

Saved by Judgment

by Robert B. Thompson

We are saved by judgment, which involves suffering and purification by fire to remove sin and make us holy and acceptable to God.

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Robert B. Thompson preaches about the challenging journey of salvation, emphasizing the need for believers to be purified from sin and self-will through fiery trials and suffering, in order to be fully saved and conformed to the image of Christ. The sermon highlights the importance of committing to God's will, enduring trials with faith, and choosing to respond to suffering by seeking God's purification. Thompson explains that salvation involves a continuous process of being refined by God's judgment, leading to a transformation into the moral image of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. (1 Peter 4:18,19)

In order to be totally saved we must be forgiven the guilt of our sin and then delivered from the sinful aspects of our personality.

The fourth chapter of First Peter primarily is about salvation by judgment. We are saved as God judges the worldliness, the passions and lusts, and the self-will of our personality. The judgment in this case is not on the guilt of our sin but on the presence of sin in us.

It is hard for the righteous to be saved. The righteous individual is saved with difficulty. Why is this?

The righteous person is saved with difficulty because of the sin remaining in his or her personality. God wants all the sin removed. Therefore He sends fiery trials on us to get at the sin in us. The reason it is hard for us to be saved from our sins is that we do not like to make the choices God is requiring.

Sometimes we do not know what those choices are. But as we experience Divinely ordained suffering, the chastening hand of the Lord on us, we hopefully respond by going to God in prayer rather than reacting with anger toward the tools God is using. Also we should not waste our time and strength rebuking the devil.

Even though Paul's thorn in the flesh was the work of Satan, Paul did not address Satan but God. And it was God who supplied the answer and the wisdom of how Paul was to regard his suffering.

Notice how the fourth chapter of First Peter commences:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. (I Peter 4:1,2))

Think carefully about the above passage. It is telling us that the purpose of suffering is to remove sin from us. Suffering saves us from sin. Suffering is a judgment on our sin, therefore we are saved by judgment.

The suffering, the chastening of us, is so we will not live our life according to evil human desires but for God's will. This is why we enter the Kingdom of God through much tribulation.

Notice also:

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (II Thessalonians 1:4,5)

The persecutions and trials the Thessalonians were enduring were God's way of purifying the personalities of those believers. Because of their perseverance and faith during their trials they will be cleansed from all sin and counted worthy of the Kingdom of God.

The believers were suffering in order to obtain their entrance into the Kingdom of God. Isn't this what the passage is stating? Then, when the Lord returns with His holy angels and punishes the ungodly, the purified Thessalonian saints will be at rest. God cannot punish the disobedience of the wicked until our obedience is complete.

And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. (II Corinthians 10:6)

These sufferings were not afflictions they administered to themselves in order to earn the Kingdom. Rather the afflictions were the judgment of God on them to make them worthy of the Kingdom. Their sufferings were Divine judgment that was saving them, in this sense.

Let's look again at the fourth chapter of I Peter.

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. (I Peter 4:3)

In our day numerous Christians are not careful to gain the victory over the lusts of the world and the flesh. They claim to be saved by a sovereign grace that overlooks their behavior. But they are deceived. If they do not repent quickly God will baptize them with fire. They will experience fiery ordeals that they might choose to turn away from their ungodly practices.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. (I Peter 4:12)

The saints to whom Peter was writing were suffering painful trials. It is normal for us who believe to experience many painful trials. And this is just what they are--trials. Our personality is being tested and judged continually that God and we may determine how pure we are. This is how we are saved from sin and conformed to the moral image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are undergoing severe trials at the time you are reading these words, do not faint. Keep your eyes fastened on the Lord Jesus. Continue to give thanks while praying that you soon may be completely delivered. Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

You are not in a grave but a tunnel. There is light at the end. You may be in the furnace like the three Hebrew young men. But Jesus is there with you.

You will come forth one day without even the smell of smoke on you. Only your bondages will be destroyed.

You are passing before the Judgment Seat of Christ so you may be prepared to be resurrected and to rise to meet Him at His return.

There is nothing strange about Christians suffering intensely, even being burned at the stake. Many have been. It is God's way of making us worthy of His Kingdom.

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (I Peter 4:13)

Christ did not suffer because of sin in His personality, as we do. Nevertheless the Scripture states that the Son of God learned obedience by the things He suffered. Now the Father has entrusted Him with all authority in Heaven and on the earth.

We will reign with Christ if we also suffer, for suffering makes us obedient to God if we receive the suffering in the right manner, not becoming rebellious but rather praying and waiting patiently for the Lord. Tribulation creates patience in our personality if we keep on trusting God.

If we suffer under the hand of God, then, when Christ is revealed, we will rejoice with Him, entering His joy. But if we are not willing to suffer but dodge and flee from every test, we never will rule with Christ. We will be ashamed before Him at His appearing.

