

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

"Growing In Faith, Abounding In Love"

The church in Thessalonica was certainly an amazing church. As we read through the brief letters that Paul penned to them, we see that they simply seemed to excel in every essential way. Their faith was growing, their love was abounding... but in some ways they were struggling.

As you may recall the church in Thessalonica was birthed under difficult circumstances. Paul, along w/Silas & Timothy entered the city & as they shared the message of the gospel there was nothing short of a tremendous response. Acts 17 records for us that a great multitude of people were saved. However, no sooner than people were being saved, the work was being brought under the pressure of persecution. So much so that Paul was only able to stay there (what would seem to be) only a few weeks before he was driven out of town.

& As one might imagine that left a burden upon the apostle's heart for how they were faring, how they were growing. So (being in Corinth) he sent Timothy to check on them & when he reported back to him, he told Paul of how they were truly exceling. Loving the Lord, loving Paul, grateful for his work among them, but evidently, they had a few questions for him. So Paul sat down & penned what we know as 1st Thessalonians.

Now; I'm speculating a bit, but it seems as though when the letter was delivered to them (or some time there about), there was a false report going around & evidently a forged letter (Paul speaks of it in Ch 2) that was claiming to be by Paul's hand that had stirred up some confusion. Because, Paul had spoken to them of the Day of the Lord, the Great tribulation. & Because the persecution against them was becoming so intense (& they seemingly had some letter claiming to be from Paul touching on the topic) they were wondering if perhaps they were actually going through the Great Tribulation that precedes the 2nd coming of Christ...

So my assumption is that when the carrier of the letter returned to Paul w/these problems, Paul sat down & penned this letter to clarify their understanding & dispel any confusion. If you want a basic outline to the book; in Ch 1 he corrects their views on *Persecution*. In Ch 2 he corrects their views on *Prophecy*, & in Ch 3 he corrects their views on *Practice*... It seems, since some of them thought that the coming of Jesus is right around the corner, they'd just quit their jobs & await His return. (Which was bringing a burden to the other believers who were having to now support them). Paul addresses that in Ch 3.

Here in Ch 1 (as he addresses persecution) Paul offers them: Praise, Promise, & Prayer.

Vs 1-2

Let's note the distinction between "of" & "in" in the very 1st Vs. This particular assembly was "of" Thessalonica. That part isn't important. You & me, we are "of" Joplin MO. What's critical is that *they were* & that *we are in God our Father & the Lord J.C.* It's not so important; your location *geographically*, but *everything* hinges where you're located *positionally*. Our *place* is Joplin MO, our *position* is in God our Father & the Lord J.C.

& If you've read much of the N.T. at all you recognize what we might call a typical Pauline greeting. "Grace & Peace" from God our Father & the Lord J.C. Again, not greater than, less than; the Father *over* Jesus. But God our Father & the Lord J.C. being side by side in Deity & Glory as the divine fount from which all grace flows.

& Because you've received the *grace* of God (through faith in J.C.) you now have peace *with* God & have come to know the peace *of* God. You're no longer at war w/God through sin & rebellion, you've made peace w/God through the blood of the cross of Christ who has loved you & given *Himself* for you. True peace comes from God alone (peace for your soul). **It doesn't come through mechanisms of psychology or the counsel of a psychiatrist. You may acquire some means of coping (& that's fine & well), but true peace flows from a supernatural source – "God our Father & the Lord J.C." & If you don't know true peace, you can! Turn from your sin, believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved by God's grace & given God's peace.**

Vs 3-4

Last week we read the admonition, "In everything give thanks." Here we read that Paul is practicing what he preaches. ☺ He says, "We are *bound* to thank God *always* for you..." Listen, it's not only prayer that will change people, that will help them to endure or do the right thing, *praise* will as well. **Having someone in your corner, on your side who will believe *in* you, not give up *on* you, offer words of encouragement & commendation *to* you can make all the difference in someone going the distance or falling short; giving up, giving in, calling it quits.**

