

The Christian's Comfort: 2 Thessalonians 1

By Joshua

No big idea.

2 Thessalonians 1

Moment of silence

Let's honor our fallen heroes that recently gave their lives in the service of not only our nation but also another that is under oppression. Let's take a moment of silence, prayer, and respect as we remember these sacrifices.

Introduction

The book of 2nd Thessalonians is one of Paul's earliest written letters:

- Most scholars agree that Paul's very first letter. (at least that we still possess today) was his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, and that this 2nd letter was written approximately 3 months after.
- I would encourage you to read 1st Thessalonians when you have a chance.
- One could arguably say that this book, in its three short chapters, is the most intensive treatise and theological overview of the return of Christ, the rapture, and the events leading up to Christ's return that we have in the Bible.

This letter is written in the context of a church that was suffering persecution and theological confusion on multiple fronts.

- On one end, the Jews within the city of Thessalonica were not fond of the Christian presence in the city and were a constant source of consternation to the church, frequently stirring up rumors and accusations against the church to the Roman authorities.
- Acts 17 – the account of Paul on his second missionary journey to this city which was a major trade city on the Macedonian coast. Paul's stay there was short, mostly due to an uprising caused by Jews who were opposed to the gospel and jealous of Paul's effectiveness and the following that this new sect of Jesus followers was gaining.

[Act 17:5-6 NKJV] 5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Now I want you to imagine, if you can, there being groups of people within a society that **plant and plan attacks and riots** in order to turn people and politics against the people of God and the ways of Christ... just if you stretch your imaginations that far.

- Be it radical Hindus in India, Radical Muslims in the middle east, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the communists in China, the radical secularized left, and Antifa in the USA, those who are willing to incite violence, manipulations, and lies in order to silence the Christian witness still exists today, and we will see more and more of it in the days to come as we grow closer and closer to Christ's return.
- But wouldn't it be wonderful to have that accusation levied against us? "These who have turned the world upside down..."
 - The Christian witness should always be one that is disturbing the godless status quo and causing people to follow a radically different direction than the rest of the world is going.

Quote

“When the Word is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind.”

CS Lewis / Attributed

Theological confusion

But on top of the persecution, they were facing, another angle of the enemy's attack was to confuse this church about eschatology. In other words, rumors had been planted and were surfacing that Christ's coming for his church was somehow missed by the Thessalonians and now they were suffering the persecution of the judgment of God in the Great Tribulation. Paul wants to counter these things and reassure the church that not only had they not missed the rapture, but the persecutions they were facing were a necessary part of their preparation for the coming kingdom of Jesus, and not without their benefit and purpose.

- I believe that this book is very preparatory for us as Christians in America, and as Christians living in the last days leading up to the return of Christ.

Bible Verse

[2Th 1:1-2 NKJV] **1 Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy** (*Silas and Timothy remained in Thessalonica and ministered to the new believers after Paul departed*), **to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**

- Many times, Paul will introduce himself in his letters with a title attached – Paul an apostle, Paul a bondservant of Jesus Christ...
- Here, he just says “Paul.”
- I think there were times when Paul wrote and needed to establish his authority and put an apostle hat on. Other times, Paul needed to make his motive clear, “I’m coming bound in my service to the Lord.”
- But here, I think he’s leveling the playing field. He is simply “Paul, a fellow believer, experiencing the same sufferings as you, needing the same grace as you...” Along with Silas and Timothy, men you know, you trust, friends, and fellow laborers in the gospel.

The tone is one of empathy and friendship. This is a letter designed to break down barriers and bring encouragement.

- Sometimes it’s important for me to be pastor Josh, but not at the expense of people forgetting that I’m still just Josh.
- It would be weird to me if my kids called me pastor Josh.
- I think Paul is writing this letter with the tone of a spiritual father toward his kids who were struggling, discouraged, and confused.

Church OF the Thessalonians IN God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Notice the dual location – They are of Thessalonica, but they are IN Christ and the Father.
- Just as we are a church OF Americans, Missourians, Saint Joesians, but more importantly, we are IN Christ Jesus.
- Notice that Paul doesn’t dismiss their national or ethnic identity, but rather defines it by placing it under the banner of Christ.

