

96-11-10a

For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 18. As you know, in Romans chapter 9, we are in the section that addresses the vessels of honor that are prepared for glory and the vessels of wrath that are fitted for destruction. And one of the concepts that Paul introduces into that passage is the idea of the potter and the clay.

Does not the potter have power over the clay to make the type of vessel that he chooses? And Jeremiah 18 is the source of this, or at least one of the sources of this reference. And so we want to look at Jeremiah 18. It will aid us in understanding as we go forward in Romans 9. Jeremiah 18, the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house and there I will cause you to hear my words.

Then I went down to the potter's house and there he was making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. So he made it again into another vessel as it seemed good to the potter to make.

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter, says the Lord. Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck it up, to pull down and to destroy it.

If that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. In the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it, if it does evil in my sight so that it does not obey my voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Now therefore speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, Thus says the Lord, behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you.

Return now everyone from his evil way and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, that is hopeless. So we will walk according to our own plans and we will everyone obey the dictates of his evil heart.

Therefore thus says the Lord. Ask now among the Gentiles who has heard such things. The Virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.

Will a man leave the snow water of Lebanon which comes from the rock of the field? Will the cold flowing waters be forsaken for strange waters? Because my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to worthless idols, they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in pathways and not on a highway, to make their land desolate and a perpetual hissing. Everyone who passes by it will be astonished and shake his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy.

I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity. The overriding observation that helps us understand this passage is that it's addressed to Israel. These are the people of God.

He begins by addressing this to the house of Israel. This is not Syria, this is not the Hittites, it's not the Egyptians, it's not even Moab or Ammon or any of the other cousin nations to Israel. This is addressed to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

And so the calamity and the disaster that God promises in contrast to the building up and the blessing is a consequence for God's people. This is not talking about salvation, this is talking about blessing or discipline from God for the people of God. And that's an important point.

As we turn now to Romans chapter 9, we will continue our study this morning. We have seen several concepts as we have gone forward in chapter 8 and 9, haven't we? We began this book and covered the first several chapters noting the historical context of this message that Paul sends to the believers in Rome. There was a large contingent of Jewish Christians who were being pulled back in the direction of religion by works, righteousness by works, righteousness by keeping the law.

It was natural, that's what they had grown up with. That was their mindset, their tradition, their heritage. And this was the peer pressure from the rest of national Israel was to continue to observe the law and to achieve righteousness by observing the superficialities of feast keeping and sacrifice offering and so forth.

And by doing some actions that were visible and manifest before people to establish one's righteousness before men, establish one's righteousness in their own minds. And many of them felt that this would establish their righteousness before God. So it is a great sea change in thinking when Paul and the other apostles come in in the early days of the church and say, God is doing a new thing.

There's a new emphasis. He's no longer emphasizing the message that the law gives, which is that we fall short in our own strength of being able to keep either the spirit or the letter of God's commands as believers. The law of Moses was a system of life for believers.

It was not a system of salvation. It wasn't a means of evangelism per se, except in the symbols. But for Israel, it was a means of worship.

It was a means of life. It was life after salvation. If you were a foreigner or a stranger and became a proselyte, you came under the law.

And when you became a believer in God, you started to keep the law as a means of life and worship. So the great contrast here is not a new way of salvation. It's a new way of life for believers.

What does God require of us as believers in this age? And it's different. We're not required to keep the law of Moses as a system of faith and practice. We are exhorted, we are called to a life of righteousness by faith.

This is a more difficult calling because it is incumbent on us every waking moment. Whatever we may be doing, wherever we're sitting or standing or driving, whatever task we're performing, our soul, our thought life is being evaluated by God. Why do we do what we do? And this is the basis for God declaring us righteous or God declaring us out of line and in need of correction.

We may be doing the right thing physically and yet thinking the wrong thing in our soul. And that goes in the wood, hay and stubble pile. It doesn't count.

