

The God Who Saves Acts 18:10-11

As have been looking at this vision when the Lord Jesus appears to Paul at night in Corinth. We have noted that there is rising opposition, and it could be even with the meeting of Aquila and Priscilla, and the arrival of Silas and Timothy, that Paul is discouraged and fearful or even timid at what might lay ahead at Corinth. And we have noted that this appearance of Christ is meant to vanquish those fears, not so much eliminate all the obstacles in his life. We will see the obstacles and opposition in this passage, but it is more than that. The fears of life are eliminated by a great and more delightful fear that have caused ordinary men and women throughout the ages to persevere in following, obeying, and delighting in Christ through the most severe circumstances. And here is the thing — it is never about the greatness of the believer but the one who we call Jesus.

Paul was given two commands. One is not to fear, and the reason for not fearing is because of the One who appeared before him. We often never bring our Lord and Saviour into our fears. Next, he is commanded to do the very thing he feared. And that is speaking because of the consequences which might follow him. What we speak or do not speak indicates what we fear. Many have been silent because they are more fearful of the response of others, than they are the Lord who has commanded them to speak. We know the fear and dread of others because of their response if we speak. But Paul is given two glorious promises. One is that our Lord is with him. Think about it. Our Saviour, the one who died for us, goes with us. We are never alone, and if he knows what it is like to be human, if he knows the struggles, and never sinned, but always went through those struggles and trials and temptations then he knows the exact grace necessary for us in whatever we go through. Whatever you are going through, if you are a child of our God, our king goes with you with all of his resources. You are never, ever alone!

The second promise is no one will hurt him. He will not suffer anything from the hands of others. This is quite a promise in light of how he has seen things unfold before. We often are looking down the corridor of our lives and think that we can tell what is going to happen. That is why fear control of our lives. We think we know what will happen, and what the final outcome will be. We think we know more than God, and we let our fears control us, but in actual fact, we are trying to play God. Think of all the billion and billions of things God has to control, not miraculously but providentially to not only make this promise but have it come to pass. Individuals, even Paul's enemies make free decisions, but what comes to pass is exactly as the Lord ordained.

Listen to what he says in Isaiah 46:8-11, **“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”** Do we remember God's sovereign control over everything in your life? There is no one situation, relationship, hurt, pain, or

struggle that is not there by the direct will of our God. And he is forever for you and not against you. You can trust in his control and wisdom because he has already proven himself faithful and true through the cross.

And life is so hard, and full of affliction. As Job 5:7 says, **“but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”** Ever see the sparks coming out of a fire? They are just constant. That is our lives, trouble after trouble. But here is the thing — God is so good. He is none other than good. So in his sovereign love and through all the trouble and adversity he will accomplish his good. He really does have an origin to destiny plan for our lives. And if you doubt that, start to look at your own salvation, your own calling. There is no other way to explain your calling, your sitting here as a follower and believer in Christ than the absolute goodness and sovereign love and control of God to those who deserve the exact opposite. Yes, I know your life is tough, and we shouldn't ignore our pain, but we need to see that the Lord is good, and taste that goodness. There is so much more that God is doing than we could ever comprehend. I want us to see that goodness and the response to that goodness this morning.

1. We see the goodness of God in his sovereign electing love of sinners. V.10.

Some truths in Scripture have to be held in tension. We cannot hold to one at the expense of the other. They might seem to be at odds but they are not. We have to remember that we are not God, and many of the truths about God and his dealing are beyond us. And one is God's absolute sovereignty and man's responsibility. Both are taught in Scripture. The foremost reason people go to a Christ-less eternity is because they choose to. The reason why we have ever trusted Christ is because of his sovereign calling, and his choice of us before the foundation of the world.

The teaching is often called “compatibilism.” God's absolute sovereignty and man responsibility are compatible. They are both taught throughout Scripture. Our decisions, the things we do and say really matter, but what comes to pass is exactly what God ordains to come to pass. You think of Joseph who was given a vision of ruling over his brothers, they conspired to kill him, and after sold him into slavery, and then about twenty years later after so much suffering, Joseph is exalted to Pharaoh's right hand. He meets his brothers, he rules over them and there is reconciliation. Skip a little further, their dad is about to die and they fear for their lives, and listen to what he says in Genesis 50:19-21, here is a person who has a trust in God and is controlled by God's sovereign love, **“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”** He doesn't say you had no control over your actions. You meant evil, you were responsible, but God in all those afflictions had a good and sovereign plan.