Despite what the world is telling you right now, there’s nothing wrong with being an American. The Bible tells us that God has, **“Determined our preappointed times and boundaries of our dwellings...”**

- It should break our hearts when we hear of the loss of life of our soldiers who risked their lives to help another nation in need.

- We should deeply care about the issues that are unique to our nation and the lives of the people that they affect.
- But how we live as Americans should always come under the authority of how the Bible calls us to live as people who are in Christ. Jesus is not just coming back for Americans, He is coming back for every tribe, tongue, and nation who call upon His name. But that doesn't mean it's wrong to be a proud American and to want to see our nation live up to righteous ideals. I care deeply about America, because of our potential for either good or evil in this world.
 - When I give account to God for how I stewarded my temporary citizenship on earth, I want to be able to say with confidence, "I didn't take an apathetic approach, I engaged to see the gospel spread. I engaged to see the truth spoken. I engaged to stand for justice, righteousness, and freedom, in a world that was full of tyranny, oppression, and wickedness."

Bible Verse

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Application

Grace and peace.

- In the correct order of succession – You can never experience the peace of God without first receiving the grace of God.
 - Grace brings forth God's unmerited favor and peace sustains your internal being when chaos is all around you.
- God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
 - On Bible scholar points out that the noun structure in the Greek is interconnected in a way that Paul's intent was to display the intersection and connectedness of God the Father and Jesus Christ could not be separated. God the Father and Jesus Christ are two distinct persons, yet they are one in nature, one in intent, and one in authority.
 - You don't get the son without acknowledging His hypostatic union with the Father, and you don't get the Father without acknowledging His oneness and equality with the Son.

Next section

The next six verses are what I like to call, “A Pauline run-on.” In a typical Paul-like fashion, Paul builds idea upon idea, inserting commas instead of periods, to the point that when you are finished reading his sentences, you feel like you need to take a break just to process the number of ideas and information conveyed. He was a brilliant man, but sometimes you need to read his sentences three or four times.

- For our sake, I have broken the next 8 verses into four basic ideas that Paul wants to communicate:

- **The Pattern of the church**
- **The Perseverance of the church**
- **The Penalty of the church’s enemies**
- **The Prize of the Church**



1

The Church's Pattern

Bible Verse

[2Th 1:3-4 NKJV] 3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

Application

Let's break this down...

- First, we are BOUND (obligated, can't help it) to always give thanks for you.
- I love how Paul insists on finding some good reason to thank God for the body of Christ.
- Today, there's a lot of body shaming that goes on, and some of it is justified. There is plenty wrong with the church today, and some things wrong in every church.
 - But here's what I love about Paul. Even when he has to correct a church, he will try to find some way to encourage them or pray for them.
 - It's one thing to constantly point out or complain about the weaknesses or failures in a church, and another thing to say, "God I want to find something to be thankful for..."
 - Despite all that is wrong with the church, we also need to be reminded how grateful we should be for the church?
 - Where would you be without the church? I think my growth in Christ, encouragement, and calling, times of sweet worship in His presence, the unlocking of biblical truths to my mind and spirit, serving outside of myself, evangelizing the lost, and the list goes on and on... all because of this beautiful living organism that the Lord has made me part of: the Church.

Two things Paul is extremely grateful for

An exceeding faith, and an abounding love.

In these two things, Paul expresses that a church that thrives in these things is a church worthy of being an example to all believers.

The word exceeding – To increase above an ordinary degree.

EXAMPLE: It's what grass does in a Missouri Summer. Seriously, there are few more discouraging tasks than mowing your yard in Missouri during the summer. But boy, does that grass grow, and it grows exceedingly. You can't stop it, you can't slow it down!

That's exactly what God has in mind for the progress of our faith.

- When we discuss faith in this way, we recognize that faith isn't a one-time purchase. I prayed to receive Jesus, and now I have faith. Faith is not static, it's always expanding.
- Biblical faith is that which begins at our salvation decision, but continues and grows as we live out the kingdom here on earth.
- The Christian life that is stagnant reflects a faith that is no longer being exercised and strengthened.
 - And we are about to learn, the greatest sets of weights for the building of our faith are difficulties, trials, and persecutions!
- Consider the following:

Bible Verse

[1Pe 1:6-7 NKJV] 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Application

WE need to realize and embrace the fact that there is something much more valuable to God than our comfort, ease, and material wealth, and that is the refinement and perfection of our faith. Faith is the currency of the kingdom, yet our faith accounts won't naturally increase as we tend to naturally drift toward apathy. Difficulties often force us into places of trust and action.

