

Real Conversion

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles this evening, and Edward began last week a new study in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

We're going to turn this week to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. Last week we were looking mostly at the background to the letter, which we found in the book of Acts, looking at Paul's ministry and mission in Thessalonica.

And with that fresh in our minds, hopefully we're coming now to the beginning of this letter. And we're going to read the first section there, the whole of chapter 1.

1 Thessalonians chapter 1 at verse 1. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 18] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake, and you became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Amen. May God bless us. This is his word. Well, good evening, friends.

[2 : 49] Let's turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, our passage for this evening. My title for tonight is Real Conversion.

How can we know the true Christian? I want to start off by imagining that we're on the back streets of Thessalonica in the year 48 AD, and two young men meet together who know each other.

Hey, Dimitri, what's that in your back pocket? Is it a parchment? It might be. Come on, what is it? Looks important. It could be a letter.

Now, come on, tell me, who's written to you? That's for me to know, and for you to find out. Well, let me see it. No, Marcos, no. We're all going to see it together, the whole church together.

We must call the brothers and sisters together, and have it read out to the whole congregation. It's very important. It's from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Really? Really? So when are we going to have this meeting?

[3 : 56] We'll have it this very evening. Everything else can wait. End of imaginary conversation. Friends, today, we are as communication rich as people in the first century were communication poor.

We're drowning in communication these days. Every day, we're sending and receiving emails, text messages, Facebooks, and WhatsApps.

In fact, the more communication, the more communication you have, the more you seem to take it for granted, and the less you notice it. But back then, the arrival of a letter was an event, and a longish letter, and a longish letter like one Thessalonians would have been very expensive to send. You had to get parchment, great piece of leather, specially prepared and stretched out. It was very costly. And as for postage, you couldn't just pop it into the red box with a stamp on.

You had to arrange for it to be taken by a courier on foot. Now, Paul probably wrote this letter from Corinth, which is over 200 miles, 200 miles from Thessalonica.

[5 : 05] He would have had to find a fit young man with a strong pair of legs to get the letter from A to B. And he would have had to give the courier money to buy food and lodging for a fortnight or more.

So communication on this scale was very costly in 48 A.D. in terms of time and money. And the Thessalonian Christians, you can be sure, would have treasured this letter and looked after it as if it were the crown jewels.

Let's remember also the human situation here. The people who received this letter were as real and vital as we are today. It's possible for 21st century people like us to look at a document like this as if it were simply of antiquarian interest, dry as dust.

You can imagine a certain type of academic saying, we have here a relatively important piece of epistolary literature from 1st century Greece.

Comparisons with Roman letters of the same period would indicate a common understanding of the literary forms appropriate to this type of communication. But there is a danger, arguably, in pressing comparisons too closely.

[6 : 19] Et cetera, et cetera. Well, all right, Professor. We don't dismiss that approach entirely. It certainly has its place. But let's not forget that these people were real human beings.

They had red blood pumping around their vascular systems. They had knees, athletic at 20, arthritic at 50. They had stomachs, usually pretty hungry ones.

They had emotions. They laughed. They wept. They fell in love. They were heartbroken. They married. They had babies. They got sick. They died. Not many of them lived beyond 50 or 60.

Lots of bacteria and no penicillin. So if we read a letter like this as if it's just an ancient document, or nothing more than a manual of doctrine, we'll miss so much.

Now, it's full of doctrine, as we shall see. But it's so much more. It's the work of a very much alive human being teaching some very much alive Thessalonians. Paul loved them.

[7 : 22] And he wrote this letter to them, first and foremost, to encourage them to keep going in the Christian faith. And that, by the way, is the main motivation behind all the New Testament letters, to enable their recipients to keep on going as Christians and not to fall away from the church and to fall away from salvation.

And Paul knew that the big pressure on these very young Christians, the pressure that might cause them to fall away, was the pressure of persecution, the hostility of other Thessalonians who had heard Paul's message but had rejected it.

Now, let's just remind ourselves of the situation here at this city of Thessalonica. We saw from Acts chapter 17 last week that Paul and Silas and Timothy only managed to stay in the city for a few weeks.

