arab boys, probably 8 and 10, fell off a high ledge to the rocks below. Both suffered severe head injuries, one was bleeding out his ears. Though it was late at night, a large number of extended family members came in to the emergency room where I, too, was being treated, and demanded that the staff do more. There was a high level of emotion: weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, agitated pacing. Emotions were high, and people were starting to get physical. A small mob followed the boys down the hall to the x-ray room and were interfering with the work of the x-ray technicians. The family was inconsolable. Things were getting out of hand, ready to explode. My son and daughter-in-law both had the same thought: we better get Dad out of here! They called an ambulance to take me to a different hospital.

In our New Testament text the apostle Paul teaches us a lesson that all of us should learn and learn *well* before trouble comes—and trouble will certainly come! He reminds that as Christians we belong to Christ, the Light of the world. We do not dwell in darkness but in the light of Christ. He says, “let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the *hope* of salvation.” This promise isn't limited to just when times are good. It's for *all* time—even bad times. “Let us put on as a helmet the hope of salvation.” We sorrow not as others who have no hope. Our hope is sure in Christ! If on the third day the Father raised Christ from the dead, then we live in hope of the resurrection. The Christian's hope is not just a wish but a certainty in Christ. There is life beyond the grave! As Job declared, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:26–27). Hope is not a wish; our faith is secure in Christ. Second, notice

2. God's appointment

Paul continues: “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.” Here is remarkable teaching that Paul could never have known, humanly speaking.

This was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. His teaching is very clear and plain. “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.” The “us” here is a reference to the church—to believers who confessed Christ with his church and maintained that confession. Believer, this is for you: “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.”

Shorter Catechism question 7 asks, “What are the decrees of God?” The answer, summarizing Scripture: “The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.” “Foreordain” is a synonym for “appoint.” It means *to appoint in advance, predestine*.

A lot of professing Christians get very uncomfortable at the mention of predestination. But we should not get uncomfortable, as though we believed in blind fate. The Bible does *not* teach blind fate; rather, it teaches predestination by our loving, merciful heavenly Father. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). The purpose of predestination is that we who confess Christ might be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son. In his infinite wisdom God has foreordained *whatever* comes to pass—“whatever”! No event, small or great, is excluded. The good things are foreordained by God. The bad things—calamities, tragedies, misfortune—are also foreordained by God. All are destined to work out for his glory. The Christian can rest assured: whatever evil God sends upon me in this vale of tears will turn out to my good! God is almighty and doesn’t lack resources. He is able to do all his holy will. Furthermore, God is a faithful Father and works all things out for his own glory and his people’s ultimate good. Something that at the time seems an utter, irredeemable tragedy will later turn out to have been a blessing in disguise, such that the believer will be able to say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Ps. 119:71). If the Christian’s hope is his wise and loving heavenly Father, and not in his own very limited resources, he will indeed be able to pray that prayer. Christians can say, “we glory in tribulations . . . knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, *hope*: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:3–5).

Here are two destinies: “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.” The first is the destiny of Christ-rejectors: wrath. The second is the destiny of those who look to Christ: salvation! It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!

Gill comments: “God hath not appointed us to *wrath* . . . to destruction and ruin, the effect of wrath; though there are some that are vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction . . . but there are others who are equally children of wrath, as deserving

of the wrath of God in themselves as others, who are not appointed to it; which is an instance of wonderful and distinguishing grace to them: but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Brothers and sisters, if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, then our destiny is to *obtain salvation* by our Lord Jesus Christ. There are no more comforting words than these. Have you fled to Christ for salvation? Have you called upon the name of the Lord? Then you are *saved*. Salvation is your portion, not because you deserve it, but because it is given to you as a gift.

Paul writes: “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” God did not appoint us to wrath (which is what we deserved); rather, he appointed us to obtain salvation. That salvation is only had in Christ, not in a supposed unitary, non-trinitarian god who is a figment of human imagination and doesn’t exist. Salvation is obtained only through Jesus Christ. It was purchased for us by his death on the cross—the only acceptable payment for our sins. It can never be taken away from us. We will obtain that salvation whether we die on this earth and await the day when the dead in Christ shall rise first, or whether we are still alive at the coming of the Lord. Our salvation is secure in Christ.

Notice that in Paul’s discussion of predestination and divine appointment his purpose was not to argue a controversial point of theology but to give believers hope. Believer, Christ is your hope!

