

# Suffering for the Gospel

## 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

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*Strong! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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Wednesday, October 7, 2015, 7pm at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois  
[livinghopechurch.net](http://livinghopechurch.net)

Listen to the words of John Newton, author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”:

“It belongs to your calling of God as a minister, that you should have a taste of the various spiritual trials which are incident to the Lord’s people, that thereby you may...know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary; and it is likewise needful to keep you perpetually attentive to that important admonition, “Without Me ye can do nothing.”- **John Newton**

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 2. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “Suffering for the Gospel.”

### **Struggle and Pain a Blessing: the Butterfly**

Pain is a blessing in disguise. Struggle and affliction are necessary in God’s plan. Pain and struggle must run their course in order for proper growth to occur.

I learned of the man who found a cocoon of the emperor butterfly. He took it home to watch it develop. One day a small opening appeared. He observed the caterpillar struggling for several hours to pass its body pass a certain point – a very small opening. Finally, this well intentioned scientist concluded there must be something wrong. So he took a pair of scissors, and snipped the remaining top of the cocoon. The moth emerged of course very easily. The body was large and swollen, its wings small and shriveled. He expected in a few hours that the wings would spread out in natural beauty, but they didn’t. Instead of having the natural ability to fly, the moth crawled around dragging around shriveled wings and a swollen body – without the ability to fly.

Only later did the man understand that the constricting cocoon and the struggle was necessary to pass through, because the struggling through that constricting hole was God’s way of passing fluid from the body into the wings – that the wings might be large and developed and the caterpillar be transformed into a butterfly able to fly with ease.

God wants you to live a transformed life, and that only comes through struggle, pain, and difficulty. If we cut it off, we will be walking around with swollen fleshly habits in our life with shrunken spiritual wings, and no power to fly.

### **Holy Scripture**

**1 Thess. 2:1-8**, “For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.<sup>2</sup> But though we had already **suffered** and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you

know, we had **boldness** in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of **much conflict.**”

<sup>3</sup>For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, <sup>4</sup>but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup>For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. <sup>6</sup>Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. <sup>7</sup>But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. <sup>8</sup>So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

### **History of the Thessalonian Church**

Paul, Silas and Timothy were the first to share the Gospel in Thessalonica, where many Jews and Gentiles came to believe and follow Jesus (Acts 17:1-4). Very quickly, Paul and the others faced persecution and even violent danger from the Jewish community there (Acts 17:5-6; 1Thess 1:6; 2:2). Thus, Paul was forced to leave the city prematurely (Acts 17:9-10).

### **Persecution and Integrity**

Paul wants the Thessalonians to see that hardship and suffering can be expected in the journey of following Jesus, and that persecution will likely continue for them, though God will be faithful to them.

He also wants them to realize what following Christ is. It’s not just a set of beliefs but a walk of integrity.

## **I. Great Consolation in the Gospel’s power, 1 Thess. 2:1**

### **In Spite of Difficulty, Ministry is Not in Vain**

**1 Thess. 2:1**, “For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.” Literally, Paul’s ministry was not “empty;” it was not “a failure.” It produced results.

The Gospel may not produce fruit right away or even in our lifetime. As Paul says in **1 Cor. 3:6-7**, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup>So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

### **Gospel Ministry Never a Fruitless Pursuit**

In a major understatement Paul goes on to say that his entrance *was not a failure*. The perfect tense of his verb gives the idea of a continuing result: not only did the preaching have immediate impressive consequences, but a permanent change was wrought in the lives of the believers. The word *kenos* (*a failure*) means ‘empty’; Paul strongly repudiates any thought that he had frittered his time away in aimless pursuits. He had come with a definite aim, and he had secured what he had aimed at.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morris, L. (1984). *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An introduction and commentary* (Vol. 13, pp. 51–52). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

### God's Word will Not Return Void

**Isaiah 55:11-12**, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

We don't know when or how, but God's Word proclaimed is never empty or in vain!

### Adoniram Judson

Adoniram Judson was a missionary to Burma. Judson's ministry to Burma was not without fruit. It was not empty or in vain. He went to a pagan land. When Judson began his mission in Burma, he set a goal of translating the Bible and founding a church of 100 members before his death.