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. (I Peter 4:15)

The above kind of suffering is different from the suffering that saves us. The suffering that comes on people, Christian or not, who are murderers or thieves or some other kind of criminal, is not a suffering that saves but a punishment for the wicked behavior they are exhibiting.

Most Christians are not murderers but multitudes of them are gossips, slanderers, meddlers, continually criticizing and causing division and bitterness. Sooner or later they receive the fruit of their behavior. This is not a suffering that saves but a suffering that punishes.

Suffering that saves is tribulation, or chastening--a baptism with fire. Suffering that punishes is wrath. It is not redemptive.

Christians are extremely concerned about going through the great tribulation. They ought to be more concerned about the hour of temptation. Temptation lures us away from the Presence of God but tribulation makes us a partaker of His holiness so one day we may dwell with Jesus Christ in the Center of the Consuming Fire.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (I Peter 4:17)

The Judgment Seat of Christ began as soon as Christ was raised from the dead and took His place at the right hand of the Father in Heaven.

You can think of Divine judgment proceeding outward from the Father in concentric circles.

First God perfected His Son, the King.

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Hebrews 2:10)

Next in order come the coheirs of the Kingdom.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:17)

As soon as the Lord sees that the full complement of sons have been saved from sin and self-will to God's satisfaction He will return with them and establish His Kingdom on the earth.

The establishing of the Kingdom of God on the earth at the hand of Christ and His coheirs will be an act of Divine judgment, removing wickedness from the earth and releasing that which is worthy into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them." (Malachi 4:1)

That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:21)

The destruction of the wicked and the release of the righteous will be accomplished at the hands of Christ and His saints as they govern with the rod of iron.

That judgment begins with those closest to the Lord is revealed in the following passage:

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months." (Revelation 11:1,2)

The "reed like a measuring rod" is portraying Divine judgment. "The temple of God and the altar" refer to the Church, especially those who are worshiping at the Altar of Incense. Those at the Altar of Incense have moved past the Lampstand, past Pentecost so to speak, and are at the place of offering themselves without reservation to the Lord.

Notice that the Gentiles, those who are not part of the family of God, are not judged at this time.

The closer you are to the Lord the more you will be judged. If you wish to live with the Lord Jesus in the Center of the Fire of Israel, then every aspect of your personality will be examined and tested with the utmost attention to detail.

The more you are judged by fire the more saved you are, that is, if you respond to the Divine fire by turning away from worldliness, the lusts and passions of your flesh, and your self-will and rebellion against God's will.

We ordinarily do not refer to degrees of being saved, that some people are more saved than others. But if you define salvation as freedom from sin and growth in Christ, then it certainly is true that some are more saved than others.

You can have as much of God as you want, in the days in which we are living, but the closer you draw to God the more you can expect to be tested.

Judgment begins with the Lord's family, especially with those who are closest to Him.

If God deals so severely with those who are closest to Him, "what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

The point is this: everyone is going to be judged at some point or another. I would just as soon get it over with. How about you?

It seems very clear to me that those who expect to be raised from the dead in the first resurrection and ascend to meet the Lord in the air, at the next coming of the Lord, must be judged in advance. Peter says that the Lord is ready to judge the living and the dead, so it must be true that somehow, in a manner we do not understand, the believers who lived victoriously in ages past are also being prepared for the coming of the Lord although they are not in the present hour living on the earth.

Think for a moment. If our judgment and consequent salvation involves fiery trials, it will not be possible for us to be revealed at the Judgment Seat of Christ, receiving the good and the bad we have practiced, after we are raised from the dead and ascend to meet the Lord in the air. Can you see the logic of this?

Our participation in this earlier resurrection (termed the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4-6) is in fact the sentence imposed on us as a result of a prior judgment. It may be noticed in Revelation 20:4-6 that no books of record are opened. This is because the participants already have been judged, already are free from the authority of the second death.

The remainder of the dead will be raised and judged at the conclusion of the thousand-year Kingdom Age. The books of record will then be opened. The sentence imposed at that time will be either life in the Kingdom of God or death in the Lake of Fire.

The first resurrection must be attained, as Paul instructed us in the third chapter of Philippians, by participation in the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. We attain the first resurrection by following the Spirit of God faithfully as He conforms us to the moral image of Christ and brings us into untroubled rest in the Father.

And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" (I Peter 4:18)

The above verse makes no sense at all in terms of current Christian teaching. We are claiming all we must do to be saved is to accept the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else is necessary. What could be easier? Jesus did it all and now we are on our way to Heaven. In what manner is this difficult?

But in terms of what we have written about the relationship of suffering to salvation, the verse makes perfect sense. Do you agree with this?

If we who are righteous believers, hopefully, are struggling to keep up with the Lord as He baptizes us with fire, what will be the case when our ordeal has been concluded and God turns to the ungodly and the sinner? Their suffering will make ours appear mild.