We may be giving money to a church, but we're doing it because of peer pressure from the people sitting around us. And in churches where they pass the plate and the plate comes by and we think, well, you know, I don't want to be thought stingy or whatever. So I'll make the motion, drop something in the plate and I'll be acceptable to those sitting near me.

Someone up in the pulpit may make a charge and make people feel guilty or feel pressure to give, talking about the great needs and so forth and people feel under compulsion. And if you respond to a compulsion like that, that's even though the act of giving would seem to be good, the motivation behind it renders it wood, hay and stubble. This message here in Romans is teaching believers who are being pressured to go back to righteousness by works, to concentrate on righteousness by faith.

And we've seen that Paul shocked them in the first part of the book by talking about unbelievers who live a life that is completely centered around themselves and the fulfillment of their own desires. And in chapter 2 he says, and you, oh man, you who are believers who ought to know better, you sit pointing the finger and condemning unbelievers for their lifestyle and you yourself are doing the very same thing. And this was designed to shock them out of their complacency and out of their traditional well-worn ruts of thinking.

What do you mean I'm just like these unbelievers? And then Paul in chapter 2 introduced the teaching in this book about the judgment seat of Christ. What is the basis of evaluation going to be? Those who by patient continuance and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality. God will grant eternal life.

And we reviewed the definition of eternal life. This is not eternal life in our traditional English sense that we're not going to the lake of fire. This is not talking about the duration or the location.

It's talking about the quality, life that partakes of the divine, life that partakes of the eternal. Passage after passage after passage tells us that life that partakes of the eternal and the divine is the blessing that goes to not just believers but to faithful believers, the overcomers of Revelation 2 and 3. So now in chapter 9 we've seen all the way through the book, in chapter 3 and in chapter

4 when he used Abraham and he said, when did God declare Abraham righteous? It was before he was circumcised. It was at the point that Abraham trusted the promise of God.

And this wasn't Abraham's salvation, was it? Abraham had been saved for decades. But when God made the promise of blessing and Abraham trusted him for that blessing of a son, God declared him righteous. This is living righteousness, righteousness for believers.

This is what pleases God and what fulfills our calling. And Paul uses that as an illustration to say that's our calling today. The pattern has been consistent even though the expression of it was different under the law.

God has always credited righteousness to faith. And that was the condemnation of Israel is that they made the law a superficial system instead of a means of expressing the faith that they had in their souls. So as we have gone on through chapter 6 and chapter 7, chapter 8 and now in chapter 9, this is the consistent theme and message of the letter to the Romans.

It is addressed to believers and it's talking about the lifestyle of believers. We often come to Romans for salvation passages and we like to take these verses. We have the Roman road, Romans 6.23 and Romans 3.23 and so forth to present the gospel.

And the truths that we present when we do that are in fact valid. But we often take these passages out of context because Romans is not a salvation book. Romans is the handbook or the manual for believers in this age on how to please God, how to stand at the judgment seat of Christ approved and accepted.

And that's very important and we've laid that foundation, we've verified it, we have seen it in countless passages in the Old and the New Testament, verified each of the terms, each of the concepts that Paul has introduced. And that's important because here in chapter 9, we are swimming against the tide of commonly held interpretation. Because when we get to chapter 9, especially if you've been exposed to Reformed theology or other systems that are influenced by Reformed theology, when we get to Romans 9, this is where predestination and salvation is thought to be taught.

But when we look at this as a part of the fabric of this book and as a part of the consistent teaching of Paul, we find that this is still talking about believers. We saw in our last study, when we get to verse 14, after having reviewed the elder shall serve the younger and so forth, why does Paul introduce that? Many times people come here and say, well, he says, Jacob I've loved and Esau I've hated and God arbitrarily chose Jacob for salvation and Esau for destruction. He arbitrarily chose Isaac for salvation and Ishmael for destruction.

And yet, when we go back to Genesis, we look at 17, we look at the fact that Ishmael had a relationship with God. He prayed and God heard his voice. God was with him.

