

# Refashioned for Living Trust

## Jeremiah 18:1-11; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:2-11



“Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace. I’m gonna see my Savior’s face, ‘cause heaven is a wonderful place!” The words to the catchy tune lift our spirits, reminding us of the idyllic pictures of a joyful paradise of carefree pleasantries and play—heaven as the eternal resort vacation. We tend to look upon a life of faith in a similar manner. We hear the gospel’s call to trust, but refashion its message as devoid of struggle, heartache, and pain. How does that mesh with the storms of life that come our way? Does God desire something more than to present us with a life of ease?

God’s word to Jeremiah at the potter’s house is not the message we would like to hear. Little of what God spoke through Jeremiah was what the people wanted to hear. They were much too busy presenting God their wish lists to worry with God’s will for them. They wanted national sovereignty. They wanted wealth. They wanted peace and security. They wanted dominance over their enemies. They wanted freedom from foreign taxation. They wanted protection from the Assyrian army that threatened the very existence of Judah.

God’s concerns were simpler. God just wanted the people to learn trust. God wanted to refashion them into a nation who would heed and seek not their own will, but the will of God. In vain they called themselves the people of *Yahweh*. They were the people who wanted to use *Yahweh* for their own ends. God wanted them to live out the trust they proclaimed. They did not like God’s message and tried to discount Jeremiah as a public enemy. They did not want to be changed. They wanted to live just as they had been living. They would not allow God to interfere with their lives.

Paul wrote the believers in Thessalonica from a backdrop of persecution. He had come to Thessalonica after being abused in Philippi. There he had been imprisoned with Silas, beaten unjustly, and expelled from town by the local authorities. Life was no fairy tale dream of living happily ever after. For Paul, the gospel meant suffering, pain, distress, and persecution of various kinds. It was from this context that he writes to encourage the Thessalonian believers.

We would rather expect Paul to be the one needing encouragement. He was the one who had faced the greater amount of persecution. Yet Paul writes to strengthen the believers, for he knows that they, also, will face their own share of persecution for the sake of Christ.

This was not the kind of persecution that so many Christian leaders in our nation like to talk about. Sure, there are those who do not want to hear the gospel and desire to discredit any and every expression of faith. In contrast with the Paul’s experience, that is no persecution. We face opposition to the gospel. When Paul speaks of taking a stand, he speaks more to the lives of our forefathers who founded churches like Rocks back in the 1700’s. He spoke of a persecution that could include imprisonment, heavy fines, and beatings. He spoke from a faith seeking not to be pleased, but to please God at whatever cost.

In 1772, that could mean a fine of 2000 lbs. of tobacco for not baptizing a child in the Church of England. It could mean imprisonment for a Baptist to preach without a license from the state church. It

could mean holding a baptismal service under threat of death from the bead of a rifle. In Paul's day, the threats and punishments of persecution could be much more cruel and exacting. Paul considered them insignificant. He was much more concerned with being a faithful servant and witness for Christ Jesus.

When it came to issues of suffering, Paul looked back on the suffering of Christ Jesus. He looked to the example of trust in God's care as Jesus faced the cross. He looked to the hope of the resurrection and trusted God beyond the limits of toil, pain, suffering, and death. Persecution was a way of life. It was the expected norm. It was nothing to shy away from, either.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians because he knew they also faced persecution. He knew that learning to trust God fully was more than a life of ease and comfort. He recognized that true faith was not for the weak at heart. God desired to refashion a people for trust and service that run counter to our nature. He wanted to remind them of his own example in their midst, pointing to the example of Christ Jesus. If God did not place Himself above the ravages of persecution, why would we expect faith to cost us nothing?

Paul reminded the believers of persecution and struggling to remain faithful to God. He spoke of God not designing them for destruction, but for fellowship. Along the way of fellowship, God wanted us to learn to trust, looking beyond the issues of this world. Throughout his words to the believers, Paul speaks of a transformation of life. Their daily example is to stand out from those around them. Their lives are to serve as beacons of integrity, character, and perseverance. God desired to refashion them into a people who would not simply say the right things, but serve God with their all.

Jeremiah lived no life of ease. He bemoaned the fact of his birth, for serving as God's messenger to Judah was no vacation. Yet he declared that he could do nothing other than be faithful to render God's word in faithfulness. In truth, he bemoaned not his life, but the reluctance of the nation to heed the warning and call to repentance. Jeremiah accepted the truth of the message he preached. Doom was coming to the nation, and they did not want to hear that message. He took up his proper position as God's servant, calling other to the same.

Paul called the Thessalonians to the same commitment. He reminded them that their hope was not in vain. There was more to the gospel than simply suffering. There was hope in God calling us into fellowship with Himself. The apparent peace and safety of those who persecuted faith was a farce. As the terrorism, hurricanes, floods, mudslides, and earthquakes of recent days, portray so vividly, security is so fragile. Paul declares a hope with such greater content than the world can understand. The God who created this world desires to refashion us into a people who trust Him amid life's storms. We were not created for disaster and destruction, but for a life of fellowship with the Almighty.

We don't learn to trust when things progress too smoothly. We learn by being stretched. Being remolded doesn't always feel great. Facing the storms of life is not an experience we relish with anticipation. It is in these times, however, that we are the most open for God to mold clay into a more suitable shape. Will we allow God to refashion us at will? Will we place our lives at His complete disposal? Will we live out the trust in God that we claim? Heaven is about coming face-to-face with God. Will we so live that we might enter into His presence in full confidence?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*