Our first two points were (1) hope is not a wish and (2) God’s appointment. Lastly, consider

3. The Christian’s glorious future

“Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

Here is another reference to the last verse of chapter 4: “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” Paul had been talking about the glorious truth of the Second Coming: “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” In light of that, Paul charged God’s people to comfort one another with these words. Not to comfort one another with sentimental platitudes: “keep a stiff upper lip,” “you can do it,” “we’ll get through this together”; but “with these *words*.” The word here is the plural of the word Logos, which refers to Christ. The Christian’s only hope as we face the certainty of death is the preaching of the gospel of Christ. A Christian funeral is not supposed to focus on the character and good works of the deceased but on Christ: *Christ* is our only comfort in life and in

death. The gospel—the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection—is to predominate in all Christian preaching.

Now, in the light of all that he has said, Paul repeats himself and says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” Here, in a nutshell, is the whole of our Christian duty: we are to comfort one another with the gospel. The minister does this in a formal, authoritative way, as Christ’s ordained servant opening up the word of God, Lord’s day by Lord’s day. But all of us have a part. We are to comfort one another with the gospel. The words of the gospel are to be on our lips as we interact with family, friends, neighbors, and fellow members of the body of Christ. The basic gospel message is simple; it concerns the good news of Christ’s sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. We should meditate on it so much that, taught by the Spirit, we can apply it to the various life situations in which we find ourselves.

Paul also says that we should “edify” one another. The word he uses here is used of building a building (an *edifice*). We are to *build up* one another. Some professing Christians are much better at tearing down than building up! The Christian message is not about me and my needs—a message of selfishness. Its focus is on the whole Christian community. As we build one another up, we ourselves will be built up: “Give, and it shall be given you.”

This morning we have considered “Appointed for Salvation”—the doctrine of election. Our Old Testament text has one of the clearest and most precious explanations of God’s election in the Bible. The occasion is Moses’ sermon to the new generation of the Israelites as they were about to enter the land of Canaan. He tells the people, “You are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage”

This is not something only for a people long ago and far away. It is for “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). As Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia: “if you are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” In the Bible the election of Israel always refers to Abraham’s *spiritual* seed, to those who hold “the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16). As he writes in Romans 9, “they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham those who are the children of the flesh, these are *not* the children of God; but the *children of the promise* are counted as the seed” (Rom. 9:6–8). It is to the Israel of *God*—those who truly held to the faith of Abraham—that Moses said, “You are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen

you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.” We who hold to the faith of Abraham—the patriarch who “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Gal. 3:6)—are a holy people to the Lord, chosen by God to be a holy people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

Please understand: this spiritual promise was never given to Abraham’s physical descendants who did not hold the faith of Abraham, but to his spiritual seed, to those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.¹

Jesus told the Jews of his day, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day . . . he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). By faith Father Abraham saw the Messianic age. He knew that the amazing promises that had been given to him were to be fulfilled at the coming of Christ. By faith, he believed in the coming Christ. He is the example of faith for all the ages. Abraham believed in the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. If we want to go to heaven, we, too, must believe in the Lord—the Christ of Scripture. Neither is there salvation in any other! Amen.

And if we come to Christ, we can have the assurance that we are the chosen people—a holy people to the Lord. We were chosen in Christ in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. Before we were formed in the womb, we were chosen. We were elected by the Father, and given to the Son, to be a special people for himself. We were not chosen because of our innate worthiness—as fallen sons and daughters of Adam, we had none. Rather than being worthy, we were wholly *unworthy*. We were sinners, rebels, dead in trespasses and sins, lost, wholly given to evil. Every thought and imagination of our heart was only evil continually. We did not know our lostness. We were satisfied to wander in darkness, far from the Father’s fold.

So why did God choose us? Our Deuteronomy text gives the answer: “because he loved us.” The New American Standard Version renders it: “because the LORD *loved* you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.” God tells his people, “I have loved you with an everlasting love”²—that is, a love that originated in the councils of eternity, a love that never changes. Why did he love us? As fallen sons and daughters of Adam we were all equally undeserving. No fallen son or daughter of Adam ever deserved God’s love. Clearly, the love spoken about here was a love of the will. God *determined* to love us. It was not the love of attraction, as when a young man and young woman become attracted to one another. God loves the *unlovely*—those who were spoiled and ruined and disfigured by sin.

Because of his great, eternal love for us, his people given to the Son, he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He saved us, redeemed us and

¹ Eph. 1:4

² Jer. 31:3

brought us out of bondage to sin with his mighty hand. By the power of his Spirit he convinced us of our sin and misery, enlightened our minds in the knowledge of Christ, renewed our wills, and persuaded and enabled us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. All glory must go to him. It was not because of our works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy that he saved us.

Three points then: (1) hope is not a wish; (2) God's appointment; and (3) the Christian's glorious future. Thank God that we who believe in Jesus Christ are appointed for salvation! Amen.