God promised him a blessing. Same thing is true of Esau. These men were believers and they were physical descendants of Abraham, but they did not receive the blessing and the promise of God and the inheritance and the blessing is never defined as having anything to do with eternal salvation, is it? In Genesis, the promise to Abraham and to his seed is not a promise of salvation.

It's a promise of blessing, fulfillment of purpose, being at the forefront of God's plan for the ages and being instrumental in the outworking of the revelation of God's glory. It's a privilege. It's a blessing.

It's an inheritance that goes above and beyond birth. And we saw that in the Old Testament, physical birth into the family of Abraham is analogous to salvation, spiritual birth into the family of God. But simply being a physical descendant of Abraham is not sufficient to guarantee receiving the blessing and receiving the inheritance.

It requires something more. It requires following the Father's plan, trusting, expressing faith in the promises of God. That's how one partakes of the blessing.

And in Genesis 17, when God makes the covenant of blessing with Abraham, He says, your sons and their sons after them and the members of your household, the sign of the covenant is circumcision. And if people reject the covenant, if they aren't obedient, and of course we know that salvation is not based on obedience, is it? But partaking of this inheritance and blessing is based on obedience, circumcision, being faithful and obedient to the commands of God. If someone rejects that, he says they are cut off from their people.

They are not killed. It's not a capital punishment offense, but they're cut off from their people. And in Israel that meant no inheritance, no land ownership, no privilege of being a part of the community of Israel.

And in our analogy, that is true of us as believers. Being born into the family of God is pictured by being born into the family of Abraham. But partaking of the blessings and the rewards and being at the forefront of the fulfillment of God's plan will not take place simply by virtue of salvation alone.

It comes through faith and obedience. That's the message that we have to keep in mind when we go through Romans 9. And the reason I'm emphasizing and repeating and reviewing this is that we are so conditioned when we get to these passages to see salvation and that we almost have to overcompensate and remind ourselves of the momentum of this book and the momentum of Scripture to keep it straight. We resume now and I'll start in verse 14.

After talking about the fact that the elder shall serve the younger, Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated, we saw that this is the way that God emphasizes the basis for His choice. Normally, the elder would be the heir. Normally, the elder would receive the blessing and the double portion from his father.

But in the case of Abraham's sons, Isaac and Ishmael, the younger, Isaac, is the child of promise. He receives the inheritance and the blessing. In the case of Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau, Esau is the elder.

Esau should receive the double portion and the blessing and the inheritance. But Esau gives it away. He trades it for a mess of pottage and the elder winds up serving the younger.

And this reversal is designed to emphasize the fact that there's a basis for God's choice. It's not arbitrary. God's not just being capricious and unpredictable and saying, look, I'm God, I can do what I want.

That's not His point. His point is that we're responsible for what we choose and God will upset the normal order of things to honor those who honor Him. And those who disregard Him, He is going to disregard when it comes to blessing and to honor.

We've seen this in the parables of Christ and so on. So then in verse 14, what shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not. He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I have had mercy.

We saw that there's a difference in tense there. I will continue to have mercy on the one that I have had mercy on. We went back to the context there in Exodus and saw that when God says these words to Moses, Moses has asked for a blessing.

Moses has asked to see the glory of God. It's not Moses' salvation. It's not a distinction between salvation and lack of salvation.

It's the difference between the believers pictured by Moses on the mountain and the believers at the base of the mountain who are constructing the golden calf. They are believers. They came out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb and they picture throughout the Old Testament the saved.

But God is going to discipline the believers at the base of the mountain and God is going to honor the believer that is up on the mountain asking to see the glory of God. And this is a blessing. And that mercy that He's talking about here is not the mercy of salvation.

It's the mercy of the covenant. It's the mercy of inheritance. It's the mercy of putting someone at the forefront of His plan.

I will have mercy on whom I have had mercy. I will have compassion on whom I have had compassion. Who decides whether or not a human being receives the mercy and compassion of God? We do.