And it is the same when it comes to our salvation. Salvation is all of the Lord, but we are still responsible to trust Christ. John 6:39-40, **“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** We see all, no more or less, that have already been given by the Father will come

to Christ. This indicates that there is a predetermined number that will come, whether in Corinth, Windsor, Essex, Kingsville or Leamington. And then there is the promise that is open to any and all — all who will look and believe on the Son will be saved. It is an invitation not to some but to all. God has called us to hold this tension in the Scripture.

But the problem people have so often is not so much with free will, or that man is responsible, but with the sovereign choice of God. But this vision, and the encouragement to Paul to keep on with the task of what God has given him to do, is all contingent on Christ's absolute sovereignty over not only the adversity Paul faces, but also the fruit that will come through his preaching the gospel. Look at this verse and think through what Jesus is saying to Paul. These are the words of our Lord, Paul go on speaking, why, **"for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."** He gives two reasons. One is because Jesus commands it, and he is with him, and he is the great protector of Paul. But it is not just about Paul. This is what I love about our Christian lives and adversities. It is never just about us. God uses our lives in significant ways to strengthen other brothers and sisters in the faith, but also to bring individuals to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Think of what Jesus says, and think of the sovereignty of God, **"For I have."** Don't you love that? This is Jesus. It is not that Paul has or some gifted preacher has, but these are Jesus' people before they ever come to Christ. Look at what he calls them at the end, **"my people."** This is so strange because they are not Christ's. They have not heard the gospel or bowed the knee. They are living in rebellion to the great God of creation, and even fashioned gods out of their own passions and sinful desires. Here is why he can call them his own. It is because their salvation is not an "if they come," but they will come because of the sovereign call of the One who will call them. Jesus says something similar in John 10:16, **"And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."** Notice who brings them in. I must bring them in. They hear the voice of Christ through the preaching of the gospel and they come, only those, not any more or less than those who are of the sheepfold of Christ. They are looked upon as his sheep before they ever become sheep.

Now the objection against this is for many if it seems unfair. There are some who are not selected, or chosen through the grace of God. God is obligated to treat everyone in the same way. It is the same argument that is made in Romans 9:19-20,, **"You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'"** Who are we to question God? And there are certainly many things we can say about this. We can try and use some sort of logic outside of the clarity and logic of the word of God, but it will always fail. There is mystery here, but we have let God be God, and accept what he reveals about himself.

The other thing, is grace ceases to be grace if God has to treat everyone the same. Grace is God's free favour to those who deserve the exactly opposite. In fact, God is gracious to all people in that they exist today. But to say that God must treat all people with the same amount of favour is to miss the whole point of grace. Grace is none other than a gift to those who are undeserving. If it is an obligation than it is no longer grace. Ephesians 2:8-10, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith.**

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." How much more clearer can you get than that? He even says at the beginning of this chapter that we were dead in trespasses and sins. We were dead spiritually. What can dead people do? Nothing. But what if God through his grace gave effective grace in their lives and hearts, what if he gave life where they was death, what would be the outcome? The outcome would be life and belief. John MacArthur said, **"Is God unfair in not choosing to save everyone? 'Fair' would send everyone to hell. You don't want fair, you want mercy."**

What is the outcome of God's sovereignty in salvation? It is God is being praised and glorified and magnified for his great grace. It was not because of my choice. I was just a little more perceptive than others, and therefore I trusted Jesus. Dead people can't choose. Rebels do not want to Jesus. If God does not first choose us we would never choose him. Why do we love Christ and other believers? 1 John 4:19, **"We love because he first loved us."** There is a prior love before we ever trusted and loved Christ. And therefore all the praise and glory goes to him in salvation. Why did God choose people like us? And therefore reason is not because of us, but because of his grace and glory. Listen to the humbling passage in 1 Corinthians 1:27-31, **"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"** We thank God for our salvation. When all are gathered before the throne we are going to be praising the Lamb. We won't be congratulating one another. He deserves all the glory because salvation is by his grace alone through Christ alone.

Now what difference does that make in our lives? And it makes all the difference.

