

Series: 1 Thessalonians
Title: Appointed Afflictions
Text: 1 Thess 3: 1-9
Date: Jan 26, 2023
Place: SGBC, NJ

God makes his people one in Christ.

Ephesians 4: 4: *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
5: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6: One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

By the grace of God, Paul was one with his Thessalonian brethren. But he had been taken from them to Athens, Greece. So his heart was with them.

1 Thessalonians 2: 17: But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

1 Thessalonians 3: 1: Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2: And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: 3: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4: For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. 5: For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

Paul desired greatly to know the faith of his brethren at Thessalonica. Therefore, Paul was willing for Timothy to leave him at Athens, alone, so Timothy could go to his brethren at Thessalonica. Paul sent Timothy to them for this purpose found in verse 3...*to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith.*

It is through the preaching of the gospel of Christ that the Lord *establishes and comforts* his people concerning our faith. When we hear of how Christ finished the work of redeeming God's chosen people the Spirit establishes our new heart on Christ and gives us much comfort. The gospel declares how Christ is risen from the dead with all power over all, how Christ is head over all things to the church, how Christ is ruling and reigning in our presence even now and shall rejoice over us with singing. This is the message the Spirit blesses to establish our hearts and comfort his saints.

The Lord is faithful to establish us so that we shall not be moved away from Christ by the afflictions.

WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED

1 Thessalonians 3: 3: That no man should be moved by these afflictions:

It is only by the Lord keeping us that we shall not be moved away from Christ by the afflictions.

In pride the wicked boast that they shall never be moved. The proud are the unregenerate. Some are irreligious. Others are in religion. But both think by their own strength and works they shall not be moved.

Psalms 10: 6: He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for *I shall* never *be* in adversity.

But God's saints are flesh and blood. We are weak in our flesh. God's people are sinners saved by grace. By the Spirit of God we *know* our need of Christ constantly. Afflictions and trials trouble God's people. Despite all the evil Absalom did to David, his father, when Absalom died, David was moved in sorrow.

2 Samuel 8: 33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

So it does not mean we will not be shaken and have sorrow. We are moved in that sense. But God has promised his people we shall not be moved--not moved away from the hope we have in Christ. But unlike the wicked, we have experienced enough of our own weakness to know it is only by the Lord that we shall not be moved. The Lord Jesus looked only to the Father. He said,

Psalm 16: 8: I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Christ has taught us that it is by him alone that we shall not be moved. So we say what David said of himself,

Psalm 21: 7: The king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved.

God makes precious, unchangeable promises to his church, his holy city. The LORD God promises the church,

Psalm 46: 4: *There is* a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy *place* of the tabernacles of the most High. 5: God *is* in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, *and that* right early.

When affliction comes we shall be shaken. We are moved in heart at first due to the weakness of our sinful nature. But we shall not be moved away from the Hope of the gospel. God will see to it we shall not be moved away from the preaching of Christ. This is because God has planted us in Christ our Refuge.

1 Chronicles 17:9: Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning,...

AFFLICTIONS ARE OF GOD

1 Thessalonians 3: 3...for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4: For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

This is great comfort to the child of God. Afflictions are appointed and ruled by God our Father. Nothing is out of order with God. All things are ordered by His gracious purpose and brought to pass by his will. All comes to pass at his appointment, governed by His gracious hand.

When affliction comes, consider what God did in creation.

Psalm 104:19: He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down.

Then consider our birth. The birth of a man, the days we live, what we accomplish in life, the time we die, -all is by God's appointment.

Job 14: 5...his days *are* determined, the number of his months *are* with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

God appointed the time when he would fulfill prophecy by Christ his Son and God brought it to pass at the set time.

Habakkuk 2:3 For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Galatians 4: 4: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5: To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Think about how we were given faith in Christ. God sent the gospel and quickened us at the appointed time. God appointed who he will save and he shall save us.

Ezekiel 16:8: Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.

1 Thessalonians 5: 9: For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our Lord told us beforehand that afflictions shall come. He sent Paul telling these brethren beforehand. Then it came to pass just as the Lord said it would. So when affliction comes, let that be a comfort to you child of God. Our sovereign Savior has appointed the affliction. He rules them. And Christ shall keep his redeemed from being moved away from the hope of the gospel. The same as God appointed the affliction, God appointed us to receive a kingdom.

Isaiah 44: 6: Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. 7: And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. 8: Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it?* ye *are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any*.

Luke 22:29: And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;

So our afflictions and trials and troubles are appointed by God, "*for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*" Christ taught Paul this same thing. When the Lord Jesus called Paul the Lord told Simeon he would show Paul the things Paul must suffer.

