

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Destined For What?

by Dan Trygg

“...we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, ³ so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that *we have been destined for this*. ⁴ For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.”

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4

“...you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will *not* escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

1 Thessalonians 5:2-9

Often, when we talk to people about the gospel, we are not clearly proclaiming the same thing that Jesus and the apostles taught. We present it as *all good news*, implying that it will make life *easier* and *smoother*. Jesus said that the gate is broad and the way is easy that leads to *destruction*, and many are travelling down *that* roadway, but the gate is *narrow*, and the way is *difficult* (oppressive, constrictive, afflictive) that leads away to life. Those who find and travel that path are few. It is good news, the *best* news, but like the treasure in the field, or the pearl of great price, it will cost us something to obtain (Matt. 13:44-46). The Lord also talked about those who receive the word with joy, but when afflictions and persecutions happen because of the word, they abandon the faith (Matt. 13:21). *Afflictions and persecutions?* Paul taught that “it is *necessary* through *many afflictions* for us to enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21,22). **We talk about feeling better about ourselves, and saving our lives.** Jesus talked about *denying ourselves*, and everything the world has to offer, in order to follow Him. In fact, He says we are to *lose our lives* for His sake, take up our cross (which means *death* to self) in order to follow Him and find life in God (Lk. 9:23-25). He asks, “What is a person benefited, if he were to gain the whole world, but destroys or suffers the loss of himself?” Paul said he willingly “*counted all things to be loss* in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have *suffered the loss of all things*, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). **People present Jesus as a way to get rich**, but Jesus Himself says, “None of you can be My disciple who does not *give up or renounce all his own possessions*” (Lk. 14:33). He told people to *sell their possessions* and *give to the poor*, and they would have treasure in heaven, and to follow Him (Lk. 12:33; Matt. 19:21). He warned people to *watch out and keep themselves from greed and materialistic desires*, because a person’s life does *not* consist in the abundance of his possessions (Lk. 12:16). He saw money and possessions as *resources to be used for developing relationships* that could lead people to God (Lk. 16:9). These teachings were clearly understood and lived out in the early church (Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-36). We have already seen Paul’s take on that. He willingly *gave up everything* in order to follow Christ. In 1 Timothy 6, he adds, “...those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. But flee from these things, O person of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness” (vss. 9-11). He told Timothy, his young protégé, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, ...to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (1 Tim. 6:17-19). **We preach a man-centered gospel.** We present Christianity as a way to get God on *our* side. We talk about how to get God to *serve us*, how to get Him to *bless us* and *do things for us*. Like a genie in a bottle, if we just rub Him and massage Him enough, in the right way, He will do what we want. No! The Bible is a *God-centered* book. It is about God calling out *for Himself* a people who are willing to *live for* and *serve Him*. We have it *backwards!* **The message is not about how great and wonderful we are**, and therefore God put it all on the line for us. No! **It is about how great and wonderful He is!** He is worthy of all *our* love, commitment and service.

Hopefully, this rather long paragraph sets the stage for the main topic for today’s study: “Destined for *what?*” From the beginning of the Bible, and throughout its pages, any casual reader cannot possibly miss that **God made humankind with a capacity for free moral choice.** These choices are real in their impact and consequences. We were to live in communion with Him, as stewards of the world He made. **Humankind chose to disobey God. The**

consequences were immediate. Things were not “right” anymore. They experienced *guilt*, became *self-conscious*, and *felt the need to hide* from God and each other. The *process of dying* was initiated by their choice, as God had warned. They brought sin into their world, and death came with sin (Rom. 5:12). When they faced God, the enormity of the impact of their choice began to unfold. The world around them also *became distorted* and *corrupted* by their choice, and they had to eke out a living in a world of weeds and difficulty (Rom. 8:19-21). **God, in His mercy, however, gave them a hope of redemption from the curses they had brought upon themselves.** *The “seed of the woman” would crush the head of the “seed of the serpent”* (Gen. 3:15). Through this coming offspring, they would find deliverance from the curse. This was the first hint of the salvation that would come many generations later. Those who called on the name of Yahweh looked to this future hope in faith, trusting that God would do as He promised, and choosing to live for Him (Gen. 4:26; 5:29).