Paul preached in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths only. A number of Jews and rather more Gentiles were persuaded of the truth of the gospel and they joined Paul and Silas.

And that very fact that they left the main body of the synagogue meant that the synagogue was split in two. But that was like lighting the blue touch paper. The city went into meltdown.

[8 : 37] The Jews who couldn't stand Paul's message about Jesus roused a rough rabble of people who attacked the house of a man called Jason who was giving hospitality to Paul and Silas.

And that caused the synagogue... Sorry. Where are we? Yes, Jason was giving hospitality to Paul. The city authorities were then involved and Paul and Silas had to leave under cover of darkness for their own safety.

Now, Paul traveled on westwards to a town called Berea. He preached the gospel there. He got into more difficulties. He traveled south to Athens where he spent a short time and then he went on to Corinth which is probably where he was staying when he wrote this letter.

Probably, therefore, this letter was written only a few weeks after Paul's visit to Thessalonica perhaps three months at the most. But just think of this from Paul's point of view.

How is he thinking of this Thessalonian church? He'd been at Thessalonica only a few weeks. Quite a number of people had turned to Christ because of his preaching.

[9 : 46] We don't know exactly how many. Perhaps 50, maybe more than that. But a baby church had been born. Out of nothing, you might say. Born simply out of a few hours of gospel teaching from the missionary Paul.

And then Paul had had to leave them in a very great hurry. And he knew that the hostile people who had forced him out of town would then turn on the new Christians and put all kinds of pressures on them to renounce their faith.

So, for example, a man might say to his son, Come back to the synagogue, Benjamin, or I shall write you out of my will. No, Father.

I'm not coming back. Pretty costly. No doubt physical violence was also used. Paul knew full well that these young Christians were being pushed and harassed like this.

And he wasn't there to support them and to protect them. So he was full of anxiety for them and very understandably. Now, we'll come to chapter 1 in just a moment.

[10:50] But first of all, we need to see from chapters 2 and 3, if you'd just like to turn the page there, chapters 2 and 3, how Paul felt about this situation.

So just strap on your emotional armor for a moment because we're about to feel some very raw emotion from the apostle. Let's pick up the story at chapter 2, verse 17. Paul writes, But since we were torn away from you, brothers, that's a very strong verb.

Paul hated having to leave the city so soon and under cover of darkness. He felt a bit like a mother being torn away from her baby. Back to verse 17. Torn away in person, not in heart.

My person, my body, had to leave you, but my heart has never left you. And then what? Verse 17. We endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face because we wanted to come to you.

I, Paul, again and again. So he was traveling away from them and all he wanted to do was to turn around and go back to them. But he says in verse 18, I was hindered by Satan.

[11:59] And look at the way he describes the Thessalonian church in verses 19 and 20. This is what he thinks about them. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? For you are our glory and our joy. So he pictures himself there at the return of the Lord Jesus presenting the Thessalonian Christians to Jesus and saying to him, Lord, here is my hope, my joy, my crown of boasting and my glory.

These people rescued for your kingdom. What a way to think about the church. Just look around, glance around this building for a moment at the other people.

Is that a pretty sight? Well, let's learn to imitate Paul. These folk, the church, our hope, our joy, our crown, our glory.

These words raise our view of the church. Now back to the story, chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer. Well, bear what no longer?

[13:08] The lack of news from Thessalonica. The suspense of not knowing what was happening there. What did we then do? We were willing to be left behind at Athens alone and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. Now Athens to Thessalonica is about 200 miles. So Paul sent Timothy.

Now Timothy was a young man. Timothy, my son, I want you to go to Thessalonica and when you get there, gather the church together and establish them. That's the word he uses there in verse 2. Establish them and strengthen them with nourishing teaching so that, verse 3, no one should be moved, derailed, shifted by the afflictions that they're having to endure.

And then verse 4. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass and just as you know.

[14:17] For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

So do you see how Paul had real fears? Real fears that Timothy might get to Thessalonica and find that the church had simply vanished, that it had been wiped out by persecution, the Jews having gone back to the synagogue and the Gentiles melting into oblivion.

But, but, verse 6, but now that Timothy has come back to me, come back to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you.