God loves the world. God sent His Son and paid for the sins of the entire world. John says He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

God has demonstrated His love and compassion for everyone. But we decide whether or not we're going to receive it. So then, it is not from the source of the one who makes a decision.

It is not of him who wills in verse 16. And the emphasis here is, you know, the illogical conclusion is, well, there's a lot riding on my choice then. I'm basically determining what God's going to do.

And Paul says, no. God's using your decision as the basis for what He's going to do. But don't puff yourself up and think that you're in control.

And we use the illustration that Norman Geisler has suggested. We can sit in an empty room or we can actually stand in an empty room and wish for a chair. But our wish and our decision to have a chair doesn't make a chair happen.

There's no power in our decision there, in our wish. It can't accomplish anything. But if God says anyone who wishes for a chair is going to get one and a chair appears in the middle of the room, God is the one who's glorified.

God is the one that did the impossible and materialized a chair out of nowhere. And that's Paul's point here. Salvation, blessing, anything you want to name, doesn't come from the source of our choosing or our effort.

It's not from the source of the one who wills. It's not from the source of the one who runs. It's from the source of God who shows mercy.

It's because of the mercy of God. And that's what we should emphasize and focus on, whether it's salvation or, as isn't the case here, blessing and reward and the full receiving of life that partakes of the divine, the eternal life, blessing and inheritance package. Scripture says to Pharaoh, For this purpose I have raised you up that I may show my power in you and that my name may be declared in all the earth.

People come to this passage and say, See, God just hardened Pharaoh's heart and made him be an unbeliever. But stop and think about it. What's the situation with Pharaoh? Does God harden Pharaoh's heart so that he can't be saved? Not at all.

God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he won't let the people go. And we went through the Scriptures and looked at this concept of hardening the heart and its synonym, stiffening the neck. A passage we're going to see this morning includes that phrase.

And this is consistently in Scripture, God forcing someone to stick with what is truly in their heart. We all know that we may make a decision, we may have a wish or a desire in our heart, and yet we will act contrary to that because of some external pressure. We may despise broccoli, but because of politeness and good manners, when we're a guest in someone's home and they serve broccoli, we'll go ahead and eat it and we'll say that it was good.

And yet in our heart, we despise broccoli. This is what Israel would do. Israel would make motions like they loved God and they would come and offer sacrifices, but in their heart they despised God and they rejected God and they disregarded the commands.

And they would harden their hearts, God would harden hearts and say, I'm going to force you to express on the outside what you have in your heart on the inside. Pharaoh had already made up his mind about God and the people of God. God simply forced Pharaoh to pursue that policy and not to give in to the pressure of his advisors or the pressure of the plagues and let the people go.

And he did that so that he could make an object lesson out of Pharaoh in the land of Egypt to show his attitude toward those who reject him and to those who oppress his people. It would have been a murky lesson if the Pharaoh had presented himself as the benefactor of Israel and had graciously said, I am a benevolent Pharaoh, I will let the people go and so forth. God says, no, you've oppressed the people for 400 years, I'm going to make you stick with that so that when I discipline your land with the plagues and bring out the children of Israel with a mighty hand, it will be a clear lesson to the nations.

And it was. Rahab the harlot and all of the surrounding peoples understood that the God of Israel had delivered them from an oppressive and cruel bondage. And that was the context in which God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Salvation is not an issue. And that's what he's talking about here. Why does God dispense discipline? Why does God dispense deliverance and blessing? It's for His power and His name to be declared in all the earth.

And that's the point of chapter 17. God is at the center of the universe. The actions of God are designed to glorify God, not to glorify us or not to puff ourselves up in our ability to choose.

And that's what's called loosely Arminianism in opposition to Calvinism. Calvinism says we can make no choices. God predetermines everything.

The opposite pole is Arminianism that says we can freely choose. We can choose to be good. We don't need any enablement from God and so on.

