

Asking For and Walking in The Old Paths

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Now before we turn to the Word of God I want to do two things. I want to say what a joy it is to be back among you after I won't guess how many years, but it is a delight to step through those doors. I told your pastor. I said, "Yes, I vividly remember the building." I said, "There was a support beam right in the middle."

Now that is a very unique thing. So it makes preaching in your midst memorable. And it is a delight for me to be with you with my dear wife Dorothy and we are thankful that God gave us a good trip down here by air and we look forward to these days among you.

Then the second thing I want to do, I have no confidence in the devil. He will do anything he can to distract our minds from the Word of God. And Jesus said when the sower sows the Word, the devil like the birds of the air follow behind the sower and when they see seed on the wayside they pluck it up. The devil will use anything to distract our mind from the Word of God.

So these days I have to explain to people. I am not halfway to being Frankenstein. You see this button on my head and this object hanging on this ear and another object on that ear. Those are my mechanical ears, without which I am basically a deaf man.

Several years ago I had a sudden hearing loss in the left ear and then 11 months later in the right ear and these two instruments are God's gifts to keep me in the land of the hearing. So I don't want anybody sitting there wondering just when there is a vital point, "What is that button on his head? What is that doing there? Why does he have that button on his head?"

Now you know and God willing in the Sunday school class Sunday morning I may tell you more about God's amazing work in creating the human ear and in partially restoring ears that go dead.

So I have taken care of those items. And they are behind us and now we are going to turn to that text that your pastor read as a call to worship, Jeremiah chapter six and verse 16.

And it is so good to hear the rustling of your Bibles when we announce a text.

I remember being in a meeting where there was a converted Roman Catholic priest and it was a meeting at Trinity years ago and he said, afterwards he said, “Oh, it was so good, pastor Martin. Every time I announced a text, I heard the rustling of the new covenant priesthood coming out Romanism where people don’t have access to their Bibles. It is a wonderful privilege.”

And it is good to hear the rustling of the new covenant priesthood.

Jeremiah six and verse 16.

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Stand in the ways and see or look and ask for the old paths where is the good way and walk therein and you shall find rest for your souls.’ But they said, ‘We will not walk therein.’”

Now during this weekend of ministry, it is my intention to preach to you five messages on the theme: Asking for and walking in the old paths.

Now the language of this thematic title is obviously taken directly from the words of Jeremiah six and verse 16, the passage that was read as a call to worship and that I have, again, read in your hearing.

However, if you are to be confident that my use of this passage is legitimate, we have got to spend a little bit of time looking at the passage in the setting in which it comes to us in the Word of God.

And I want to spend just a couple of minute with you considering the prophet and the people to whom he was called to minister. This verse is found in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah called one of the major prophets. Who was this man Jeremiah? Who are the people to whom he spoke these words, “Stand in the ways and ask for the old paths”?

Well, we learn in chapter one that Jeremiah was called while a relatively young man as a priest in the land of Anathoth in the tribe of Benjamin.

Chapter one verse one, “The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.”

So it may be in the first year of his priesthood for people who were in the priestly line began to serve at age 20 and we know from verse six that he was a relatively young man. He says, “Ah, Lord, I don’t know how to speak. For I am a child.”

God has spoken to him and God has indicated he is to be God’s mouthpiece, but he feels the burden of his youth and he is called primarily to minister to what would be called the southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah in the southern part of Israel. The northern tribes have already gone into captivity and he is going to minister primarily to those people in the southern kingdom, the center of whose life was at Jerusalem.

And he was told right off the bat what his ministry was going to be. Look at verse 10 in chapter one.

“I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms to pluck up, to break down, to destroy, to overthrow and to build and to plant.” A two-thirds negative ministry, four negatives, two positives and God says, “Jeremiah, that is what your ministry is going to be.”

Furthermore, it was a minister that would concentrate on the judgment of God that was to come upon Judah.

Look at verse 13.

“The Word of the Lord came to me,” chapter one, “The second time saying, ‘What do you see?’ I said, ‘I see a boiling cauldron and the face thereof is from the north.’ Then the Lord said unto me, ‘Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land for I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north says the Lord and they shall come.’”

Verse 16.

“I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness in that they have forsaken me and burned incense unto other gods.”

God is going to bring the Babylonians from the north and they are going to be God’s instrument to punish Judah for their apostasy from the Lord and their turning unto idols.

Now, Jeremiah was told at the outset he wasn’t going to win any popularity contest. Look at verse 18 of chapter one.