- Gold perishes, but the things that we do now by faith last forever. It is not our wealth, but our faith that will ultimately be revealed when Jesus returns.

Bible Verse

[2Pe 1:5-9 NKJV] 5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, [you] will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Illustration

Faith is like a tree: It has roots that bring forth shoots and bear fruits. A tree with dead roots, or broken shoots, or rotten fruits is good for nothing.

- **Shoots – Our faith is rooted in Christ.**
- **Shoots – It grows through action, obedience, and service.**
- **Roots – It ultimately bears fruit that honors and glorifies God.**

If however, we neglect the growth of our faith, we still get fruit, but it's the wrong kind.

- **Shoots – Rooted in the world.**
- **Shoots – Self-centered and worldly pursuits.**
- **Roots – Shallow faith and lack of eternal impact.**

Abounding Love

The kind of agape love that this church displayed, was a love that was in action, one toward another.

- Their love wasn't merely abounding, it was about toward one another.
- Love was not merely being expressed in a corporate sense, it was being expressed individually, from one member to the next.
- There was an abundance of love that caused the church to be a place where everyone in it knew that they were genuinely cared for and valued.
- Just months earlier, this was Paul's prayer for this same church.

[1Th 3:12 NKJV] 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we [do] to you...

What a joy to get reports that his prayers were being answered.

Application

This church's faith was so active, and love so genuine, that Paul goes as far as to say in verse 4, **“so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,”**

- Paul would say, “Wherever I go, I’m telling people that if there was a church they should imitate in these specific areas, it would be your church!”
- It was rare that Paul boasted about a church, but here he tells everyone about their fervency. Have the kind of faith and love that church has.

WHAT IF, your family, your life, or this church, God put a big sign outside that said, “Be like this church, be like this Christian, be like this family...” How would you feel about that? It would prompt me to ask serious questions about the state of my faith and the abundance of my love:

- Are the risks of faith I’m taking for God increasing, or have I become comfortably apathetic and resistant to being used by God in new ways?
- Are my love, compassion, and sacrifice worthy of the name of Jesus and accurately reflect His heart for the world?
- Is my love for the church active and involved with those around me, or have I become increasingly more disconnected from the body of Christ?
- Am I adding to my faith, increasing in my service, stretching out of my comfort zone, or have I settled in my own little world that I will do everything I can to preserve so I don’t have to be bothered with further growth?

Notice the way Paul describes their response to difficulties: He uses words like patience, and endurance.

Quote

“It’s not the experience of difficulty that grows your faith, it is how you engage difficulty when it comes.”

Josh /

Application

Trials, tribulations, and persecutions have the potential to either ***end*** you or ***establish*** you, and much depends on how you choose to respond to them when they come.

- We need to adopt the mindset of Christ.
- My tendency when wronged is to focus on my anger or desire to be justified. the mind of Christ would be to patiently endure, forgive, and let God be my judge.
- My tendency when suffering comes is to find a way of escape, even if it means to compromise. the mind of Christ would have me look forward to the glory that will come after my temporary suffering, and keep my eyes on heaven.
- My tendency when intimidated or threatened by evil is to back down, shy away, and self-preserve. The mid of Christ would call me to stand boldly, engage the enemy, and trust in Christ.
- Our tendency is to feel sorry for ourselves, the mind of Christ finds an opportunity to glorify God. Our tendency is to play the victim, the mind of Christ tells us to find our victory in Christ and overcome by faith.

The Three most valuable elements of life

Paul would say to the church in Corinth, the three things remain Faith, Hope, and Love.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, He mentions all three of these in his greeting:

[1Th 1:3 NKJV] 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father...

But in his second letter, he fails to mention the word hope. He recognizes that they are still being patient in the midst of their trials, but that their hope in the future was waning. This is why he is going to spend chapter two expanding on what he wrote about in his first letter.

He is going to remind them of what he called, ***“our blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”*** in his letter to Titus.

Application

But I wonder if any of you here can relate.

