

Chosen to Salvation

***“We are bound to
give thanks always
to God for you,
brethren beloved of
the Lord, because
God hath from the
beginning chosen
you to salvation
through
sanctification of
the Spirit and
belief of the truth.”***

***—II Thessalonians
2:13***

PAUL OPENED HIS SEC-

ond epistle to the Thessalonians, as he did many times in his writings, by thanking God for the brethren whom he was addressing. (II Thess. 1:3) Specifically, he thanked God for their growing faith and their love, which seemed to abound toward one another. What a beautiful testimony of their faithfulness is given just from Paul's simple statement of thanksgiving

for them. Paul takes the matter a step further, saying that as he traveled and visited the various churches he had helped establish, he spread the word of their faithfulness so that all who heard gloried in it. He states, “We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.”—vs. 4

Although Paul realized that the church at Thessalonica had been faithful up until now, he also knew they would continue to be tested and tried, and maintaining their faithful course would not be accomplished in their own strength, but in God's. He prayed that God would continue to work in them to the completion of that which had been started. In II Thessalonians 1:11, we read, "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." Notice that Paul indicated in this verse that it was really God's work which was being fulfilled in the Thessalonian church, 'his goodness,' and his 'work of faith with power.' Paul wanted them, and us, to realize that all the glory and honor relating to the development of each member of the church belonged exclusively to God and his faithful son, Jesus Christ, and it was only through grace that they, and we, could be products of such a work. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."—vs. 12

MORE THAN MERE BELIEF REQUIRED

In our article text, Paul recounts once again how that the brethren he was addressing had been specially chosen by God to receive salvation based on their faithfulness in being sanctified and because of their understanding of the Truth of God's Word. This points out the fact that to realize the hope of a heavenly salvation requires more than mere belief, although this is certainly a required element.

It also requires an understanding of God's plan—his Truth—and the resulting sanctifying effect that knowledge should have on one's character. Without these two additional elements—God's Truth and its sanctifying effect—we could not be found fit for a place in Christ's heavenly kingdom. Realizing this, Paul admonished the brethren to "Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught." (chap. 2:15) He also prayed that God would "comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."—vs.17

Paul expressed to the Thessalonian brethren that the Lord is faithful, as well as his confidence that they would be also. He says, "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you." (chap. 3:3,4) We also should be confident, not in our own strength, but in the Lord's, and remember the words, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)."—Heb. 10:23

WHO IS WORTHY?

To look further into the arrangement by which the church is 'chosen to salvation,' we turn to the last book of the Bible—Revelation. The book of Revelation is highly symbolic, and in chapter five we have pictured before our minds, as it were, God upon his throne with a book. This book, or scroll, was written on the inside as well as on the outside, as books were in olden times. However, no one could read it, or even open it, as it was sealed with seven seals. The question is then asked, "Who is

worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" (Rev. 5:2) No one "in heaven nor in earth" was found who was able to open the book, or even to look upon it, causing much weeping and disappointment. (vss. 3,4) The book, in this instance, seems to be symbolic of God's divine purpose and plan, that purpose being to have a perfect race of God's creation here upon earth, enjoying in peace and perfection all the beauties and blessings of God's creative handiwork. However, sin had separated man from God's favor, and instead of living and enjoying the beauties of earth forever, man was subject to the results of sin—disease, sickness, suffering, and eventually death. God's original purpose for man was sealed, unable to be opened and fulfilled, until and unless someone could be found worthy to redeem man from his fallen condition and bring him back into favor with God.

To fulfill the requirement of a redeemer would not be an easy task. First, it required a corresponding price—a perfect human life to be given up in payment of the perfect human life Adam lost when he sinned in the Garden of Eden. Many angelic beings qualified as perfect, yet they were not a corresponding price because they were not human beings—born of flesh and blood. Although a corresponding price from the standpoint of their human lineage could be found among mankind, all failed in the other vital requirement of being perfect. All were of Adam's descent, and, therefore, it was impossible for any of them to give a perfect life as a ransom, for none were perfect, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10) As the Psalmist says, "None of them can by any means

redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” (Psa. 49:7) Surely it seemed that no one was worthy to open the book, and loose its seals.