“I have made you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar. Brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes, against the priests, against the people. Jeremiah, you are going to be set against every single category within the land of Judah. And, furthermore, they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.”

So here is the nation, sunk into idolatry and apostasy from God, ripe for judgment. But what was their mindset?

Well, the people were self justifying. Look at chapter two and verse 23.

“How can you say, ‘I am not defiled. I have not gone after the Baalim’?”

Here God is charging them with idolatry and worshiping the Baals and they say, “What are you talking about? That is not us. We are not going after these idols.”

Chapter two and verse 35, a similar protestation.

“Yet you say, ‘Oh, I am innocent. Surely his anger is turned away from me.’”

They are persuading themselves that all is well in spite of the manifold evidences that they were, indeed, worshipping idols. They were self justifying. They have undergone a surface change.

Chapter three and verse 10.

“Yet for all of this, her treacherous sister Judah has not returned to me with her whole heart, but feignedly said the Lord.”

They went through the semblance of a kind of revival under Josiah. But God says through the prophet, “It is all surface. It is all a sham. They didn’t turn to me with the whole heart and truly seek me. They are playing games, religious games.”

And then, added to all of this, they are lulled into a false assurance by the false prophets. Look at chapter six verses 13 and 14.

“For from the least of them to the greatest of them everyone is given to covetousness, from the prophet even to the priest. Everyone deals falsely. They have healed the hurt of my people slightly saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? Nay. They were not at all ashamed. Neither could they blush.”

What a terrible state to be in, wedded to their idols, besotten in their sins, they don’t blush. One of the reasons being the false prophets were saying, “Everything is all right. Peace, peace,” when in reality there was no peace.

Now what was the overall thrust, then, of Jeremiah’s message to such a people?

Well, he is pronouncing judgment is sure to come. But he had another note in his preaching and that note is found in almost all of the prophet whenever they announce judgment. There is a promise of mercy if the people will repent and turn from their sins.

And so in chapter three verses 10 to 12 we see that emphasis in the ministry of Jeremiah, chapter three and verses 12 to 14.

“Go and proclaim these words to the north and say, ‘Return backsliding Israel, says the Lord. I will not look in anger upon you. I am merciful, says the Lord. I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity that you have transgressed against the Lord your God and scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree and have not obeyed my voice says the Lord. Return, oh backsliding children.’”

Here God pronounces that his heart is still towards his people.

Chapter four, verse one.

“If you will return, oh Israel, says the Lord, if you return to me, put away your abominations. Then you shall not be removed. I have told you you are going to be scattered. You are going to be removed, however it is not too late if you yet repent and turn from your sins and turn unto me I will show mercy upon you.”

And it is in that framework of announcing judgment yet promising mercy upon repentance that we come to our text for this weekend of ministry

“Thus says the Lord, Stand in the ways and see and ask for the old paths where is the good way and walk therein. You shall find rest for your souls.”

Here is God taking the picture of a wanderer, of a man on a journey and he has lost his way and he comes, as it were, to a crossroads and God says, “Look, don’t go on stumbling, feeling your way with uncertainty. Stop and look and as you look out then ask. Maybe someone can point you to the right way.” God says, “Stand in the way. Stop your walking. Stop your moving. Look around. Observe the possibilities before you and then inquire. Where are the old paths, the paths that lead to the good way?”

And then God says, “Walk therein and you will find rest for your soul.”

So this is one of the many appeals through the prophets saying, “God has not fully and finally washed his hands of you. Here his voice and return into the way of blessing and God will give rest to your souls.”

So that is the setting of that passage. Now let’s spend just a few minutes to open up the passage itself.

It begins by drawing our attention to the majestic speaker.

“Thus says the Lord.” And then the prophet spoke. He said, “Thus says Yahweh, Jehovah, the great I am,” who when Moses said, “Who shall I say is sending me to Pharaoh?” God said, “You tell him, I am that I am.”

God is the self sustained, self sufficient God who needs nothing outside of himself to sustain himself, to make himself completely satisfied and fulfilled in himself. He is the great, the glorious I am.

Now think of it. This great God who needs nothing from his creatures, God needs nothing from you, nothing from me to be totally satisfied and fulfilled in himself. Within the fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is perfect delight and perfect joy, perfect fulfillment. And yet God steps, as it were, outside of himself and comes to the likes of you and me and says, “I am going not speak to you.”

Think of it.

Thus says the Lord. The God in whom we live, we move and have our very being, we can't draw our next breath unless God says, "Draw it."