- Have you ever been in the middle of circumstances you don't understand, difficulties you didn't invite into your life or persecutions for following Jesus that make you question if it's worth it? You are trying to patiently endure, but starting to wonder if it's ever going to turn a corner bring forth something that's worth it?
- Have you ever been confused about what everyone is saying about the end times and wonder if Jesus is really ever coming back?

If you have, then you understand what these people were going through and why Paul is explaining to them the purpose behind their suffering. And verse 5, which you almost need to read several times slowly to understand, Paul gives clarity into the trials.

2

The Church's Perseverance

Bible Verse

[2Th 1:5 NKJV] 5 [which is] manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

Illustration

Manifest – clear and obvious evidence that God’s judgments are right.

What is the evidence? The trials and tribulations you are facing. WHAT???

Think of it like this. If you and I were on a boat and the waves started getting out of control and the boat started tossing to and fro. If I looked at you and said, “these waves are the clear and obvious evidence of the strength of the wind,” wouldn’t that make sense? The wind is real, the wind is strong, the wind has effects. How do I know, because I am experiencing the waves created by the wind?

THE CONNECTION: Persecution, tribulations, and difficulties that come from the world upon the Christian are the evidence of the reality of God’s righteousness in us, and the reality that we are being prepared for His eternal kingdom. remember what Jesus said?

[Jhn 3:19-20 NKJV] 19 “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

When you do something fundamentally godly and righteous and someone despises you, mistreats you, or spreads lies about you because of it, it is evidence that God’s righteous judgment exists, because their conscience is pricked. You were salt that stung their wound. you were light that invaded their comfortable darkness. And their response of taking it out on you is the evidence that God’s judgment has already begun.

- Not only that, but the fact that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper is evidence that one day Jesus will return in judgment and flip the scales so that the righteous have rest and the wicked are afflicted.

Counted worthy

He continues, "That you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suffer."

- He is not suggesting that somehow you can earn a level of worthiness that will finally allow you into heaven. You and I could never be worthy enough for the kingdom. Aren't you grateful today that the kingdom of God is your because Jesus was worthy and took your place at the cross? That he has made you accepted in the beloved on the merit of His own righteousness?
- So what is Paul saying?

Our natural inclination when trials and difficulties come is to find the quickest way out of them. Paul is saying that sometimes God is not looking to immediately rescue us from trials, but rather is giving us an opportunity in the trial to show our allegiance to His kingdom.

EXAMPLE: That US soldier in Afghanistan is a citizen of the US by way of birth or legal immigration into the US. His or her performance overseas doesn't change that fact. But on the battlefield, they have an opportunity to show that they consider themselves worthy of defending their people and constitution. Their valor against attack, their resolve in the face of evil, their heroism, courage, and compassion are all displaying to the enemy their pride in their nation.

- When we endure difficulty with patience, stay bold in the face of our adversaries, continue in faith, hope, and love, and stay active in the spiritual battles around us even when we are at the end, we display to the spiritual forces of Satan, and to the unbelieving world that we are citizens of heaven,. ambassadors for Christ, and that we are worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus and everything He stands for.

Conclusion

We are going to dig deep into clearing up the fog regarding eschatology, but before we do, we need to better understand the theology of suffering. The tribulation coming on this world during God's season of wrath and judgment will be unparalleled to anything it's ever known, seen, or experienced.

I believe that the follower of Jesus won't be around to experience it.

I do believe, however, that the idea of suffering for the sake of Christ or being persecuted for the sake of righteousness is lost on many western, American Christians. If history serves as a reminder and a pattern, we cannot be ignorant of the fact that following Jesus makes enemies who desire to see Christians out of the mix.

I try not to be a pessimistic person. I believe that ahead of us could be great revival, great repentance, and another outpouring of salvation. But I also am seeing a greater hostility toward truth and greater oppression toward those who refuse to bow to the idols of the culture. Will we stand? Will we continue to hope? Will we count it an honor to suffer for the name of Jesus?

I find great confidence and solace in the words of one of Martin Luther's most famous hymns, A Mighty Fortress.

Illustration

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours

through him who with us sideth.

Let goods and kindred go,

this mortal life also;

the body they may kill:

God's truth abideth still;

his kingdom is forever!

