

Two Destinies

2 Thessalonians 1:6–10

We don't hear a lot of sermons about heaven and hell. These are uncomfortable topics for many people, but they are real, and it is vital to understand them. Every one of us within the sound of my voice today—every one of us—will spend eternity in either heaven or hell. I am not speaking as a private person. As a minister of the Word of God, my job is to explain and apply the Holy Scriptures, not to express my personal opinion. I assure you that what I am preaching today affects you personally, so listen carefully, for one day you will give account for the way you responded to God's holy Word.

I have three points this morning: (1) two classes of men, (2) two verdicts, and (3) two destinies; first,

1. Two classes of men

My first point is “two classes of men.” When I use the term *men* I am using it in its biblical sense of *human* or *person*. Both the Hebrew and Greek, the languages in which the Bible was originally written, have different words for *man*: one that means *male* and another that means *human*. When the Bible says that “God made *man* in his own image,” it means the human race: men, women and children. Out of all the creatures that God made—all the species of life on this planet—only one: man—was made in God's own image, with the capacity to have a personal relationship (fellowship) with the Creator. The Bible records that God made man—male and female—in his image. When Adam—significantly, his name means *man*—sinned, he brought guilt and condemnation upon the whole human race. All of us—every single person, the sons and daughters of Adam—were born in sin. The Bible is very clear. As Romans teaches, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” The fact that all of us are mortal and destined to die demonstrates beyond doubt that we inherited the guilt of Adam's first sin. The fact that we are going to die proves it. This is an important biblical doctrine; it affects every one of us personally.

Now there are various ways to classify men. Physically, they can be classified by *kindred, tribe, clan, nationality*, etc. (*Race* is a modern construct; the Bible says nothing about race. Modern man is obsessed with this supposed classification, and tyrants use it to divide people.¹) In the book of Revelation the apostle John testifies, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every *nation*,

¹ Mankind is a single race, all descended from a single ancestor, Adam. Biblically, one can speak of “the human race,” but not “the races of man”; there are not various races, but one human race, fallen in Adam, all needing salvation.

tribe, tongue, and people.” These refer to groupings based upon heredity, language and common interests.

But in our New Testament text the apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, identifies two classes of men—their *spiritual* classification. Notice his words carefully: “. . . it is a righteous thing with God . . . to give you who are troubled rest with *us* when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven . . . in flaming fire taking vengeance on *those* who do not know God.” Note the sharp contrast between “us” who receive rest and “those” who receive vengeance. Clearly, at the final day, one group will go to their eternal rest in the blessed presence of Christ, while another group will go to hell to experience God’s never-ending vengeance for all eternity.

The other day, Norma and I helped our daughter and son-in-law gather the apples under their very prolific apple tree. All the apples under the tree were separated into two groups: those that were perfectly ripe and could be made into a wonderfully-sweet homemade applesauce—delightful as a topping for pancakes or ice cream—and those that were overripe and rotten. So while we worked, we separated and sorted, separated and sorted—some to go into a sack to be taken into the kitchen, others to go straight to the compost pile. We saw ourselves as stewards of God’s creation, not wanting to waste good apples, but needing to dispose of the bad, so we separated and sorted.

Our Thessalonians text describes how God himself at the final day will be in the separating and sorting business, separating and sorting out those who will go into his eternal rest and those who receive vengeance. Because we have sinned, *none* of us deserve eternal rest. By our sins we have spit in the face of a holy God. We have said, as it were, “God, I will *not* submit to your will, I will do my own will. I don’t care what you think.” And so we persist in our sin and rebellion against God. The Bible says that we have sinned and fallen short of God’s standard of absolute perfection. The wages of sin is *death*—eternal death, banishment from the comfortable presence of a loving heavenly Father. So at the final judgment God the righteous judge will be in the separating and sorting business. Every person on the face of the earth will receive perfect justice. The wicked will be turned into hell; and the righteous, whose sins have been laid on Christ the Mediator, and who have received his perfect righteousness as a free gift—will be ushered into heaven with the words “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” When Jesus returns in glory, all the peoples of the world from every age will be gathered before the face of Christ, and he will separate the “sheep” from the “goats.” This is the teaching of Holy Scripture.