He gives life and breath and all things. That is what Paul said in preaching to the pagans on Mars' hill. Yet this God condescends to speak directly to his people and insofar as his Word is rightly expounded, that is the God who is speaking to you, to you, to you and me and every single one of us.

He comes to us in condescending grace. He needs nothing from us. And yet in love and mercy he deigns to speak to us. That is the majestic speaker. It is the Lord himself.

Now notice secondly the arresting commands. What does God say to this traveler who has lost his way?

Well, first of all, he is to stand and see or look. He is not to rush forward in a thoughtless way. He is not to be simply carried by the momentum that has brought him where he is. The traveler is to pause. He is to look about him. He is thoughtfully consider where he is and what his options are. That is the first command that this great God issues to his people: Stand and see. And that is the command God is going to be issuing to us throughout this weekend of ministry, causing us to stop, to look about us, to consider where we are in everything from our own personal relationship to God, to where we are in our own walk before him, where we are in our relationship to his church, where we are in relationship to the Lord's Day and a number of other things. This God is calling upon us not to simply go on unthinkingly and carelessly in the path in which he finds us.

That is the first arresting command: Stand and look or see.

Secondly, then God says we are to ask for the old paths. Literally, the ancient paths.

Now they are old or ancient paths, not nearly old by man made traditions for God everywhere condemns people being shaped by man made traditions.

Do you remember what Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day?

"You make void the Word of God by your traditions."

And Job could speak in Job 22:15 of the traditions of wicked men. Not all traditions, not all old paths are worthy to be walked in. This is what Job said.

"Will you keep the old way which wicked men have trodden?"

Wicked men have their patterns that are old and ancient, but these ancient paths are called all together the good way. Notice paths is plural, but the way is singular.

As for the old paths which all together constitute the good way. And what is that good way, the old paths? It is the way marked out by the Word of the living God. For God later on in this very chapter indicts the people because they will not be obedient to his Word. And it is his Word that constitutes the old or the ancient paths that all together are the good way, the way of Psalm one where it says the Lord knows the way of the righteous, that narrow way of Matthew seven and verse 14.

“Enter in by the narrow gate and walk upon the narrow way that leads unto life.”

So the arresting commands are: Stand and look, ask for the old paths which constitute the good way. And, thirdly, God says “Having discovered those paths and that good way, travel in it. Walk in it. Plant your feet in it and in dependence upon God and his grace, give your self to living your life along the directions of that good way, constituted of the old paths.”

So we have looked at the gracious speaker, thus saith the Lord; the arresting commands. But now look at the gracious promise.

“And if you do this, you will find rest for your souls.”

You will find that rest and peace of soul which can be found in no other course of life.

Now those words, “You shall find rest for your souls,” do they sound familiar? Remember what Jesus said?

“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you shall find rest to your souls.”

Our Lord was quoting these very words. According to the New Testament use of this passage, where do we find rest of soul? By coming to Christ, taking the yoke of Christ and learning of Christ. For it is in coming to Christ who himself is the way and bringing ourselves under the yoke of Christ and submitting our minds and wills to the Word of Christ we find rest to our souls. We have found the old paths and the good way.

And so in the light of these marvelous promises of God, preceded by these very arresting commands of God, I want us in these days together to stop and to look about us and to contemplate where we are and what the options are before us in things spiritual and eternal. And having done so and then seeing the way marked out by the Word of God of the good paths that constitute the good way, the old paths that constitute the good way, to commit ourselves to walk in them so that we may know the blessed promise fulfilled. We shall find rest to our souls.

Now, having examined this foundational and framework text, I trust your conscience is persuaded that it is right for us to use it as a call to our own hearts to ask for and to walk in the old paths of the God's changeless revelation as found in the Scripture.

And in the remainder of my time tonight, I want us to consider the first area of that mandated pass, to stop, to look, to ask and to walk in it.

And what is it? Well, I want to describe it this way. It is a call to the old path of a Holy Spirit wrought conversion to God. It is a call to the old path of a Holy Spirit wrought conversion unto God. That is, a heart and life transformation that is described in various ways in the New Testament. It is called a new birth. It is called a new creation. It is called putting on the new man. It is called a resurrection from the dead. It is called a turning from darkness to light.

All of these terms are richly set before us to show us that this matter of truly being converted unto God is a marvelous, a glorious, a heart and a life transforming experience as well as a destiny changing experience.