Yet in the middle of his ministry, he about gave up in despair. When his first wife Ann died he was pushed to despair. He wrote in one letter home to Ann's relatives: "My tears flow at the same time over the forsaken grave of my dear love and over the loathsome sepulcher of my own heart."<sup>2</sup> He had a grave dug beside the hut and sat beside it contemplating the stages of the body's dissolution.

He retreated for forty days alone further into the Tiger-infested jungles of Burma, and wrote in one letter than he felt utter spiritual desolation. "God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not."<sup>3</sup> He was under spiritual attack, but his journey to Burma was not in vain.

When he died, he left the Burmese Bible, 100 churches, and over 8,000 believers.<sup>4</sup> What was his secret? Judson was not a great man. He was a very weak man with a very powerful God. Judson was a weak man and he knew it. For this reason, he demanded of himself that he seek the Lord for two to three hours a day. In his own writings, tells how he would find time for this. He says, “Arrange your affairs, if possible, so that you can leisurely devote two or three hours every day” to prayer. Judson was known to divide this prayer time into seven sections throughout the day.

You say, how did he do it? I'll let him tell you. He writes the following: “Endeavor seven times a day to withdraw from business and company, and lift up thy soul to God in private retirement. Begin the day by rising after midnight and devoting some time amid the silence and darkness of the night to this sacred work. Let the hour of opening dawn find thee at the same work. Let the hours of nine, twelve, three, six, and nine at night witness the same. Be resolute in His cause. Make all practical sacrifices to maintain it. Consider that thy time is short and that business and company must not be allowed to rob thee of thy God.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 288.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>4</sup> Rosalie Hall Hunt (Spring 2006). "Unforgettable" in the magazine: *Christian History & Biography*, 90: 39–41.

<sup>5</sup> E.M. Bounds. *Power through Prayer*, 48.

## Do You Remember Who Gave You the Gospel

I can remember on over 10 occasions when Christians from different churches came to my door and gave me the Gospel. One 2 occasions that I remember, people were giving out Gospel literature in the mall. I can remember on numerous occasions how a bus would pick me up when I was a kid and bring me to a Gospel preaching church. That church would one day send me out as a missionary.

What about you? Who gave you the Gospel? Aren't you glad that though you did not perhaps repent right away, that their coming to you was not in vain.

## II. Great **Conflict** in giving the Gospel, 1 Thess. 2:2

### Get Ready for War

**1 Thess. 2:2**, "But though we had already **suffered** and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had **boldness** in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of **much conflict**."

### Boldness and Suffering at Philippi

Paul and Silas were actually harmed in two ways at Philippi, as indicated by the two words **suffered** and **mistreated**. They were treated brutally, being beaten and imprisoned in stocks, falsely accused, and illegally punished. **Suffered** refers primarily to the physical abuse, whereas **mistreated** refers to public disgrace, or even legal abuse.<sup>6</sup> Let's read about it in Acts 16.

### Imprisoned at Philippi

**Acts 16:13-24**, "On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.<sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.<sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.<sup>16</sup> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.<sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."<sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup>But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.<sup>20</sup> And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.<sup>21</sup> They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.<sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.<sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks."

<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 35). Chicago: Moody Press.

## The Uproar at Thessalonica

As Paul says, great suffering and conflict followed them to Thessalonica. **Acts 17:1-5**, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup>explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” <sup>4</sup>And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. <sup>5</sup>But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar...”

## Get Ready to Fight and Suffer for the Gospel

**Ephesians 6:10–13** (ESV), “Finally, **be strong** in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup>**Put on** the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For **we do not wrestle against flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore **take up** the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand firm.**”

- **Jeremiah 17:5**, “Thus says the LORD; Cursed *be* the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the LORD.”
- David tells us: “*vain is the help of man*” (Psalm 60:11).
- God commands us to “*lean not to your own understanding*” (Proverbs 3:5).

## The War Chest

Now just outside of the very near presence of God is a war chest. God says, “My children will not lose. Give me your body, and I will come in and make it my own. Your hands, your feet, your mouth, will be my hands, feet, and mouth. And I will take out your heart of stone and make it a heart of flesh and I will give you my burdens to bear and you will speak my words and go forth in my power and you will be my instrument!”

Now go into that war chest and put on the whole armor of God. Put on...