For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we've been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, now that we know that you're standing fast in the Lord.

So you see what has happened. Timothy has walked the 200 miles to Thessalonica. He's spent time with the church there, teaching them, no doubt running over the gospel with them again and again and its implications.

[15 : 29] Then he's walked the 200 miles back to Paul, and having got back to Paul, he said to him, it's okay, our fears were groundless. The Christians are going on well. They haven't rolled over.

They long to see you. Their faith is firm. And I can only imagine that Paul would have fallen on his knees at hearing Timothy's report and thanked God that God had faithfully cared for these very young Christians.

And this passage of the letter, from chapter 2, verse 17, to the end of chapter 3, opens a window for us into Paul's heart. We feel the strength of his love for the young Christians, and we understand why he wrote this letter.

Look at chapter 3, verse 10. 3.10. He wants to see them face to face and supply what is lacking in their faith. Now that's why he's writing this letter.

Timothy has been there and has given them some instruction and encouragement, but they need more. So the purpose of this letter is to feed them and nourish them and strengthen them so that, chapter 3, verse 3, they continue to be not moved, not unsettled or derailed by the pressures that Paul knows they're enduring.

[16 : 46] Now this letter will have the same kind of effect on us 20 centuries later. We too live under all sorts of pressures. Affliction and difficulty threaten to derail our faith sometimes.

But if we can digest and ingest the nourishment of this letter, we too will be kept on board and enabled to live the Christian life with joyful perseverance.

So let's turn back to chapter 1. Now remember, Paul wrote this chapter after Timothy had returned from Thessalonica with the good news that the church was standing firm.

Paul knows, therefore, that these men and women are truly Christians, that they're truly converted to Christ. People don't endure and survive persecution for their faith unless they really belong to the Lord.

So the purpose of this first chapter is to reassure them that they really are Christians, that they really are converted. And young Christians often need this kind of reassurance and it's very understandable.

[17 : 52] Well, think of it. You reach a point in your life where you give yourself to Christ. Christ. You submit to him as Lord and Savior. You're born again. You're persuaded that the gospel is true.

But in those early days, you sometimes wonder if anything has objectively happened to you. You'd perhaps imagine that you'd wake up to find that you're never tempted to sin, but you find out that you are tempted.

Or you'd perhaps imagine that you would never again feel a bit down or a bit depressed, but you do have low days, especially if it's raining and it's November or you've got exams or you've eaten some fish that's gone off and you're not feeling too good.

You need reassurance that you really do belong to Jesus, that you really have been forgiven. And that's what Paul is giving to the Thessalonian Christians in this first chapter.

And let it be reassurance to us as well for those of us who are Christians. So let's see how Paul brings this reassurance. I've got six headings. Okay, but there'll be brief ones.

[18 : 58] First, he tells them of their identity in verse one. To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are in the Father and they are in Jesus. That describes their permanent location, their eternal habitat.

So anyone who is a Christian can say, I'm in Glasgow and I'm in the Father and I'm in the Lord Jesus. I'm in God, up to the neck, further than that.

That's where I belong. That's my identity. All other identities are secondary. Your name, your family background, your work, your talents, your idiosyncrasies.

idiosyncrasies. The eternally important thing about you is that you are in the Father and in the Lord Jesus. Remember how Jesus said in John chapter 15, abide in me and I in you.

[20 : 00] So to be a Christian is to make your home in the heart of God and it means that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit make their home inside you.

If you're leading a rather lonely life at the moment, here's a suggestion. When you get to bed tonight, say to the Lord, Lord, the most important thing is that I belong to you and you belong to me.

I am yours and you are mine. I am in you and you are in me. That's a source of great peace and contentment.

Paul is reassuring the Thessalonians of their identity. They are not only in Thessalonica, they are in the Father and in the Lord Jesus. That's where they belong.

That is who they are. Now secondly, Paul points out the evidence for their conversion in terms of their changed behavior and this is the subject of verses 2 and 3.

[21 : 02] In verse 2, Paul pours out his thankfulness to God as he, verse 3, remembers their work of faith, their labor of love and the steadfastness of their hope in the Lord Jesus.

