

The Zeal of the Lord – Isaiah 9:6-7, Titus 2:11-15

The Treasure that is Your Life in Christ #4

Introduction – We are considering the treasure that we have which is our life in Christ, a treasure beyond value (Matt 13:44-46). We have seen how this treasure is now our new identity, our new way of being human (Rom 6). And we have seen that knowing God in Christ is the best thing in life (Eph 1:15-23). The zeal of the Lord brought you into this life and that zeal produces a zeal for God in us. As a “State of the church” sermon for 2018, let this be an exhortation to this local body. Overwhelmed by the zeal of the Lord for our salvation, let it transform us into people zealous for the things which please God.

An Overview of the Passages – Christmas exists because of the zeal of the LORD of armies (Isaiah 9:6-7). The Son was given, stooping down in becoming a child but with an end of having the government of all creation given to Him. His name reveals His character (v6) and we are promised that this rule will have no end (v7) because the “*zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*” Paul instructs a younger pastor to preach this “grace of God that brings salvation” which appeared (Tit 2:11). This grace-preaching teaches us to deny ungodly living and instead embrace righteous living (v12). This is to be done in the sure hope of seeing Jesus again (v13), the One who gave Himself for us to redeem us and purify us (v14). We are redeemed from every sin and simultaneously purified to be a special people, “*zealous for good works*” (v14). As with Timothy, Paul commands Titus to thunder these things in his preaching (v15, see 2 Tim 4:2-5).

The Zeal of the Lord – We can see clearly in Isaiah that the zeal of the Lord brings forth His saving grace. One definition of this kind of zeal is, “*an earnest desire of and concern for all things pertaining to the glory of God and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus among men.*” This is the Lord’s earnest desire and it is to be the desire of Christ’s disciples. The zeal of the Lord is violent against sinful rebellion (as Phinehas demonstrated in Num 25, or Jehu in 2 Kings 10:15-17), and hypocrisy (as Jesus in the temple driving out the moneychangers in John 2:17), and full of saving grace (as the Lord revealed in destroying Sennacherib’s forces at Jerusalem in 2 Kings 19). Zeal consumes the Psalmist when God’s Word is forgotten (Psalm 119:139). The righteous expect God’s zeal to intervene for His people (as in the prayers of Isaiah 63:15).

Misplaced Zeal – It is possible to earnestly desire but not have a zeal according to the knowledge of God. Paul charged the unbelieving Jews with such zeal (Rom 10:2) and of course, he had been guilty of that himself (Acts 8:3). The word for zeal is also translated “*envy*” and this kind of zeal is rottenness to the bones (Prov 14:30). There is a man-centered zeal that makes resolutions according to our own strength which is repulsive to God (Gal 3:3). So zeal must be regulated by the Word of God and mediated to us by His Spirit.

The Example of our Lord – His zeal is first of all revealed in His willingness to humble Himself by becoming a man. But His zeal for His Father’s glory throughout His ministry was also manifest. He sought His Father’s will (John 5:30), and taught what the Father gave Him (John 7:16). His works were the works His Father gave Him (John 9:4). The only glory Jesus wished for was a glory that revealed His Father (John 17:1-5). His zeal kept Him steadfast even when it would cost Him His own life (John 18:11). We have been purified to be a special people, zealous for good works that reveal the glory of God. We can only obey this if we have the zeal which Christ has. And so we are instructed to look to Christ for that finishing zeal (Heb 12:1-2).

Zeal to Stand Against the Enemy – The devil prowls about like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8). One Puritan wrote, “*shall we not be as violent to save our souls as the devil is to damn them?*” Paul said to Titus that our salvation teaches us to “*live soberly*” which includes taking our battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil seriously. Many have noted the zeal with which the enemies of God pursue their wickednesses and how timid the church is to stand for righteousness. Their heart is set on evil (Eccles 8:11) so that they weary themselves to commit sin (Jer 9:5), rush into iniquity like a horse into battle (Jer 8:6), encourage all to join in with them (Rom 1:32) and cannot sleep until they have achieved it (Prov 4:16). Where is the zeal of the Lord among His people?

The Sin of Being Lukewarm – When Jesus spoke to the church at Laodicea, He said that a lukewarm heart towards Him was repugnant (Rev 3:14-16). If an individual or a church is lukewarm, Jesus will vomit you out of His mouth. They were guilty of resting in their riches and social status and were blind to their growing eternal poverty (vv17-18). Then Jesus said, “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent*” (v19).

All of these passages make clear the point of Titus 2:11-15. We have been saved so that we might be a people zealous for good works (also Eph 2:10). If you are wallowing about in a lukewarm attitude with regard to holiness and the glory of God, how can you say that you have been saved?

The Gift of Zeal – But do not miss this. This zeal is only given to those who have been saved. It is not in our nature to have this zeal. Like repentance and faith, it is the gift of God – and these are gifts God loves to give. And so, hear the Word of God: You have been saved by the zeal of the Lord. Rise up, repent of your spiritual laziness, gird up your loins, and run the race set before you.