The fact that there are two classes of men harmonizes with Psalm 1, which closes with the words, “Therefore the *ungodly* shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the *righteous*. For the LORD knoweth the way of the

righteous: but the way of the *ungodly* shall perish.” There are thus two classes of men: the “righteous” and the “ungodly.” The righteous are those who, by grace, through faith, have their sins forgiven and are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The ungodly are those who die in their sins, without Christ.

What about you? Have you asked the Lord to save you? Do you confess him as Lord? Are you clothed with Christ’s perfect righteousness? Are you his joyful worshipper? Do you love to spend time in his presence, pouring out your heart to him in prayer? Or do you live life apart from him, pursuing your own pleasures, running from God, doing your own thing? There are two classes of men: those who are Christ’s, and those who are not. Which are you?

Secondly, there are

2. Two verdicts

Our text speaks of a time, yet future, “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.” At that time, according to Scripture, he will sit as judge and conduct the final judgment.

The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the final judgment in its last chapter: “God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day . . . all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.”²

The final judgment will be a comprehensive examination of all “thoughts, words, and deeds.” Even thoughts! In the last 30 years or so, laws have been enacted that establish penalties for “hate crimes”: higher penalties for crimes considered particularly heinous for having been motivated by hate. But Scripture teaches that God alone knows the secrets of men’s hearts. God alone knows men’s thoughts. God alone is qualified to judge what went through a person’s mind during his commission of a crime. When we appear in the court of Christ at the last day, he will be perfectly capable of judging our thoughts. What evil thoughts have gone through your head? What will be your defense at the last day? Your only hope is to flee to Christ. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If we confess our sins—that is, acknowledge them as sin before the all-seeing God, whom we have offended, humbly imploring his pardoning grace and mercy—we will be forgiven! Sinner, there is hope for you in Christ!

The Confession cites the apostle Paul’s sermon on the Areopagus in Athens, where he informed his pagan hearers that God “has appointed a day on which *He*

² https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_33

will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

All people everywhere need to be continually reminded of this, because all of us will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This is an appointment that no human being will miss. You and I will be there.

In a court of law, trials are conducted by a judge who has been duly appointed. The duty of the judge is to make sure that the trial is conducted fairly, in accordance with the law. There is a prosecutor, who institutes legal proceedings against the accused. There is a defense attorney, whose responsibility is to protect the legal rights of his client and ensure that he or she receives a fair trial. There is the jury, who hears the evidence and renders a verdict: “guilty” or “not guilty.” If the trial ends with a guilty verdict, the judge determines the sentence.

The word *verdict* comes from roots meaning *true saying: true judgment*. We read in Romans that “the judgment of God is according to truth.”³ The God of heaven has never pronounced a false judgment yet. All his judgments are perfectly consistent with his holy character.

At the final judgment every sinner standing before Christ will be judged either “guilty” or “not guilty.” Since all of us are sinners, the only way that we can be found “not guilty” is if our sins were laid on Christ, and his perfect righteous were credited to our account. Truly, “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And if we look to the Savior, Jesus Christ, his perfect righteousness is credited to our account: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

Sinner, are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?

Lastly, consider:

3. Two destinies

Consider verses 9–10, “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”

Here are two destinies: the destiny of the wicked, who will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power; and the destiny of the righteous, who will surround the throne of the Lamb and spend eternity glorifying Christ and admiring him for his saving work.

The wicked will be punished with “everlasting destruction.” The severity of this punishment can hardly be imagined. The destruction of their soul and body will continue forever. They will not be annihilated, or cease to exist. “The fire of divine

³ Rom. 2:2

wrath will never be quenched; the smoke of their torment will ascend for ever.”⁴ Since their sin was committed against an infinite, eternal Being, their punishment will be infinite in its duration. And since they will never repent or amend their ways, but will continue to curse God eternally, their continued punishment will be just and necessary.

But the destiny of the righteous will be far different. The saints of God will surround the throne of the Lamb and spend eternity singing the praises of Christ and admiring him for his great salvation. The word translated “to be admired” is literally *to be marveled at*. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” We will spend eternity trying to plumb the depths of God’s marvelous plan of salvation.