As people, we go through tough times & it's easy to want to throw in the towel. To say, "You know what, forget it." But if someone would come along & say, "Hey, you got this, trust in the Lord, finish well, don't give up, you're doing awesome..." It can make all the difference. The bible says, **"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, But perverseness in it breaks the spirit."**¹

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Pr 15:4]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We talked about this last week, the person who always knows how to make a situation difficult, or point out every potential problem, it breaks the spirit. Leaves you saying, "I guess it'll never work, why bother..." But a wholesome tongue is a tree of life, encourages you to grow, to stick to it, to see it through & watch God work despite the difficulties. & Again, "*A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!*"² Make it your aim to be a person of encouragement.

Discouragement is around every corner, be the exception!

Paul says, "We thank God for you, we're *bound* to." The idea is that of *owing* God a debt of gratitude for everything He was doing, how He was working in the church of Thessalonica.

He highlights 3 things. #1 A growing faith. "Your grows *exceedingly...*" & Let's remember these attributes are being developed in the midst of intense persecution. They're not abandoning God, giving up on God, saying, "God if you really loved us, You wouldn't allow these things to happen to us!" Rather than walking away *from* the Lord, they're leaning more heavily *upon* the Lord, drawing strength *from* the Lord.

Saving faith is ignited in the hearing of the gospel. But we need to understand that faith isn't simply a static substance, it's intended to grow. & A growing faith is indicative of a growing Christian. The bible is filled w/examples of faith that teach us the fingerprints of a growing faith. Great men of faith, never start as great men of faith, their faith grows as God intended.

We could journey all the way back to the "father of faith" Ab himself. God came to him, called him out of a pagan land (faith was ignited in the hearing of God's word). & You all know the story, if you don't, I'd encourage you to go back to the book of Genesis & read it, it's fascinating. God promises him a son, God (decades later) gives him a son, then God says, "Take now your son, your only son (Isaac) whom you love to the land of Moriah & offer him there as a burnt offering to Me." Ab didn't understand, God had promised him a nation through this son, salvation to the ends of the earth, yet now God was asking him to offer him as a burnt offering... But as you know he honored God's word, obeyed God's instructions & God honored his faith & forbade him from offering his son. (Of course it was a picture of God who would take His only Son whom He loves & offering Him for us & as to where Ab was stopped, Jesus would be sacrificed for the sin of the world). *But the lesson is that a growing faith won't abandon God, it will continue to follow God even when it doesn't understand.*

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 15:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Gideon's journey began in timidity, on a threshing floor trying to stay off the enemy's radar. But God called him to lead the army of Israel against insurmountable odds. He had about 30,000 soldiers & the Midianites/Amalekites were numerous as locusts, like the sand of the seashore in multitude... Gideon says to God, "I don't like these odds..." God says, "You're right, I don't either, you have too many. ☺ Tell every man who's afraid to go home... 22,000 packed up & left. God whittled it down more till there were only 300 soldiers... Here's the point, a growing faith is willing to take risks.

When's the last time you took a risk for God? You placed your hand to something so seemingly impossible, so insurmountable that if God wasn't in it, it was doomed to fail? Don't be afraid to trust an unlimited God for impossible things. If He's brought you to it, He's gonna do it.

We could speak of David & Goliath. A growing faith believes God to overcome our biggest obstacles. David anchored himself in God's *past* faithfulness for his *present* dilemma.

Look at Peter. His life (amongst other things) teaches us that a growing faith will rebound after failure. & Rather than be beatdown *by* past failure there will be boldness (Acts Ch 2) to do God's will, to share God's word & the incredible truth of His restoration, His reconciliation, salvation by His grace through faith in J.C.

Of course, Paul's life teaches us that growing faith is willing to sacrifice & to suffer for the glory of God. A growing faith will endure because it sees things in the light of eternity. It will maintain an eternal perspective.