But verse 18 sums that up. Therefore, He has mercy on whomever He wills and whom He wills, He hardens. Now this mercy and hardening are not talking about salvation.

We haven't had salvation introduced anywhere here. This is the difference between blessing and disciplines. The difference between the favor of God and the wrath of God.

And there is a basis for God's choice. It says He has mercy on whomever He wills. Whom does God will to have mercy on? He says in 1 Samuel, I will honor those who honor me, but those who disregard me I will lightly esteem.

And that's the understatement of the Old Testament. I will lightly esteem. Now in verse 19, this is what we saw last time.

You will say to me then why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will? And it's important in verse 19, whatever English version of the Scriptures you have, that last phrase should be translated who has resisted His will, not who can resist His will. There's no word here for ability. This is who has resisted His will.

And this is the common objection that Israel has brought up when God sends a prophet to them throughout the Old Testament and says you are disobedient, you are stiff-necked, you are hard-hearted, you have failed to fulfill my commands. And Israel throws up its hands and says, in what way have we disregarded your commands? We're being faithful. We're being obedient because they measure themselves by the external standard of observing the feast or offering the sacrifice.

And they say we're obedient. We shouldn't be in line for discipline. We're doing what God commands.

As it says, this people draws near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And that's God's standard. And so what this is saying, this is an echo of what is repeated, for example, in Malachi.

We saw last time in Malachi, five or six times in Malachi, the prophet will bring an accusation. You have defiled my altars. And the people will say, in what way have we defiled your altars? You have dishonored my name.

In what way have we dishonored your name? And here, when Paul implies in chapter 9 that Israel has been hard-hearted and has been like Esau and like Ishmael instead of like Isaac and like Jacob, you will say to me then, why is he finding fault with us? Who has resisted his will? We haven't resisted his will. We've fulfilled his will. We're obedient.

We should be in line for blessing. And then Paul answers in verse 20, But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? And in the last few weeks, we've gone through topical studies of several of these concepts. What does it mean to be the seed of Abraham? What does it mean to experience the favor of God versus the discipline of God? We saw this looking at the passages in the New Testament that talk about outer darkness.

And I was reviewing a very good, thick, and deep book by Dr. Joseph Dillow. Jody Dillow has written a book called The Reign of the Servant Kings. The purpose of his book is to address the tradition, the theological tradition that he came out of, which is the Reformed tradition.

He received his master's and his doctorate in seminary, believing that theology. And he went over

to Europe and was teaching pastors in Europe these same things. And the questions that they asked stimulated his thinking when he was presenting the predestination and the election, unconditional election, and limited atonement and so forth.

And these European pastors were hearing this for the first time, and they asked questions, and Jody became dissatisfied in his own mind with the answers that he was giving them. He didn't feel like they were really solid from Scripture. And so he sat down to establish the scriptural basis.

His intent was to go in and to verify for himself and for these European pastors that these things were true. And in the course of his study, the Scriptures corrected his thinking. And the result of that study is in this book called *The Reign of the Servant Kings*.

And many of the passages that have been taught as referring to unbelievers and those who were never truly saved, you know, in Reformed theology, perseverance of the saints is the measure of whether or not you're really saved. If you persevere and have good works, you're saved. If you started out well and fall apart, well, you were never saved to begin with.

And he goes through the history of this thinking, why it came up and where it is refuted by the statements of the Scriptures themselves. But I was going back through *The Reign of the Servant Kings* this week, and in connection, he also addresses some of these passages that we have looked at. And it's encouraging to me to see that someone who has credentials and is respected and so forth can publish a book and come to the same conclusions that we have come to independently in our own studies.

But one of the things he pointed out is that he prefers the translation when you get to the outer darkness passages, the darkness which is outside, because it's a relative term. It comes up, for example, in the parable of the wedding feast where the one who comes in without the garment, and that white linen garment is always associated in Scripture with the righteous deeds of the saints. There's someone who's standing there without righteous deeds.