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Just when it seemed that no one would be found worthy to be the one to carry out God’s plan of salvation to its ultimate conclusion, the cry is heard, “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” (Rev. 5:5) Who was this ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David’? If there was any doubt, it is removed in the next verse, when it identifies this ‘worthy’ one as a “Lamb as it had been slain.” (vs. 6) This could only be Jesus, of whom John the Baptist had said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

Because of Jesus’ faithfulness even unto death and his subsequent resurrection to the right hand of God, it could now be said with much rejoicing, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood {men} from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”—Rev. 5:9, *New American Standard Bible*

TWO CLASSES IDENTIFIED

In Revelation chapter 7, the Apostle John, in vision, sees the reward of the faithful overcomers of the present age—those chosen to salvation. These, he says, are those who receive a heavenly inheritance prior to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom here on earth for the rest of mankind, all of whom have been purchased by Jesus’ blood. In

this chapter are mentioned two distinct, yet related, classes of those who receive such a heavenly reward.

First, John says that the symbolic four winds of trouble that will bring about the end of this present evil order of things and usher in a new age of blessing for mankind (see II Peter 3:7,13) cannot be let loose in their fury until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads, that is, until they have proven themselves faithful, even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) Verse 4 of Revelation chapter 7 states that this group of faithful servants will be a relatively small number, only one hundred and forty four thousand, to be exact. This is in harmony with the words of Jesus when he referred to this class of his faithful followers as a "little flock." (Luke 12:32) It is only this class that has the indelible mark, or seal, of the character of Christ so fixed in their hearts and minds, having been proven loyal through trials and testings. They only can be deemed worthy of "glory and honour and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) Later, John again refers to this small number of faithful ones, and the reason they are rewarded so highly, saying, "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."—Rev. 14:1,4

Notice in the previous scripture that John speaks of this small group as 'firstfruits.' This indicates

that there are to be other groups who will be deemed worthy of life—‘afterfruits,’ as it were—although on a lesser plane of life than the 144,000 to whom immortality is given. One of these groups is the second class spoken of in Revelation 7. Verse 9 identifies this group as a “great multitude” in contrast with the first group comprising only a ‘little flock.’ Also, in contrast, is the statement in this same verse that this second class stood “before the Lamb,” whereas the first group is spoken of as being ‘with’ the Lamb (see Rev. 14:1). John further says that this ‘great multitude’ had “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (chap. 7:14) Thus is indicated to us that this group, while deemed worthy of heavenly life, were not as faithful as the class cited earlier in the chapter. This group had, through a measure of willful sin, soiled their symbolic robes and, through difficult experiences, were required to wash them in order to be found acceptable to God. Because of this, they fail to achieve the reward of immortality given to the little flock. However, they are promised a heavenly inheritance, to serve God ‘before the throne,’ with their life sustenance graciously provided by the Lamb. “For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”—vs. 17

PREACHING AND LIVING THE GOSPEL

One of the privileges that the prospective members of the church—the little flock—have at the present time is to preach the good tidings to others. This is an important requirement for those chosen

to salvation. Revelation 14:6 speaks of an angel, or messenger, as “having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” All who are striving to follow Christ have part in proclaiming the Gospel message. That this would be the case was prophesied by Jesus himself, when he said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.” (Matt. 24:14) In the next verse, Revelation 14:7, John tells us what our message to others should be, “Fear [reverence] God, and give glory to him: . . . worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” God is to be the center of all our preaching—not ourselves, our ideas, our thoughts, our ways, but his only. Additionally, we should preach Jesus, the one who exercised the power of God his Father to create heaven, earth, the sea, and the fountains of waters. “All things were made by him [Jesus, God’s son]; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”—John 1:3