Far more than mere deciding for Christ and accepting Christ or a mere intellectual acceptance of the objective facts of the gospel, we want together to stop and to look, to ask and to answer ourselves: Have I indeed, by the grace and power of God, experienced a sound, Holy Spirit wrought conversion unto God?

And as we wrestle with that question together, I know of no single passage in all of the Scriptures that more succinctly, that is, in a nice, brief, summarized way and yet more comprehensively that it means more adequately addresses this issue than 1 Thessalonians chapter one verses nine and 10.

And so we are going to park here for the remainder of our time together.

Looking at this passage as the passage pointing out the old path and the good way of a Holy Spirit wrought conversion unto God.

Notice the setting now. Paul begins this chapter with giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians and as he gives thanks with his companions, he is both remembering, verse three, and knowing, verse four.

He said, "We pray for you with thanksgiving, remembering and knowing."

And what did they know?

He said, "We know, beloved of God, your election."

Well, how did Paul know their election? He tells us.

"Because our gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power."

Well, how did he know the gospel had come to them in power?

Because of what the gospel did in the transformation of their lives.

When the gospel comes in power, the gospel comes with life transforming impact upon us so that he can go on to say in verse six, “You became, something happened that you became something you were not.”

Verse seven. “So that you became...”

The gospel was not a set of ideas that floated in one ear, floated out the other and meanwhile they said, “Well, I have heard it floating here and float out there and I don’t object to it. Christ is the Son of God. Christ died for sinners. That is all.”

Oh, no, no.

When that gospel came to them in power, they became something entirely different from what they were before that gospel came in power. And it is beautifully summarized in verses nine and 10 and I want you to look with me now at those verses.

“For they themselves report concerning us what matter of entering in we had unto you, how that you turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

Notice the three very basic things that constitute a Holy Spirit wrought conversion unto God.

Number one, the first thing that this gospel does when it comes in power, there is a decisive turning. Notice the language of Paul.

“You turned unto God from idols.”

Now this word “turned” is one of the richest words in the New Testament for that Holy Spirit wrought conversion unto God.

Luke uses it no fewer than eight times in the book of Acts and for a specimen use of it look at Acts chapter 26 and verse 20. For here the apostle Paul is telling us what message he preached throughout the entirety of his missionary church planting career as an apostle.

Verse 19 of Acts 26.

“Wherefore, oh King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared, both to them of Damascus,” that is where he first preached after he was converted, “and

at Jerusalem,” that is where he went next, “and throughout all the country of Judea and also to the Gentiles that they should repent,” here we are now, “and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance.”

Paul says a dominant note in his preaching wherever he went was that men should turn to God. And obviously he preached that when he was in Thessalonica. And now we can say, “Because the gospel came to you not in word only, but in power, you Thessalonians, actually turned to God.”

Now notice. There is both a positive and a negative aspect of this turning unto God, a positive and a negative aspect.

Here is the positive. You turned unto God. And the words that Paul uses give this picture. When the gospel came to you, you had your backs turned against God. Your face was turned against God. But when the gospel came and you heard the good news of God’s love to sinners in the person and work of his beloved Son, when that gospel came in power, you turned towards God.

This is the very phrase used in John chapter one.

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,” προς τον θεον (pros ton thay-on), towards God, face to face with God. Christ comes out of heaven to earth to live the life we should live, but did not, to die the death we deserve and dare not. For what purpose? To bring us into the very fellowship with God that he had from all eternity. That is what he came from heaven to do. The gospel finds us with our backs to God, our faces away from God, but in a Holy Spirit wrought conversion there is a turning towards God.

Now it has to be this because, you see, the very purpose for which Christ died was to have a people who no longer live with their backs and their faces to God.

Where does the Bible say that?

Well, turn with me to 1 Peter chapter three and verse 18.

I am having trouble with one of my artificial ears, so be patient with me.

All right, what do we read in 1 Peter 3:18?

“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, “now notice, “that he might bring us to God.” He suffered not just to save us from the wrath to come, but to bring us to God, to put us back in a relationship of face to face delightful, joyful communion and fellowship with God himself.

“Died, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God.”

Now that is the purpose for which Christ died. What is the actual call that comes to us in the gospel overture? Listen to the prophet Isaiah.

“Seek the Lord while he may be found.” You want to look at it in chapter 55. “Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way.” Now notice the next words, Isaiah 55 verse seven. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.”