Righteous deeds are not the means of salvation, but they are the means of being qualified for blessing and inheritance and proximity to Jesus Christ and the Millennial Kingdom. And someone who does not have those, the king comes up and says, Friend, of course, God's not going to be calling unbelievers a friend, but he says, Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he commands his servants, and they bind this guest hand and foot and cast him out of the wedding feast into the darkness which is outside. And of course, that's relative to the festivities that are going on in the banquet hall.

So I think I like that translation. Like I say, I read these after we had done our study, but the darkness which is outside is a very legitimate translation. The article is on both of the Greek words there, on outside, you know, the darkness, the outside is what it would literally say.

But here we have seen these concepts related to believers. We have compressed and flattened

so much of Scriptural teaching that pertains and is directed at believers. And we've said, oh, that's unbelievers.

They're warning unbelievers that they'd better get saved rather than seeing that these are warning passages to believers and that if we do not persevere, if we do not endure to the end, if we do not hold fast the confidence which we had at first, we are in danger of loss. And this is a shocking and an unpleasant message. Paul told Timothy in the latter days that people are going to want to hear nice things and good things, that want to have their ears tickled.

They will not want to be instructed and rebuked and corrected by the Word of Truth. And this is one of the things that has happened. We take so many of these passages and dismiss them and say, well, I'm saved, that doesn't apply to me.

And they do. And we have failed to recognize that there are consequences for failing to pursue our calling, failing to press toward the mark. And this is the burden that's on Paul's heart.

And he says, I tell you even weeping that many believers are enemies of the cross of Christ. It's a big deal. And that's what's going on here in Romans 9. And it's a harsh message.

But keep in mind, God is the same yesterday, today and forever. And many people talk about the God of the Old Testament being a God of judgment and discipline and the God of the New Testament being a God of love and benevolence and that all of the harshness is past. It reminds me of the prophet Samuel when he comes up to Saul and Saul has spared King Agag.

And he's kept a portion of the spoils and said, well, I was going to sacrifice this to the Lord. And when the people have wanted to keep these things for themselves and Agag is standing there and the prophet Samuel comes up and begins to rebuke King Saul. And Agag says, well, surely the bitterness of death is past.

And Samuel grabs a nearby sword and hacks him in pieces. The bitterness of death was not past, even though Agag thought it was. And we have lulled ourselves into a false sense of security, not of eternal security, not for salvation, but we are generally taught all believers are going to experience wonderful blessing and reward.

We will all sit around the banquet table with Christ. We will all walk with Him in white. We will all rule and reign with Christ.

We will all have the white stone and the new name. We will all have the benefits and the blessings that God promises to the faithful. And it's just not true.

And we gloss over the judgment seat of Christ. We think of it as the reward seat of Christ. Well, the word is not reward, it's judgment.

And Paul tells the Corinthians, we will give an account for every word and every thought, whether

bad or good. It's right in the Scripture. And why we gloss over this, it's a terrible shame because we lose a source of motivation and we lose a perspective on reality by glossing these things over.

That's what Paul is attempting to correct here. And he says in verse 21, Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? Now, this lump of clay represents believers. The lump of clay that is in the hands of the potter is believers.

God is not shaping the human race and fitting some for destruction in the lake of fire and others for salvation in heaven. The lump of clay in Scripture never, I repeat, never is used for unbelievers. It is always used of the nation of Israel.

And in our second session this morning, we're going to specifically look at this subject, the potter and the clay. But we need to understand and we need to have a fresh mind as we come to these things. So many times we've come to Romans 9 and we've said, well, this is salvation.

It's believers and unbelievers. And it is not. And we will document that.

We're going to look at virtually every passage in the Bible next session that talks about the clay and the potter and the potter's vessel. And we're going to see exactly what that represents. Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, Do you see the parallel between verse 22 and verse 17? What is God's purpose? Remember way back in verse 11, so that the purpose of God in choosing might stand.