Ever since God had a rebellion in Heaven He has determined to make an end of rebellion and sin. God is going to shake not only the earth but also Heaven. He means business! There will be no more sin when God gets through. This is why it is necessary His appointed rulers are tested to the limit by fiery trials. These trials result in our salvation.

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. (I Peter 4:19)

This is Peter's advice to you if you are experiencing the chastening of the Lord. "Commit yourself to your faithful Creator and continue to do good." Do not repay evil for evil. God will use people to bring out the worst in you. Don't look to them to change; don't get bitter and start blaming people for your pain; look only to the Lord. Whatever you do, do not yield to bitterness. Keep on doing good. God will bring you forth in His time, not one moment too late. God does not enjoy having you suffer. He is bringing suffering on you to save you from sin!

Do not take any suffering for granted. Always pray for relief, and relief will come in the Lord's time. In order to break out of God's prison you have to break God's laws. If you break out you will be captured and given a longer sentence, that is, unless God sees that you never are going to choose to go His way. If this happens, if God gives up on you, you are in a dangerous way indeed!

Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit so we may bear witness of His salvation and also be able to live a holy life.

Jesus baptizes us with fire so the sin may be destroyed out of us.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Matthew 3:11)

I hear Christians today praying for the fire of God as though it were some kind of thrill they hope to experience. Do they have no idea what it means to be baptized with fire?

When the fire of God falls on us every aspect of our personality is tested. That which is not of Christ in us begins to protest because it cannot stand the Divine Presence to this extent. Then we either will turn away from Christ and go back to our comfortable church games or else press forward into the flames.

"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12)

To winnow the grain is to separate the grains of wheat from the worthless chaff. The chaff of our personality, that which is worthless in the Kingdom, will be burned up with unquenchable fire. We are to hold steady in the Lord, continuing to do good, as the Lord tosses us on the winnowing fork so the chaff can be removed from us.

Is that happening to you today? If so, don't quit. Good things are ahead for you, one of which is the strength to resist temptation during the age of moral horrors we are entering, if you do not turn away from the Lord.

One of the greatest gifts you ever will receive from God is the strength to say no to the invitations of Satan, the strength to close the doors in your personality that are permitting Satan to keep a grip on you.

I do not believe the reader will have any trouble perceiving that salvation, which is our deliverance from the person and ways of Satan, the cleansing of our flesh and spirit from worldliness, lust and passion, and self-will, and our entering untroubled rest in the center of God's Person and will, results from many Divine operations. Notable among these operations is the suffering that is sent to us to cause us to choose to turn away from sin and to press into the Presence and will of God.

God has spoken through the Prophets that He intends to purify His people by a baptism of fire.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years. (Malachi 3:3,4)

Silver is refined and purified by fire.

It is easy to see why Satan has encouraged today's teachers of the Bible to view the new covenant as a "special Gentile dispensation of grace not found in the Old Testament." If we think the new covenant is a special Gentile dispensation of grace, then we will perceive Malachi 3:3,4 as applying only to Jews after the flesh.

The truth is, it is we Christians who are the priesthood of God, the holy nation that is to be cleansed by fire.

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (I Peter 2:5)

And note:

It was revealed to them [the Hebrew Prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. (I Peter 1:12)

Remember, when John the Baptist was speaking of the baptism of fire that would cleanse God's people, he was addressing Jews under the Law of Moses--those who would consider themselves to be the people whom Malachi was addressing. But through the cross of Christ we Gentile believers have been made one with the Jews, receiving the same baptism of the Holy Spirit, receiving the same baptism of purification by the fires of Divine judgment.

Dispensationalism, the model of biblical interpretation that presents a special Gentile church, a mystery not found in the Old Testament, to be carried to Heaven by "grace" apart from righteous behavior, is one of the most terribly destructive concepts ever to be permitted into Christian thinking.

Dispensationalism has little in common with the true new covenant, the writing of God's laws in our mind and heart.

The harm Dispensational thinking has done to the Church of Jesus Christ is beyond comprehension. Perhaps God will make it all work for good if we now turn away from the abominable notion of a special Gentile church that does not have to obey the Lord and begin at once to keep the commandments of Christ and His Apostles.

We understand now, having shed Dispensational thinking, that Malachi 3:3,4, and all other prophecies having to do with the Messianic Kingdom, are addressed to the one true Seed of Abraham--the Lord Jesus Christ and those who belong to Him. These are the true Israel of God and heirs of the promise made to Abraham, the promise of the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean, however, that God will not turn again to the physical land and people of Israel in the last days and save them with an unprecedented intervention of His Spirit. The Scriptures declare that He shall and no word of the Scriptures can be changed in any manner whatever.

