

Whenever God tells us something about the future, that very often leaves us with questions, because we don't always get the answers that we might like to have. And these kinds of questions can leave us feeling uncertain, unsure about what is actually going to happen. And the very thing that God intended to be a comfort to us ends up actually making us uncomfortable instead.

Think about our reading from last time, 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. Paul talks about things like the great rebellion which is going to come at the end of days, when many will turn away from the Lord. And Paul also talks about the coming of the man of lawlessness, the one who will be at the head of that rebellion. Paul talks about Satan working false miracles in order to deceive many. And Paul even says that God will use all of this as a way of condemning the unbelieving world. When we take all of that together, it leaves us with a lot of questions. "Is that going to happen to me? Am I going to have to go through this? Will I be deceived? Will I fall away?" And on and on the questions go. And this is also true if we compare our own time with what Paul is saying. We say, "Is this the time that Paul was talking about? Are we living in the time of the great rebellion? And if that's true, what's going to happen to me? What will the future be like?" And on and on those questions go. Because these questions have a way of leaving us uncertain, unsure about what is actually going to happen, especially when things are getting worse and worse around us all the time.

But Christians, Paul does not want to make us uncertain. Paul does not want to leave us in doubt. Paul wants to comfort us. He wants to strengthen our faith. And we can see that happening especially in our reading for this evening, where Paul shows us why we can be confident even in the face of what is to come.

So Paul begins, then, in verse 13. He says: "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." So Paul gives us four reasons, then, why we can be confident in this verse. And the first one of these reasons is because "God chose you." Your salvation depends on God and on him alone. And pay attention to what Paul is doing here. Paul starts with God and then talks about us. He says, "God chose you." We have a tendency to do the opposite. We tend to start with ourselves, and then think about what God is doing. But when we do it that way, Christians, that leaves us in doubt. Because we look at ourselves, and, well, I'm nothing worth trusting. I have all kinds of things going on my life that I have no control over. I am no secure foundation on which to base my faith. But Paul doesn't point us to ourselves. Paul points us to God and what God is doing. God chose you. God elected you to belong to him, even before he created the world. Think about that! God chose you! It's all based on him. And if it's all based on him even before any of this ever happened, we know how it's going to turn out. We know how it will end. We can be confident, because God has chosen us for himself.

The second reason he gives is that "God chose you to be saved." He does not say God just chose you in some generic way. He does not say God chose you the way that we often choose things, like choosing what to wear or choosing what to eat, things that really don't make any difference. He does not say God chose you to be uncertain. He does not say God chose you to leave you on your own. He says God chose you to be saved. That's his whole purpose. That's what he wants to do, to deliver you from all the things to come. So that we know that no matter what happens,

God wants to save us. We can be confident knowing that God intends to deliver us from all things.

But that, of course, might actually lead us to a different question. We might say, "Okay, that all sounds good, but how do I know that it applies to me? How do I know that I am being saved? How do I know that God has chosen me?" Paul answers that question with our third reason, where he says "God chose you to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit." God chose you to be different from the world. God chose you to be holy, to be like him. And the Holy Spirit works in us to change us, to make us something different from what we were. Because if we were like the world, Christians, if we thought like the world, if we acted like the world, if we did what the world did, we would be just like them. And if we're just like them, we will be condemned along with them. Because that's the only thing that's going to happen to the unbelieving world. But we're not like them. The Spirit has changed us. The Spirit has made us different from the world. We do not act like them. We don't think like them. We don't do what they do. And for that reason, we know that we will not share the same judgment as the world. God has separated us for himself, so that we will be saved through what he is doing.

And also the fourth reason is the same thing. "God chose you to be saved through belief in the truth." God has taught you the truth in his Word. You have come to believe that truth through the working of the Holy Spirit. And that means that we are being saved by faith. And all of this shows again that we are not like the world. The world hates the truth. The world wants nothing to do with God. The world, as Paul says, "delights in unrighteousness." They love being evil. They love not being with God. But we have come to know the truth. We have come to believe in that truth. And for that reason, we are not like the world. Christians, all of this shows us that we can be confident in the face of what is to come, because we're not like the world. God has chosen us to be different in his Son, Jesus Christ.

All of this goes on to say, then, verse 14: "To this he called you through our Gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." God has called you through the Gospel. He has called you to himself, to believe in the Gospel of his Son. The Gospel changes us. The Gospel transforms us. The Gospel brings us to God. But the Gospel also has a goal, and that is that we may obtain the glory of Jesus Christ. It is not just that we're going to be saved. That's one thing. But through this, Jesus will be glorified. When we come to heaven and see everything that Jesus has done for us to save us despite ourselves, we will glorify him and praise him for all the things that he has done. It gives us something to hold on to, something to look forward to when things get hard.

But Christians, we should not become careless as a result of this. This is why Paul says in verse 15: "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter." Everything that we've just said, that we've been talking about might lead us to think, "Well then, it doesn't matter what I do! Because God saves me. God's done all of this. It's up to God from beginning to end. I have nothing to do with it. So who cares what I do? I can live how I want, because God's going to save me anyway. Because it depends on him, right?" But Christians, that's the exact opposite of what Paul is telling us. Just because God is doing all these things doesn't mean that we should become careless or that we shouldn't pay attention. God still wants us to be careful. God still wants us to watch. Because if we become

careless, we become just like the world all over again, not paying attention to what God is doing. And becoming like the world, becoming careless like the world means that we will be condemned along with the world.

But Christians, we should also remember that this watchfulness, this carefulness comes from God. As Paul says in verse 17: "The Lord will comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word." God doesn't leave us alone to just do these things all by ourselves, as if he said, "Okay, I did it up to this point. Now you have to take care of the rest." We would never be able to finish it. We would be left in doubt. No, God is the one who does all of these things for us and in us, so that we can be confident because of what Jesus is doing for us.

This is also why Paul wants the Thessalonians to pray for him, because prayer shows us above all else how much we need God for everything, including our good works. The Lord, Paul says, will deliver us from all wicked and evil men. He will deliver us from all evil, just as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. We can trust in God to take care of us, because he is the one who will deliver us in the end.

So we can be confident in the face of all trouble, because God is the one who is steadfast. We can be confident in the face of all trouble, because we are in Jesus Christ. We can be confident in the face of trouble, because the Spirit changes us, transforms us, makes us into something new. We are no longer like the world because of what God has done for us. So we need not be afraid of what is to come, because God shows us how he will deliver us in all things.

So Christians, in the face of uncertainty, let us look to the place where God gives us certainty. Though the future may seem difficult or dark to us, God has chosen you to be saved. He has chosen you to be saved, through sanctification and through belief in the truth. God knows those who belong to him, and he will take care of them in all things, because he is the one who gives us confidence. So stand firm and hold on to the truth that you have been taught. And then, as Paul says, "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ." Because it's there in God that we will find confidence for the future ahead.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to give us confidence in the face of all things. We pray that you would help us always to remain steadfast, so that we may trust in you in all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.