God has a purpose in choosing, some for blessing and some for discipline. There's a point. There's a reason why He chose Jacob and not Esau.

There's a reason. Now, Reformed theology assigns no reason. They say, this is the inscrutable, unknowable, unfathomable, His ways are higher, His thoughts are higher.

We can't know or understand. God is just inscrutable. And we should not be asking why God chooses some for salvation and some for destruction.

We should rather ask ourselves, we should just be grateful that He chooses any of us for salvation. Don't ask why God didn't save everyone. Just be thankful that God saved anyone.

And it's terrible. It distorts God by so over-emphasizing His sovereignty that the rest of His characteristics diminish and are unseen. God has a purpose in choosing, some believers for discipline and some believers for honor.

And that's the message. That's the point. Paul is writing this letter to believers and he's saying, when you stand at the judgment seat, there's going to be a basis of God's choice of some for glory and honor and immortality.

Remember chapter 2? And there are others who are going to weep and wail and gnash their teeth. Now, that's a harsh prospect for a believer who's been saved by the blood of Christ. And we don't like to think about it.

We don't want to believe it. We think, oh, my goodness, we're saved. The bitterness is past.

There should be no judgment. There should be no wrath. But there's going to be.

And it is an important message for us to understand. And I will tell you, even in my own personal experience, I find this to be extremely motivating. It shakes me personally out of complacency or out of taking things for granted.

It makes me want to look at my mental attitude and my level of perseverance on a daily basis. And I think it is designed to do that. I think all of us need to remember that like any good parent, God not only rewards good behavior, but he will discipline poor behavior.

And in some cases, the consequences are long-lasting and will last through the Millennial Kingdom at a minimum. God has a purpose. And in verse 22, God wants to show his wrath and to make his power known.

And he endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. We saw last time, well, my goodness, you get the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. How can that be anything but people, unbelievers going to the lake of fire? And we looked at the word for destruction, Apollia.

And in so many passages in the New Testament, that word, it doesn't mean destruction. It doesn't mean annihilation. There's a perfectly good word for annihilation.

This is the word for ruin or the word for waste. It was used when the lady broke the alabaster jar of perfume so that she could anoint Jesus with it. And the disciples got in a huff and said, why was this wasted? It could have been sold and the money given to the poor.

Well, obviously, the perfume and its jar were not destroyed, but in their minds, it was a waste. It could have been put to a better use, and it wasn't. And in Paul and in Peter, when he talks about these false teachers who distort the Word of God to their own ruin, Peter talks about the letters of Paul, and he says they wrest the Scriptures, W-R-E-S-T in the Old King James.

They distort the Scriptures to their own harm, to their own destruction, to their own apolia. Now, these are believers distorting the Scriptures to their own ruin, and it's the very same word, apolia. This word is not used typically for unbelievers.

The only places where we find that is when it's in the phrase son of perdition, talking about Judas. He is a son of perdition. And I would not be willing to argue the salvation status of Judas, pro or con, when you look at the words of Peter over in Acts, when they're going to elect a new apostle,

he talks about the fact that Judas has fallen from his position as an apostle and as a teacher, meaning that he was there at one time, and he has lost his portion.

And, you know, we like to think of Judas as being an unbeliever. I'm not prepared to say, because there are Scriptures that seem to indicate that he is on the far end of the spectrum of believers who come under judgment and under discipline. We'll study that out one of these days, but suffice it to say, being a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction is not a synonym for an unbeliever going to the lake of fire.

This is synonymous in the New Testament especially, and in the prophets of the Old Testament, with the people of God coming under great discipline from God. We're going to see that in our second session. We're going to pause here and take our break, but this phrase here, the potter having power over the clay, from the same lump to make a vessel for honor and another for dishonor, we're going to examine that in our next session and see what Scripture has to say.

How do the Scriptures define the potter and the clay? What does this mean, honor and dishonor? That's what we'll see when we come back. Let's stop and take a break.