Here the gospel call is there is pardon. There is forgiveness, but it is found in the way of returning unto the Lord and to our God. God does not pardon sinners still living with a turned back and a turned face who reach back and say, “Oh, yes, I believe Jesus died for sinners so I won’t go to hell when I die. But I will still live with a turned back and a turned face.”

God does not pardon such sinners. God leads them under the wrath that they justly deserve. And when there is a Holy Spirit wrought conversion there is this decisive turning, a turning unto God.

But then there is the negative. We are back in 1 Thessalonians now. What was the negative?

“You turned unto God from your idols, from your idols.”

Now were all the Thessalonians literal idol worshippers? When you read how the gospel came to Thessalonica in Acts chapter 17, of how Paul went in the synagogue and preached to the Jews and in a short time he was driven out of the city. There is no account of his ministry to the idol worshippers, but apparently the gospel very soon broke out of that limited circle and penetrated the raw paganism of that city with its idol worship.

But notice. Paul does not say, “Only you pagan Gentiles who are idolaters in the most blatant way turned from your idols.”

He writes of the whole church, assuming they were all idol worshippers, even the Jews who did not worship idols outwardly and externally. An idol is any person or any thing that occupies a place in your heart belonging only to God. That is an idol. Any person, any thing that occupies a place in your heart that belongs only to God, that is an idol.

And our hearts are 24/7 idol factories, constantly making their idols. But if there is a deep Holy Spirit work of true conversion, that commitment to being an idol factory is broken. We will struggle with the reality of its attempts to go back into business until we die. But the deliberate choice to be in the business of an idol factory is broken. There is a turning from idols to serve the living and the true God. There is a decisive turning, an about face. From henceforth, no longer will my heart be a deliberate, willful, perpetual idol factory. It is a heart that I want God to possess by his Spirit.

As the Scripture say that those who find life through the death of Christ no longer live unto themselves, but unto him for their sakes died and rose again. There is the first strand of what is involved in the old path, the biblical path of true conversion, a decisive turning unto God from our idols.

But then, secondly, notice the text. There is a decisive submitting.

“You turned unto God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

Now the apostle Paul had several words which he could use to express the idea of serving. And he chooses one that could literally be translated “to serve as a willing slave.”

He says, “You turned to God.” And what was the disposition of your heart? It was the disposition of becoming his willing slave.

Now what was the existence of a slave in the Roman Empire? A slave was the property of his master who existed to do the will of his master. He had no will of his own. And Paul picks up that very concept and says, “When the grace of God conquers us, we are brought to a place of a decisive, submitting to God.”

Notice the object of that submission. He says, “And to serve as a slave of the living and the true God, the only God who has life, the only God who is a real God, everything else is false.”

And once you discover that that God whom you had ignored, that God whom you had willfully disobeyed, whose law you had despised, whose gospel you had regarded with indifference, when you saw the heart of that God as that heart is revealed in the gospel, that he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and you realize, “I have had such horrible thoughts of God, I have lived unto myself. I have lived serving myself. I have been indifferent to his laws and his ways. What horrible wickedness. He is a gracious God. He is a God worthy to be loved, worthy to be served. If he would send his Son, surely anything he requires of me will only be for my highest good and my best interest. What a fool I have been to think of God as an ugly, intrusive slave master. I see in this a gracious God and I want to serve him like that slave in the Old Testament who would serve for seven years and was now free to go off on his own and he loved his master and he said, ‘No, master. Take me to the door post and take an ice pick. Pierce my ear. I want to be your willing slave forever.’”

That is what a sinner does when he sees the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He turns to serve as a willing slave this great and this gracious God. And that disposition has a very practical outworking.

Read Romans 6:15 to 23 which expands on this whole concept of how every true believer in Christ becomes a bond slave to God, to righteousness and to Christ. And that is not

just a disjointed, abstract idea. Paul says, “Look. When you were the slaves of sin, you presented your members to sin. You gave your hands to take things you shouldn’t take, to touch things they shouldn’t take. You gave your eyes to look at things you shouldn’t look at. You gave your ears to be the inlet of lust and of covetousness. You gave your ears to listen to things they shouldn’t listen to. You gave your feet to walk in paths they never should have walked in. You gave all of the members of your body to be the slaves of sin.”

But he said, “Now that Christ and God and righteousness have become your master, you present all of those members to God.”

It is a very real and a practical servitude to the living God in which we now want our eyes to look upon things that please him and our ears to hear what pleases him and our feet to go in paths that please him. And all of our faculties and powers exist to do the will of our master. And we gladly say in the language of the hymn we sing, “Jesus, master, whose I am, purchased thine alone to be by thy blood oh spotless lamb shed so willingly for me. Let my heart be all thine own. Let me live for thee alone.”

