

Encouragement for Believers in the Last Days

II Thessalonians 2:13-17

Introduction:

- We have been looking at what is coming down the pike during the end times
- Although we are not in the end times yet, according to God's calendar we are living in the last days- and getting very close to those end times!
- The last days is a broad term in the New Testament, broad enough to where one could say that the last days began with the birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost. The days of the Messiah mark the last days; yet the term is especially appropriate to the season immediately before the return of Jesus and the consummation of all things.
- There is nothing left on God's calendar before He begins to wrap things up in this world! So, here are some practical encouragements for us

I. **WE ARE BELOVED-** v. 13-14

- a. Here in NYC surrounded by millions, many still feel alone, unnoticed, and unloved.
- b. What a blessed thought- that we are beloved by God!
 - i. Means literally - to be fond of, to love dearly
 - ii. Zech 2:8 speaking of Israel- for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye
 - iii. God always keeps an "eye" on His people
- c. Human relationships are a great opportunity to experience what it means to be loved!
 - i. Parents, children, spouse, friends, etc.
 - ii. Sadly, some have had poor experiences of love. They've only seen distorted views of love
 - iii. Regardless, no one can love us as God loves us! "No one ever cared for me like Jesus"
 - iv. God is love- He is the perfect embodiment of what love is all about!
- d. This is the language of marriage- are we not the Bride of Christ?

- e. He loves us, but do we truly love Him? (James 4)
- f. The highest word for love is used here- agape- this is a sacrificial love that is not self-serving
- g. What does God get out of our relationship? He simply loves us!
- h. God's love is revealed in the gospel- Christ died for our sins!
- i. Chosen you to salvation- v. 13-14
 - i. Chosen/election- to take for oneself
 - ii. Our salvation was born in the mind of God
 - iii. What the doctrine of election is not:
 1. Does not teach that God arbitrarily choose some for salvation and some for damnation- II Peter 3:9
 2. Does not negate human responsibility! (irresistible grace) In Acts 7 the multitude resisted the Holy Spirit and stoned Stephen!
 3. Does not negate evangelism! (Mark 16:15)
 - iv. "The doctrine of election is a 'family truth' intended to foster the welfare of believers." (Hiebert) illustr- you can look back and thank God for what He did in saving you!

Once my soul was astray from the heavenly way
 I was wretched and as vile as could be.
 But my Savior in love gave me peace from above,
 When He reached down His hand for me.

CHORUS:

When the Savior reached down for me
 When He reached down His hand for me,
 I was lost and undone without God or His Son
 When He reached down His hand for me.

- v. From the beginning- God planned man's salvation before the creation. That is why Christ is referred to in Revelation 13:8 as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (cf. I Peter 1:20). God always knew that I would need a Savior!
- vi. V. 14- Calling- Chosen in eternity, called in time

1. Calling is that divine work of the Holy Spirit which convicts us of sin, and convinces us to trust in Christ. Bring us to the place of a “faith response”- v. 13
 2. Have you answered His call?
 3. What if today is God’s final call to you?
- j. Important implications for our assurance of salvation
- i. You are saved not because you feel like it
 - ii. But because God says so in His word.- I John 5:13
- II. **STAND FAST AND HOLD THE TRADITIONS-** v. 15
- a. Standing fast means to not give up any ground!
 - i. We are all on a journey of discipleship. We may be in different positions or situations on that journey, but we should all be advancing forward!
 - ii. We should not be losing any ground! Otherwise, we are backslidden
 - b. Illustr- Early African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in private devotions. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others. They would kindly remind the negligent one, “Brother, the grass grows on your path.”
 - c. What are these traditions?
 - i. They cannot be the sinful traditions of men- Matthew 15:1-6, Col. 2:8
 - ii. The Bible recognizes that traditions can be a dangerous feature of religious systems (Matthew 15:2-3, 6) or the traditions of man (Colossians 2:8). But Paul has in mind the apostolic traditions given by God, and preserved for us in the the New Testament- the word of God!
 - iii. Not all traditions are bad, but they must not contradict scripture (Halloween vs. Thanksgiving)
 - iv. Any tradition which contradicts the word of God is dangerous! The Bible is our standard!
 - d. II Kings 23:2-3- Josiah’s attitude towards the word of God
- III. **THROUGH GRACE-** v. 16-17
- a. Note: the emphasis on Christ’s deity, and equality with God- v. 16

- b. Grace- God blessing us with what we do not deserve (II Peter 1:3 “all things pertaining to life and godliness”)- illustr- Jacob
- c. I need God to give me everlasting consolation, good hope, comfort, and to establish me in every good word and work! Otherwise there is no hope!
- d. Hath given- In our intercession and petition, we do well to remember God’s past faithfulness and present blessing. His faithfulness in the past is a promise of His faithfulness for the future.
- e. “God has given us much, and all his past gifts are pleas for more gifts. Men do not plead so. The beggar in the street cannot say, ‘Give me a penny to-day because you gave me one yesterday,’ else we might reply, ‘That is the reason why I should not give you any more.’ But when dealing with God, this is a good plea.” (Spurgeon)
- f. Everlasting consolation- peace/comfort
 - i. Peace with God, and the peace of God (Rom. 5:1, Philippians 4:7)
 - ii. You can never have the peace of God until you make peace with God!
 - iii. Consolation also means safety- Safety consists not in the absence of danger but in the presence of God.
 - iv. Illustr- In 1555, Nicholas Ridley was burned at the stake because of his witness for Christ. On the night before Ridley's execution, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to be of assistance and comfort. Nicholas declined the offer and replied that he meant to go to bed and sleep as quietly as ever he did in his life. Because he knew the peace of God, he could rest in the strength of the everlasting arms of his Lord to meet his need. So can we!
- g. V. 17- Some Christian people think that ‘word’ should be everything and work nothing...they do not get as far as work
- h. Truth on our lips is not enough- it must be worked out in our lives!
 - i. Teaching and doing, doctrine and duty, preaching and practice
 - ii. Illustr- prayer: In theory, prayer sounds great. It moves mountains and opens doors and changes the world. In practice? Well, a lot of us have never stick with it long enough to find out. We forget to pray, we lack faith in our prayers, or we pray without fervency or power.

Conclusion: Don’t be deceived into living for a world, or a devil who does not really love you! God loves you and has provided all that you need in this life, and the next- will you trust Him?