- Belt of Truth
- Breastplate of Righteousness—righteousness of Christ
- Shoes of Peace—sharing the Gospel
- Shield of Faith
- Helmet of Salvation
- Sword of the Spirit

If you go in your own power you will fail. “**Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord**”.

## I Came Not to Bring Peace

Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians with a call to Battle. What? I thought Jesus was supposed to bring me peace! Wait a minute! I became a Christian for God to heal me. What's this about fighting?

That's right. God has called you to fight. There is an invisible war going on! Jesus said, "I came not to bring peace but a sword" (Mt. 10:34). God has called you to fight against His enemies, but His greatest enemies are unseen. Indeed Christ came to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn. 3:8).

In the Christian life, there is a necessary struggle. In a moment we are going to see how Paul uses the metaphor of a soldier to describe how to fight the enemy. Today's message is meant to give you a vision of the Battle, the Enemy, and the Victor.

You must put on God's armor. You must have a wartime mentality. If you do not fight, you will be taken captive. You will be mocked.

**2 Timothy 2:5** (ESV), "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. 5 An athlete is not crowned unless he competes [competes] according to the rules."

### "Athleo Stephano" ἀθλέω στεφανόω

Paul uses a phrase in 2 Timothy 2:5 which means "contending for the crown". It was a term used in the Greek Olympics.

- Athleo means "*to contend, to compete, to go after*"
- Stephano – for "*the wreath, the crown*" – i.e. the glory, the achievement, the victory.

Be strong in the Lord! Contend, fight, wage war! How? Be strong in the Lord! You are weak!

**2 Timothy 1:7**, "God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and of a disciplined mind" (my translation). Paul says to the Ephesians, where Timothy would be the pastor – **Ephesians 6:10**, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."

### You cannot trust the enemy!

The enemy is an invader. You have to drive him out!

**Numbers 33:55** (ESV), "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell."

### We Don't Negotiate with Terrorists!

"We don't negotiate with terrorists". This has been the policy of our country since its inception. We don't talk about compromise with the enemy. The only way we talk with the enemy is on terms of surrender. And so it is with our spiritual enemies.

All life is war. From the cradle to the grave, we fight. Before the new birth, we were held captive by the devil. Now we must "stand against the schemes of the devil". Though Christ has

delivered the death blow to the powers of darkness, they are not yet fully destroyed. At the end of Paul's life he said "I have fought a good fight".

### Why use God's weapons?

**2 Corinthians 10:3–4** (ESV), "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the **weapons of our warfare** are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

### What are God's weapons?

1. Prayer
2. Words of Scripture - This includes the power of the gospel to break through sin and hardened opposition and awaken faith in the hearts of unbelievers (see Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23).<sup>7</sup>
3. Worship
4. Faith
5. Righteous conduct on the part of the members of the church

### Satan's Schemes – the world, the flesh, and the devil

The **world** is...

- Lust of the flesh (wanting physical desires, sinful **passions**)
- Lust of the eye (wanting beautiful externals, **possessions**)
- Boastful pride of life (selfish ambition, **popularity**)
  - Do not love the world (1 John 2:15)
  - Do not let it shape your values (Rom. 12:2) – not conformed but transformed!
  - You should live through Jesus as crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14)

The **flesh** refers to our capacity and disposition to put self-interests above God. ***You are your own worse enemy.*** In short, the flesh is an internal resistance to obey God (Mark 7:21–23; Gal. 5:19–21; Col.3:5–8; James 1:14–15).

- Recognize longer a slave to the impulses of the flesh. You are no longer a slave (Rom. 6)
- Walk in conscious submission to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16), and you will not fulfil the desires and passions of the flesh!
- Put to death (mortify) sinful desires (Rom. 8:13–16). Forsake them and fill your heart with the things of the Lord that are far more satisfying.

### Cristus Victor, "Christ is the Victor"

Christ is the Victor!! He is...

- The Lion of the Tribe of Judah!
- The King of all kings and Lord of all lords!

Christ has all power. Why would you want to be strong in anything else?

- **1 John 4:4** (KJV), "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: The mystery of the body of Christ*. Preaching the Word (214). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

- **Romans 8:31** (ESV), “If God is for us, who can be against us?”
- God has given us everything we need to win the battle. **Romans 8:32** (ESV), “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”
- **John 15:5**, “without Me you can do nothing.”