2. We need to see the response to God's sovereignty in salvation. V.11.

Most of the objections to God's sovereignty in salvation are outside the Scriptures. They are human reasoning rather than Biblical reasons. They say that the doctrine of election or God's predetermination to save some will cause people to be lethargic or lazy in their salvation. Why witness if God has chosen? It will also produce believers that are proud and arrogant because they have been chosen above others. But here is the thing, God's truth when rightly understood always causes a passion and love and heart for God. You see the same argument with the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. If Jesus paid all of the debt of sin and there is nothing left to do then believers will live lose lives, and not care about sin. It will give them a license to sin, and not be bothered by it. But listen to how Paul counters that argument in Romans 6:1-3, **"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not**

know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Here is what Paul says about continuing in sin, if you realize what Jesus has done and who we are in Christ it is unthinkable to continue in sin. A right understanding of justification causes passionate obedience, not loose living. Those Christians who have been the most zealous to live for Christ, and live holy lives are those who have a firm grasp that Jesus has truly done it all. There is nothing that needs to be accomplished. I am forever secure through the finished work of Christ.

And it is the same with the doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation. The modern missions movement started by William Carey was founded on God's sovereignty. It emboldened these missionaries to go whether Carey or Hudson Taylor or Jonathan Edwards or Adoniram Judson or John Paton. Famous preachers who had a heart for souls like Charles Spurgeon. Martyn D. Lloyd Jones, John Bunyan, John Newton, George Whitfield, just to name a few were all Calvinists, and most of the missionary names that we are familiar with are Calvinists. The reason why is the right understanding will always lead to hearts that want to reach the lost, a passion to see God glorified and magnified through the making and maturing of disciples.

So think of the outcome of this vision and message in Paul's life. Paul, don't fear, go on speaking, they will not harm you, I have many people who are my people who will come through the instrumentality of your preaching. They will hear the voice of the master, and they will come. So look at the response of Paul here in verse 11, **"And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."** Paul didn't leave. He didn't say that is enough. God's sovereignty over his life, and God's sovereignty in salvation was the impetus of not only staying but doing the one thing that caused so much of his fears. Listen to what he did among those both inside and outside of Christ — **"teaching the word among them."** Who is the them? It is the people in the vision Paul is commanded to speak to, and that is the people of Corinth. The people who could hurt him. There was a renewed zeal and desire to make Christ known. The doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation produces zealous Christians.

Now so many think that if you teach election that evangelism will become pointless. What is the use if God has decided before hand? And election does not make election pointless but it is the whole point of evangelism. It makes it effective. God has chosen, therefore people will come. Think of Paul in his fears. This is pointless, there is only opposition and persecution. No Paul, I have many people in this city. Listen to what J.I. Packer writes in his excellent little book, *The Sovereignty of God and Evangelism*, **"So far from making evangelism pointless the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility—indeed, the certainty—that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it, there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel."**

Listen to also what Richard Phillips writes, **"All our work is in vain if we consider its success dependent on our effort alone. Without his sovereign initiative and overruling, our efforts amount to nothing. We do not possess in ourselves any ability at all to change a heart given over to idolatry and sin. Does**

this mean that we should do nothing? Not at all! God has chosen to bring about the conversion of sinners through the human instruments. We may not comprehend why this is so; but we are not called upon to understand it, merely to acquiesce to it. We are called to be faithful in evangelism and prayer, leaving the results to the sovereign power of God.”

When you start to realize the hardness of the human heart, and the deadness than you start to realize your limitation in evangelism, and the desire to make known Christ dissipates. Listen to Romans 8:7-8, **“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”** There is an inability to please God or trust God or trust Christ. Why? Because the sinner freely chooses sin over Christ. This is such a humbling doctrine. I am powerless without Christ. But here is the glory of the gospel, what I cannot do with my mere words, my Christ can do. Think of it, you might look at your rebellious spouse, or adult child, and you think as you look at their love affair with sin, and their deadness to anything spiritual, and think there is no hope. But what if God could take that heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh? What if God could take the words you preach and testify of and make it living and active? Isn’t this exactly what happened to us? After detailing our deadness in Ephesians 2, he says in verses 4-5, **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”**

There was an impossibility for you ever to come to Christ, and you know it when you look back at your life. Me, trust in Christ? No way! But God has done more than we could ask or think through his amazing grace. And here is what we also know — God used others to present the truths of Christ to our heart and life. So think of the person you think — impossible! That was your life. But God is the God of the impossible. He gives life where there is death. He gives eternal salvation and trust in him. You see how the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in salvation instead of making us lethargic and our testifying of Christ making it pointless, gives hope, life, and zeal? Paul opens his mouth. Look to your sovereign God he is giving you so many opportunities to speak, and speak because realizing his goodness how could we ever be silent?