Now picture Paul on his knees here in verse 2. He's praying, isn't he? Who is he thinking about as he thanks God? The answer is all of you.

We give thanks to God always for all of you. It's a striking phrase. We thank God for all of you. It suggests that he's going over their names in his mind and perhaps thinking of their individual faces as he prays for them and thanks God for them.

Thank you, dear Father, for Dimitri and Marcos and Andreas and Johannes, for Agatha, Katerina, Bossa Nova, well, maybe not her.

And what is he thankfully remembering in the presence of God? Well, look at verse 3. Faith, love, hope. Where have we come across those three wonderful things before?

[22 : 11] They come several times in Paul's letters, most famously in 1 Corinthians 13. Now there remain these three, faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Now in Paul's teaching, in Paul's thinking, these three virtues demonstrate real Christian faith.

They're at the heart of what it means to experience the saving grace of the gospel.

Paul would almost say you can't be a Christian at all unless your life demonstrates faith and love and hope. Now think of it like this. Faith lifts our hearts towards God and enables us to trust him. Love stretches out to our fellow human beings and enables us to care for them. And hope looks forward with certain expectation to the return of the Lord Jesus.

So faith takes us upwards, love takes us outwards, hope takes us forwards. And how does Paul remember these three qualities emerging in the Thessalonians?

[23 : 19] verse three, your faith makes you work, work to understand the gospel more deeply, work to pass it on to others. Your love makes you labor to look after your fellow Christians and not just Christians but others in the community as well.

The Christian is active in serving the needs of the church. Love makes Christians labor. Think of some of the laboring that goes on here in our fellowship. I'll just name a few things.

Welcoming, painting and decorating, communicating, that's computers, cleaning, giving gifts, making music, teaching children and teenagers, catering, visiting the elderly, comforting the bereaved, supporting those who are suffering.

The list could be endless, couldn't it? But Paul is thinking back those few months to his time in Thessalonica and he's remembering how these people came to life and were active in loving and serving one another.

And he also remembers in verse three the steadfastness of their hope in the Lord Jesus. In other words, they had learned to look forward with longing and sure expectation for his return.

[24 : 35] And Paul's phrase is steadfastness of hope. And that word steadfastness suggests pressure, forcing a person to have to endure things.

You don't need steadfastness or tenacity unless there's powerful pressure on you to give in or to give up. Here's an illustration. Think of a rugby match at Murrayfield. Who shall the teams be? I would suggest Scotland v England. Okay? Now it's the last minute of the game, 80th minute and the final whistle is about to blow and the Scottish scrum this has happened several times. Scottish scrum are pressing for the line. They're about one meter from the try line. That Scottish prop forward has got to be steadfast under pressure, hasn't he? He's got to push with all his thunder thighs, all his 19 stone till the wily Sassanax collapse and he can drop on the ball and score the winning try.

It's pressure that demands steadfastness. Now the Christian looks forward not at the boundary of the try line but at a greater boundary, the end of all things and the return of Jesus and the Christian presses forward disregarding the voices of atheism and agnosticism and despair that try to throw him off course.

[25 : 54] The Christian presses forward steadfastly to the realm of eternal life. So Paul is saying to his beloved Thessalonians, I remember all this and I thank God for all of you.

He's reassuring them that they really are Christians on the evidence of their faith, their love and their steadfastness of hope. Now third, he's reassuring them on the basis of how they received the gospel that Paul preached to them.

Look at verse 4. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you. That's a powerful sentence. We know that God has chosen you.

How could Paul know that? Well, he tells them in verse 5. Because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

The gospel came to them in word. That's the only way that it can come to any of us. The gospel is a verbal message. It proclaims certain truths about Jesus.

[27 : 02] To put it very simply and shortly, it proclaims that he was God incarnate, born of a virgin Mary, that he lived in Israel, he taught, he performed mighty miracles, he died for our sins, he was raised, he ascended into heaven, he sits at God's right hand and he will return as judge and our final savior.

That's the gospel in condensed form. It describes Jesus and his great purpose to save eternally all who come to him in faith and repentance. But you can hear those words, those gospel words, and they can make no impression at all.