The Psalmist said, “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy” (Ps. 107:2). Has the Lord saved you? Has he washed you from your sins in his own blood? Has he taken away your love of sinning and given you a love for himself and for his people? Then God wants us to talk about it! He wants us to tell the world of his salvation. He wants us to speak to him in prayer, thanking him for all the ways that we are thankful for his saving work. For the Christian, we will continue to learn more and more of his great salvation throughout eternity. We will never run out of reasons to praise him.

Note well: there are *two* destinies, and no more. Some imagine that there is a third option: Purgatory for souls who die guilty “without having satisfied for the punishment due to their sins”⁵—as if we can atone for our own sins, which is impossible. Purgatory is a figment of human imagination, totally devoid of scriptural support.⁶

This is clear in Daniel 12, which says, “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” This inspired text teaches that of the whole of humanity, some awake “to everlasting life,” and others awake “to shame and everlasting contempt.” So the Bible is consistent: the whole testimony of Scripture is that there are *two* destinies: heaven for the righteous and hell for the wicked. Every human person will go to one place or the other.

⁴ Gill, Commentary on 2 Thess. 1:9 (e-Sword)

⁵ Baltimore Catechism Q. 1381

⁶ It is widely assumed that Purgatory is in the Apocrypha. It is not.

The Westminster Confession summarizes the teaching of Scripture: “The end of God’s appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked, who know not God and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”⁷

If you have never committed your life to Jesus Christ, flee to him for mercy! His promise remains: “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

As you know, former president Donald Trump was almost assassinated one month ago. Here is an open letter written by a traditionalist Catholic. It could just as well have been written by a fire-and-brimstone Baptist.

Dear President Trump,

So . . . it finally happened. They tried, openly, to finish you.

We were all shocked.

You’ve had a brush with death. But now it’s time to think very seriously indeed—because the next would-be assassin may hit his target.

But . . . do you know what?

Whatever the reason that you survived this assassination attempt—whether it was direct divine intervention, or luck as you said—we can know one thing with certainty. It is absolutely certain that the only reason you are alive—shooting or no shooting—is because God wants you to be alive.

This brush with death should bring something home to you. You can dodge all the bullets you want, but as surely as death comes for every man, one day it will come for you, whether it be with a bullet or in your bed.

Now, before we talk about what this means for your plans as President Trump, let’s talk—if I may—about Donald, the man.

When that day comes, when death finally knocks on your door . . . don’t you want to be right with God?

What good is being president of the United States, or even emperor of the whole world—if you then die, and fall into hell, the slave of the devil?

And yes, that’s what we all are, unless we are freed by Christ.

At this time, having come so close to death, and also at this stage of your life, you’ve been given an opportunity and focus that few others get.

⁷ https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_33 section 2.

Now is the time for you to seek out the solution to the great problems of life—of sin, of man’s fall from grace, our estrangement from God, our redemption and sanctification by Jesus Christ, the only true God . . .

And through all this, you can come to know, love and serve him for the remainder of your life on earth, and then be happy with him forever in the next.

You are in our prayers.⁸

In a few moments we will sing the hymn “Great God, What Do I See and Hear!”

“Great God, what do I see and hear! The end of things created! The Judge of mankind doth appear on clouds of glory seated! The trumpet sounds; the graves restore the dead which they contained before: prepare, my soul, to meet him.

“The dead in Christ shall first arise, at the last trumpet’s sounding, caught up to meet him in the skies, with joy their Lord surrounding; no gloomy fears their souls dismay; his presence sheds eternal day on those prepared to meet him.

“But sinners, filled with guilty fears, behold his wrath prevailing; for they shall rise, and find their tears and sighs are unavailing: the day of grace is past and gone; trembling, they stand before the throne, all *unprepared* to meet him.

“Great God, what do I see and hear! The end of things created! The Judge of mankind doth appear on clouds of glory seated! Beneath his cross I view the day when heaven and earth shall pass away, and thus prepare to meet him.”⁹

Thank God that those who belong to Christ view eternity from the foot of the cross. Amen!

⁸ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/trump-was-almost-assassinated-one-month-ago-he-should-consider-this-one-important-question/>

⁹ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/great-god-what-do-i-see-and-hear/>