John the Revelator reminds us that it is not only important that we preach the gospel message, but that we also live it each day of our Christian walk. “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Rev. 14:12) This verse indicates that to live according to the gospel message requires endurance, constancy, and patient continuance, because the way is sometimes difficult, the trials and tests severe. John says that to be successful in this lifelong work, two things must take place. First, we must keep the commandments of God. That is, we

must be obedient to the precepts and guidelines which, through the Scriptures, he has set before us. Obedience is the ultimate test of loyalty, and our character must be found in such a state if we are to be deemed faithful and worthy of the crown of life. Second, we must also keep the faith of Jesus. This means we must have the same kind of faith that Jesus had. His faith was such that, even under the most difficult circumstances, he could say, “not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42) His was also a faith based on a correct understanding of God’s plans and purposes. Our faith, too, is to be built upon the simple truth of God’s Word, not upon human reasoning, creeds, or theories.

We find these words concerning those who faithfully complete the work previously described: “I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” (Rev. 14:13) Although these will experience death, yet it will be a blessing, for they will be resurrected—changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Cor. 15:52)—and have the privilege of being associated with Jesus in the heavenly phase of the kingdom to bless all the families of the earth. (Gen. 28:14) They will rest, or cease, from their present earthly ‘labours’ as the above verse indicates, but their works will ‘follow them’ after their resurrection, as they will then have part in the great work of blessing mankind in Christ’s coming kingdom. These faithful, patient, enduring ones are spoken of in Romans 2:7 as those “who by

patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality.”

AN EARTHLY HOPE FOR MANKIND

Our lesson thus far has focused on the reward of those footstep followers of Jesus who would be counted worthy to share a heavenly inheritance with him as immortal spirit beings—his church—as well as those who, although less faithful, will also receive a heavenly reward—a great multitude. The Apostle John, however, presents the additional hope of an earthly inheritance for the remainder of mankind, to be made possible by the establishment of a kingdom of peace here on earth. Revelation 21:1,2 speaks of this arrangement as a “new heaven and a new earth.” This is not to be thought of literally, but in the sense that there will be established a new order of things, and that this new order will have as the source of its governing authority the ‘new heaven’—that is, Christ and his church. They will not reign literally here on earth, as they will be in heaven. However, their governing authority will be made manifest through various faithful earthly representatives who will administer the righteous and perfect laws of that kingdom.

“I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” (Rev. 21:3) This verse states plainly that it has been God’s intent from the very beginning that his tabernacle (dwelling) would be with man. Since he created man to dwell on the earth, it only makes sense that God intended, in due time, for mankind

to live here in perfection forever, enjoying the beauty and bounty of the earth, and also enjoying communion with God as Adam had in the garden of Eden. We believe this time is close at hand, and once the lessons of sin have fully been learned by mankind, this present evil order will give way to the righteous and peaceful kingdom that Jesus taught his disciples to pray for—"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10

John continues by describing some of the wonderful conditions that will exist in the earth during this time of blessing, saying that when this time comes tears will be wiped away, and there will be no more death, sorrow, or crying, not even any more pain! All these former things will have passed away. (Rev. 21:4) Summarizing all these changes, John says, "Behold, I make all things new. . . . Write: for these words are true and faithful." (vs. 5) We can have the utmost confidence that these words will come to pass. They will not fail, for God has so stated the matter.

OBEDIENT MANKIND TO ATTAIN SALVATION

In Revelation 21:22-27, John points out that authority, both religious and civil, during Christ's coming kingdom will center in God and his Son, "the Lamb." (vs. 22) The light of Truth will also emanate from them. (vs. 23) No more will this light be hidden, covered up, or deceitfully distorted by Satan and his devices, for he will be bound, no longer able to influence mankind. (see Rev. 20:1,2) The result of this will be that entire nations and peoples will flock to be part of this wonderful

arrangement. “The nations . . . shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory . . . into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory . . . of the nations into it.”—Rev. 21:24-26

All of mankind who come into harmony with this blessed arrangement and attain full heart obedience to the precepts of righteousness then in force will be those spoken by John —“they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (vs. 27) All such among mankind will then be found also chosen to salvation, all to the praise and honor of God and his precious son, Jesus.

■