They can bounce off a person's brain like raindrops bouncing off a tin roof. Now those words actually convey the sweetest, loveliest message, the best message in the world, and yet a person can hear them and reject them.

But that's not what the Thessalonians did with Paul's message. Look at verse 5. Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

In other words, the bullet went home. You said, yes, we need the savior. The Holy Spirit pressed the gospel into you and you were fully convinced of its truth.

[28 : 19] The gospel powerfully persuaded you that Jesus is the savior and you came to him. You surrendered. You said to him, yes, Lord, I come to you. I turn my back on everything else and I come to you.

Now Paul is saying to the Thessalonians, that's what you did when I preached the gospel to you and nobody responds to the gospel like that unless God has chosen them. It's a sure mark of your conversion, of your election.

It's just the same for us. If you're sitting here now saying deep in your heart, yes, yes, yes, I accept Jesus.

He is my Lord. I treasure his salvation. I rejoice in his promise of eternal life. If you're saying that, it is impossible that you're not a Christian. Your face may be expressionless at this very moment.

You might have a face like a pork pie at this very moment. But if your heart is rejoicing in the Lord Jesus, it is impossible that you're not converted. If on the other hand, your heart is chilly and aloof and you're thinking, I don't want this.

[29 : 31] If that's you, let me encourage you to keep on coming to church and to keep on thinking about these things. God historically has softened many a hard heart. He attacks our hard hearts like an army attacking a fortified city until the defenses crumble.

It's what he does. I should know because he did it for me. But he does it because he loves us and he has no wish that we should perish. When we receive the gospel and acknowledge its power, that is evidence that God has chosen us.

Now, fourth, Paul reassures the Thessalonians because, verse 6, they became imitators of Paul, Silas, and Timothy and of the Lord himself.

In other words, they began to display the family DNA or the family likeness. And how is this seen? Well, halfway through verse 6, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

So, as they listened to Paul preaching, as they began to understand the implications of what he was saying, as their hearts began to say yes, yes, to Paul, they were aware of two powerful forces, affliction and joy.

[30 : 53] Affliction because already their relatives were breathing fire and brimstone at them, threatening to hurt them physically or financially. But at the same time, joy because they were overwhelmed with the thought that God loved them so much that Jesus had laid down his life to

bring forgiveness for their sins.

And this is the family DNA, the family likeness for all Christians, this mixture of affliction and joy. And it all starts with Jesus himself because Paul imitates Jesus.

Jesus, think of him, is a man of unfathomable sorrows and overwhelming joys at the same time. Sorrow at our sin, sorrow at the power of death.

Do you remember how he broke down in tears at the graveside of Lazarus? But also, immeasurable joy, joy in the love of his father, joy in the accomplishment of his mission.

How could he not rejoice at the thought of rescuing countless people, an uncountable multitude, to share the everlasting joy of his kingdom? And Paul too, this man with a heart the size of a planet, his life was crisscrossed with sorrows as his body was crisscrossed with scars.

[32 : 11] And yet he knew joys far deeper than the joys of most of us. His letters, for all the pain that they sometimes express, are the letters of a deeply joyful and deeply thankful man.

And that's the authentic Christian life for us, joy and sorrow experienced simultaneously at the same time at different levels in our lives. So even in the midst of our most painful experiences, we can rejoice that our sins are forgiven and our names are written in heaven.

That's the mixture of affliction and joy Paul is saying to the Thessalonians. That's the imitation of us and of the Lord Jesus. And that demonstrates that you share the family likeness and belong to the Lord's family.

Then fifth, Paul reassures them on the ground that the world is noticing how remarkably they've changed. Verse seven, because you have become imitators of us and of the Lord, you have become an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

That's the northern part of Greece and the southern part. And verse eight, it's not just in Greece that God's word has been sounding forth from you. Everybody, everywhere, is hearing of your commitment to the gospel.

[33 : 30] For they themselves, verse nine, people in lots of other churches he means, they are speaking about the way you Thessalonians received us and our message. It's a very interesting little passage.

Paul is making the point that a church can be an encouraging example to other churches. And isn't that something that a church like us, like ourselves, should wish for?