Acts 9:16: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Affliction from men is due to the enmity of men's hearts against Christ and his people. But it is not merely due to that. Man can do nothing except it be God's appointment. Afflictions from men, like every sort of affliction, are by the appointment of God. God's everlasting covenant of salvation is "ordered and sure in all things." So is the affliction which God appointed for his people. We read in Job 5: 6, "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust." Affliction is not by chance. Paul knew that. On his way to Jerusalem, he said,

Acts 20: 22: And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24: But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

What a comfort to know! Do you suffer affliction, child of God? Our Lord appointed his child to the affliction. The Lord appointed the precise affliction just for his child. Where we see disorder, God is working all things in perfect order so that "all things working together for good, to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Now the devil's aim is to make us forget this. That was Paul's great fear for these brethren at Thessalonica. He said in verse 5, "*I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.*"

This affliction happened to these brethren immediately and we can be sure that it caused them some trouble at first. Take Jacob as an example. The Lord made Jacob know his presence was with Jacob. But almost immediately Jacob became fearful that he and his family would perish by the hand of his brother, Esau.

These fears are not only due to our old man and our sinful unbelief but also by the power and craftiness of satan. He appeals to our discontented sin-nature, to our self-pity and our rebellious will. The devil appeals

to our fleshly love of ease and our dislike of suffering. He works on our carnal mind to make us mind the things of the flesh.

But what comfort when we look to Christ when he walked this earth

Matthew 4: 1: Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

It was appointed for our Savior to be tempted of the devil, too. But Christ defeated him. And Christ did so for his people. The tempter said to our Lord, "If thou be the Son of God." If the devil said that to our Lord then he will say it to you and to me. But knowing that Christ was led of the Spirit of God then we know he is ruling our affliction as well. The Lord defeated the devil and sin, death and hell. Our Sovereign Savior only uses the devil to show us and keep us believing Christ is our King and our Salvation.

THE END PURPOSE OF AFFLICTION

The end purpose of affliction is always for the good of God's saints. Paul is writing this after the fact. He looked back on the affliction and on God's deliverance with adoration and gratitude for what God worked in the saints at Thessalonica. It turned to their good.

1 Thessalonians 3: 6: But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: 7: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: 8: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. 9: For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

Paul had suffered much affliction. But their faith strengthened his faith in the Lord. If any believer is suffering affliction then remember this. When the Lord first afflicted us by making us hear the law declare us guilty, it was by God's appointment. We were looking at our person and works, imagining we were so good and righteous that God would surely be obligated to open heaven for us. But the commandment came and reached to the thoughts and intents of our heart and all our goodness, for which we thought God should receive us, became sin to us. Then we saw it was all that for which we saw God should damn us. The plum line of the law made us see how out of line our person and work is. We came up short.

But what did the Lord do through that affliction? He revealed Christ in our hearts. The Spirit of God made us know Christ alone is our Redemption from the curse; Christ alone is our Righteousness of acceptance with God; Christ alone our Perfection of holiness; Christ alone our constant Refuge. He was faithful to us before he ever gave us faith. He gave us faith because Christ had justified us. And by revealing himself to us, he gave us joy in our new heart that we had never known. Do you see the good God worked through that affliction?

For his saints, our Redeemer lovingly sends the appointed affliction, to keep this good news in our hearts to keep us rejoicing in him alone. When the dog is corrected he tries to bite the stick that smites him. The world looks at second causes. They try to find deliverance by second causes. We may do that for a time. But Christ makes his faithful dogs look beyond the second causes to the Master who holds the rod. He makes us behold our faithful heavenly Father who appointed the affliction. He makes us see he afflicted us for our good. In doing so he make us know again we are not saved by our strength. He turns our eye of faith beyond these things below to our Redeemer seated on the throne of His glory, wearing the crown that belongs to Him alone.

Israel was afflicted in Egypt, but the more they were afflicted, the more they grew. Likewise, the Lord grows all his people through affliction. He grows his child in faith showing us our Redeemer is ruling it all to show us he is our sovereign Savior forever. God draws us lean upon his mighty arm, upon his loving breast, to know we are safe in the arms of his unchangeable, eternal love so that we heed his word. He reminds again that the wildest storm is ruled by our Redeemer to teach his child to trust his all-wise, all-gracious will. Then we thank him with joy and adoration. This is the end purpose of affliction.

Psalm 119: 71: Lord, it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes...75: I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

Psalm 34: 18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. 19: Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

Child of God, in every affliction, remember, every work of providence of our Redeemer is for you to teach you he is your Deliverer.

Zephaniah 3:17: The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty.

Child of God, the Lord is thy God. He is in the midst of his church, collectively and individually. Our Savior is mighty to save us from all our sins and sorrows, from all our fears and foes. He has already conquered them all! Christ Jesus our Lord will save you from those who afflict you and gather you and keep you gathered. Scripture says that he will save. He will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in his love. He will rejoice over thee with singing. Thus our Lord brings glory to his name as brethren rejoice in the Lord even as Paul did in verse 9, "*For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.*"

Amen!