Also we have as follows:

"In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'" (Zechariah 13:8,9)

While the above passage is pointed at the physical land and people of Israel, it does reveal that God purifies people, saves people, by fiery judgments. Because of the rebellious nature of humans God always works in this manner.

It is to be kept in mind that Christians are the one Seed of Abraham, whether Jewish or Gentile by physical birth. Thus whatever is written concerning Israel, if it has to do with their acceptability in the sight of God and does not concern physical activity in the geographical land, directly concerns all the Seed of Abraham.

The widely held concept of Dispensationalism has destroyed the oneness of the work of God. Today's believers are almost totally unaware there is only one Church, one called-out people, which began with Abraham, was issued the Law by Moses, was given eternal life by the Lord Jesus Christ, and will be established on the physical mountain of Jerusalem at the time of the Lord's return. There is only one Olive Tree, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are an integral part of Him.

The perfect oneness of the elect of God, the one new Man, is not being presented with clarity today, probably due to the destructive effects of Dispensational thinking.

As the Kingdom of God approaches the earth many of the past religious theories and traditions will fall by the way (and probably many believers along with them), but it can't be helped. God seems to be able to work very well in the midst of chaos and bring forth things of value in the Kingdom.

We are entering trying times in which some of the assumptions we have made are being tested to the bone. Everything is being shaken so what is not of the Lord Jesus Christ may be removed.

Sometimes the social fabric is ripped as part of a church comprises members who are hearing from God and the other part is following the soulish traditions that have been part of Christian thinking for many years. Inevitably one group or the other will leave and then continually attempt to influence those who have remained to come over to the side of those who have left. This is because while the spiritual ties and church ties have been severed, the social ties have not.

I wonder sometimes if the Apostle Paul understood the problem of social ties when he commanded us to have nothing more to do with those who cause division. Whether Paul did or not, he wrote the infallible Word of God and so we must be obedient.

We are stating in this brief paper that the Christian salvation is remarkably different from what we have supposed. Instead of salvation being a ticket to Heaven we obtain by taking the traditional "four steps," it is a drawn out program of fiery tests, a multitude of steps during which we are saved from sin and rebellion. Being saved is difficult because of the choices we must make and sometimes take too long to make.

We have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We literally have to work it out by continually responding to the Holy Spirit as He brings us from one problem to another.

Are we gloomy and despairing with all this pressure and change? Absolutely not. We are going on our way rejoicing. Sufficient to each day is the evil, the problems designated for that day. At the same time God's mercies are renewed every morning. Every day we receive the Divine grace that will convert the evil into our salvation.

We are being changed into the image of the glory of the Lord. The change takes place line upon line, command upon command, here a little and there a little. We are becoming a new creation of righteous behavior in the Lord Jesus.

We understand then that we are being saved by Divine judgment. The Psalmist prayed that God would look to see if there was any wickedness in him in order that he might be set free to walk in the everlasting way.

Zion is being redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness.

The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?" (Isaiah 33:14)

"Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?" Isaiah asks us this question. Then he answers his own question:

"He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil-- (Isaiah 33:15)

And explains the consequences:

"This is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him. Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that

stretches afar." (Isaiah 33:16,17)

The Lord Jesus always lives, moves, and has His Being in the Divine Fire, in the heart of the Father. Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

Our tradition has it that Jesus will return to bring us to Heaven. This is not what the above verse means at all. It means that Jesus will come to each believer and bring him or her to the Consuming Fire. Three verses later in John the Lord said that no one comes to the Father except through Himself, not to Heaven but to the Father!

The Lord Jesus always dwells in the Fire that God Is. In His great love for us Jesus wants us to be with Him where He is, that is, in the heart of the Divine Fire. Jesus has gone to the cross, and then to the Father in Heaven that He might prepare a place for us in the Father. We are to become a room in the Father's eternal house.

How do we prepare ourselves to dwell with the Furnace of Israel? By letting the Holy Spirit "fireproof" us today. It is today that the Lord wishes to cleanse us from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit so there is no chaff in us that will burn when we are brought into His Presence.

If our works are gold, silver, precious stones, then the fires of God's judgment on our life will only purify what we are and what we have done.

But if our works are those of the flesh, not having been wrought in Christ, the Divine fire will leave us naked and destitute. This is how we will appear when we are raised from the dead.

There is this about the holy Fire of God. When we determine to be holy as He is holy, holiness becomes a delight to us. We develop an absolute passion for holiness. We can't get enough of God's fire. We desire more and more fire until we are thinking in the Divine Fire; speaking in the Divine Fire; acting in the Divine Fire. There is no environment in which to live that compares in joy and peace with the Heart of our holy Father. This is where we always find the Lord Jesus.

Let God judge you and send necessary problems, pains, and pressures. If you respond cheerfully with a willing and obedient heart you will purchase for yourself a better resurrection, having been saved by judgment.

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