Not only for ourselves, but for other churches which are unashamed in teaching the Bible. Have you heard about the Tron Church in Glasgow? And this other church and that other church, they're unashamed of the Bible.

They're preaching the real Bible gospel. They're not kowtowing to the spirit of the age. And people at that church are listening to the Bible gospel and the ethics that flow from the Bible gospel and they're keen to obey them.

That's a church that is not prepared to bow to the cultural Marxism of the modern world. And to be an example like that will encourage other churches to be bolder in teaching the Bible themselves, teaching it radically and living by the Bible radically.

[34 : 39] A church that lives radically by the Bible will be noticed and God will use it to draw many people to faith and salvation. Now sixth and last, Paul reassures the Thessalonian Christians that they really are Christians because, verse 9, they have made a 180 degree turn.

They have abandoned their former idols. They have turned to God, the living and true God, and, verse 10, they are now waiting for his son to return from heaven.

Jesus, raised from the dead, whose mighty power will deliver his people from the wrath to come. Now it's a miracle of divine power that turns a heart from worshipping the idols of the world.

I don't need to name those idols, you know what they are. An idol is anything that a person lives for. An idol is the thing that people dream about or daydream about, the thing that seems to bring color and purpose and joy into their lives, the desirable thing, the coveted goal.

But Paul is talking here about a profound reorientation whereby a person ceases to live for the idols of this world and begins to long for the world to come, to wait, as Paul puts it in verse 10, to develop an eager longing for the return of Jesus.

[36 : 10] Friends, I have just had a week or so ago the experience of turning 70. And I can tell you it's a pretty wonderfully focusing experience. It concentrates the mind rather wonderfully.

You realize that you're on the home straight. 60, let me tell you, 60 is nothing. You're a boy at 60.

You've hardly started shaving at 60. But when you turn 70, it's almost as though you're on a running

track and you're running round and round several times and then suddenly you round the bend and you enter the home straight and you're looking at the tape, the finishing tape at the far end.

As I say, it makes you very thoughtful. It makes you realize that time is short. Now, Paul would say to us, look at that finishing tape and remember what's really involved if you're a Christian.

Learn to look forward to the Lord's return. In fact, surely the message is learn to look forward to the Lord's return when you're young. Don't wait till you're an antique. All of us stand on the lip of eternity.

Some of us might step into it next week. The prospect of the return of Jesus for which we wait, it's a prospect both wonderful and terrifying. Look at verse 10.

[37 : 23] Why has God raised Jesus from the dead? Well, the answer is to tell the world that the world's judge and savior is coming. The resurrection of Jesus is the sure foretaste of the day of judgment.

The judge is on his way and when he comes, he will deliver his people as Lot was delivered from the fire and brimstone that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. But God's anger will engulf the unrepentant world.

On that day, it will be better to meet Jesus as our savior than as our judge. I want to end by pointing out a lovely phrase in verse 4 which I haven't really picked up on.

Just look back to verse 4. We know, brothers, loved by God that he has chosen you. Brothers, of course, means brothers and sisters. But this is a thought to delight our hearts.

Those who belong to Jesus are loved by God. Loved by God. That says a great deal more about God than it says about us because after all, we are hardly lovable in our natural state.

[38 : 33] God sets his heart upon us as the bridegroom sets his heart upon the bride. And this love that God has for his people far outpasses any kind of love that we might know on earth.

It's far deeper and purer and more tenacious than the love of a mother for her baby or a father for his children or the love of the best kind of friendship. God loves those who belong to him deeply and everlastingly.

Just think about that as you go home this evening and rejoice in it. We know, brothers, loved by God that he has chosen you. And that divine choice, undeserved and unfathomable, is demonstrated in lives that are turned right around, away from the idols of this world, waiting for Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Well, let's pray together. What mercy and love you have shown to the world, our dear Father, when we were lost and hopeless and far from you, alienated from your love, you sent a Savior, the Savior, Jesus, who took the penalty of our sins on himself.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. And he, in dying and rising for us, has opened the gateway to everlasting life.

[40 : 21] Keep us, we pray, in him and in your care until the day of his return. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.