As humanity spread, however, the outworking of sin became more evil and extreme. Wrath is the vigorous upsurge of God’s holy nature against sin and injustice. He is *repelled* by the improper use of what He has made, and His reaction is to *set right the wrong, destroy the evil, judge and punish the evil doer*. He has repeatedly done this, in part, throughout history to individuals, people groups and even nations. The flood of Noah’s time was God’s wrath against evil. Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed because of their sin and injustice. He destroyed the Canaanites because of their oppressive evil and idolatry. The Assyrian and Babylonian empires fell because of their arrogance and sin. *If His wrath were to be fully poured out, the entire world would be destroyed.* In fact, His justice demands it! **This world is destined for wrath and destruction.** There will be *nothing* left of this creation. The elements, themselves, will be destroyed in fervent heat, and this entire creation will be destroyed (II Pet. 3:10-12). **He has withheld the fullness of His wrath, because He intended to save out of this corrupted species of people as many as will respond to the invitations of His truth and His grace** (II Pet. 3:9). The “seed of the woman” was a foreshadowing of His plan to redeem humanity. God was just and righteous to overlook sin in the time before Christ, because He knew Jesus would be the sacrifice to pay for and remove sin. Because of Jesus’ choice to die in our place, God is just and righteous to forgive the sins of those who *take refuge in* and *identify with* Jesus as their Lord and Savior (Rom. 3:25,26). **Those who refuse God’s salvation are lost in their sins, and are destined for wrath** (Jn. 3:36). **Those who lay hold of Christ by genuine faith will be reborn,** not of perishable seed (destined for wrath), but of imperishable seed (I Pet. 1:23). They become children of God, and just as they have borne the corrupted sin-nature passed down from Adam, **they will be transformed and will become like Jesus Himself, in the resurrection when Christ returns to claim His own** (I Cor. 15:20,35-57; I Jn. 3:1,2).

God has not changed. He still is holy, and He still has wrath and judgment for sin. In the NT, the word for “wrath” is used some 36 times. 30 of these times it is in reference to God’s wrath. When we suppress the truth, and stubbornly refuse to repent or acknowledge God, we are storing up His wrath against us (Rom. 1:18; 2:5). **God has not softened over the centuries, or between the Old and New Testaments.** In fact, the NT clearly describes the final outpouring of His wrath upon this planet. There will be no last-minute reprieve. **The world-system is heading for a culmination, rushing headlong toward judgment.** The wrath of God will be poured out in incredible plagues and natural disasters. **In the end, Jesus Himself will come to destroy those who oppose Him.**

In the midst of this hell-bound world, however, there is a remnant of those who respond to the call of God, and choose to yield to and embrace Christ as their Savior and Master. By faith, they are born of the Spirit, and have passed out of death into life. Their citizenship has changed from this world to become a citizen of God’s Kingdom. **If this is true, they are going to be marching to the sound of a different Drummer. They are not going to continue down the broad way, along with the throngs heading to destruction.** They are no longer in lock-step with everyone else. They stop laughing at the inappropriate jokes. **They start spending their time and energy investing in growing in their faith.** They stop doing what they used to do. They go to church or Bible study. They read the scriptures, and maybe Christian books. They spend time seeking God in prayer. They may get involved in some kind of ministry or service work. **As soon as they begin to do these things, they will become noticeable, and they will begin to experience resistance and opposition.** They are going *against* the grain, and they have to *press* and *push* to make progress. This resistance and opposition are some of the “afflictions” they will encounter as they follow Jesus. In fact, **IF they pursue Jesus, they WILL experience afflictions.** The word means “pressure, constriction, something pushing or squeezing you” (cf. Rom. 12:2). It refers to trouble, trials, afflictions, difficulties and tribulations that we will face as we follow Christ. The narrow gate that Jesus described opens to a “constrictive” path, a path with pressures, obstacles, and resistance that we have to push through. **The pressure is designed by the enemy to discourage us, and get us to conform again to his program.** It tests our mettle and the sincerity of our faith. **God permits it, because He knows we have more than enough power and provision in Christ to come through as victors, stronger and more firmly committed for the effort.** Pressures *will* come, but we can *overcome*.