Paul says this is what happened to the Thessalonians when the gospel came in power. There was this decisive turning, you turned from your idols, to God. There was this decisive submitting to serve him as a willing slave. And then there was a decisive refocusing of your life.

Look at verse 10.

“And to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

He says you not only turned and you turned to serve, but you turned to serve and to wait for his Son from heaven.

What in the world does that have to do with a Holy Spirit wrought conversion? Just this. When God in his grace brings us to true saving faith in Christ, the Bible says every true believer in Christ is given a genuine love for Christ. That is why Peter could say in 1 Peter chapter one, “On whom believing, whom you love, on whom believing.”

Every time we believe on him, there is true love borne in the heart to him.

Now, when we love a person what is our disposition when we are separated from that person?

Do you think I could get away with it the next time I am separated from my wife and I get on the phone and I call her and I say, “Now, dear, you know I really love you. I really miss you. But, you know, I am really not too anxious about getting home and seeing you.”

She would say, "Excuse me? Did I hear you right? Maybe I have got a hearing problem, not just you, Al. Run that by me again?"

"Well, what I said, dear, is I really love you. I really miss you. But, you know, I am really not excited about seeing you."

Do you think she would swallow that kind of talk? If you wonder, ask her afterwards. She will tell you very freely. It is a no brainer.

When our hearts are set in affection upon a person and we are separated from that person for a time, it is inevitable that we long to see them.

And so Paul says, "When God worked in the hearts of you Thessalonians he gave you not only a faith in Christ, but a love for Christ which gave you a yearning to see Christ and therefore having turned to God from your idols with a disposition to serve him, you now have a heart that longs to see him."

Notice he didn't see, "And to wait for the Second Coming." That is an event. He said, "To wait for his Son." That is a person. All the difference in the world between an event and a person. And he said, "You Thessalonians had your hearts wedded to Christ in love and because of that, you had a disposition of waiting for his Son from heaven, even the historical Christ who was raised from the dead, who does indeed deliver us from the wrath to come."

If he has delivered us from the wrath to come, he has so worked in us that we long to see him because we love him.

And all these people running around saying, "I am saved by Jesus, trusting in Jesus, not going to go to hell when I die. He saved me from the wrath to come," there is no real waiting for the Son out of the heavens.

Why? Because there is no real love to him. And that is why there is such carelessness in seeking to conform their lives to the Word of God. The only conclusion we draw biblically is they don't know what it is to have the gospel come not in Word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

So Paul in these two verses sets before us a marvelous standard by which to stand and to look about us and to ask: What is? Where are the good paths? What is the good way? And the good way of true Spirit wrought, Holy Ghost conviction and regeneration and union with Christ and all those rich biblical terms that describe the converted man or woman that is set before us here, a decisive turning, a decisive submitting, a decisive reorienting.

Now the summons comes to you and the summons comes to me to stand, to look, to ask and then to answer the question. Have I entered this good way? Have I entered this ancient path of a solid, true work of God's grace? And if I haven't, face the reality and

cry to God that for Christ's sake he would have mercy upon you. And if you have been able to sit here this evening and say, "Yes, pastor Martin. By the grace of God these things are true of me. These things are realities in my life," then your gratitude to God should overflow afresh.

Why? Because Paul could say in verse four, "Knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election, how that our gospel came not unto you in Word only, but in power."

Why has the Word come to you in power effecting this radical change in your life? It is because God freely, sovereignly set his love upon you before the world began and your election has been manifested in your conversion as the gospel has come in power. And we ought to go to our homes tonight filled with a fresh sense of wonder and rejoicing and gratitude that God in mercy has done that work in us that will continue until the day of Jesus Christ and we are found wholly and totally conformed to his likeness, sinless inhabiting deathless, glorified bodies in the presence of Christ and of all of his redeemed forever.

Let's pray.

Our Father, how we thank you for your Word, that Word which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our pathway. And we pray that you would write that Word deeply upon all of our hearts. For those who sit here in this place tonight who are strangers to that work of the Spirit of which we have sought to speak tonight, oh God, have gracious dealings with them and for your people who can say in judgment day honesty, "These things are true of me," may there be a new measure of rejoicing and gratitude and desire to show our gratitude by lives of meticulous, careful obedience to all that you have revealed. Seal your Word, then, to all of our hearts we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.