How's your faith? Is it growing? Let's remind ourselves again, it's not static. It's growing or it's diminishing... The faith of the Thessalonians was growing, radically, exceedingly. –

& Their love was abounding, overflowing. Listen, a genuine faith toward God will always be accompanied by love toward others. We might say that when our faith grows upward, our love grows outward.

Sometimes we read these letters & we think, "Wow, wouldn't be great if this is how it was for us. Faith abounding, love overflowing?" But we forget that biblical love isn't simply this intangible, ethereal emotion that flows up out of the mysterious somewhere to somehow energize our emotional state. Biblical love is a decision that I make, not just a feeling or emotional state. It's not something I feel, it's something I do.

Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*³

Now, if Rom 5 Paul tells us that the love of God has been poured out (or gushed) into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (think about that). It's there, we just have to walk in it, be about it. But here's the thing, it's not pick & choose, we don't love those whom we feel like it, we love one another, there's no exception in which of your bro's &/or sisters whom we choose to love.

What a great goal to have said of CCJ. Our faith is growing, our love is abounding. However, the church in Thessalonica had still one more commendation: "Patience & faith in all your persecutions & tribulations which you endure..." It's been said that a faith that can't be tested, can't be trusted. As a believer you can expect your faith to be tried. In one respect it's how God demonstrates to you (& others) the genuine nature of your faith & your decision to follow Him.

The Thessalonians had resolved that come what may they would trust *in* the Lord & continue to follow *after* the Lord & that was on display for all to see. This patience & faith isn't simply a passive resignation that bears what comes our way. There's hope here, a seeing what others mean for evil & trusting that God will turn it for God. There's a Romans 8:28 atmosphere about this kind of patience & faith. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*⁴

You see. You & me, we're prone to think that suffering proves that God doesn't care. What Paul puts forth is just the opposite. He's growing you, purifying me, preparing us for His kingdom that awaits us. Notice. (Paul, has just pointed out their endurance in all their persecutions & tribulations)...

Vs 5-7

We want God to deliver us, God wants to develop us... Guys, what Paul is communicating here is that suffering because you're a believer isn't a burden, it's a blessing & a privilege. If God entrusts you w/suffering, from the eternal perspective, you're blessed! Speaking to the Philippians (in light of their persecution) He said it like this, *"...and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but*

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 13:34-35). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 8:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted (gifted) on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,”*⁵

“Listen,” (Paul is saying) “the fact that you’re being put down & persecuted is proof that you’re a part of the kingdom!” “...manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God.” That you may be counted *worthy* of the kingdom of God. The word “worthy” doesn’t describe merit (as though you earned it) it speaks of being made fit. *In other words, God fits us for glory eternally through our suffering presently. Write these down & you can read them later; suffering & glory cannot be separated (Matt. 5:10–12; 1 Peter 4:12–14; 5:1, Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16–17).*

Suffering for Christ won’t make a man, but it will reveal what a man is made of. Is their faith genuine? Is their confession true? Times of testing reveal what’s in us. From the persecutors perspective they’re penalizing us, from God’s perspective, He’s purifying us. *Let’s remember, it’s not our happiness that God has in view, it’s our holiness that He’s after. Far from being absent from us in our times of suffering (which is what we tend to think), God is at work in us... & At the risk of redundancy; we tend to see God’s goodness in terms of our being pampered, God sees it in terms of our being purified.*

But not only is God’s righteous judgment made manifest in demonstrating your worthiness of His kingdom through the trouble that’s placed upon you, but it’s also made manifest in punishing those who persecute you... “It’s a righteous thing w/God to repay w/tribulation those who trouble you.” – Many people believe the judgment of God & the love of God are contradictory in nature. *They forget that not only in God love, He’s also righteous, He’s just. & As such He will repay all evil. & What Paul is heading toward here is that all evil will be judged, & it will be accounted for either at the cross... or in hell.*

Think it through, could God truly be righteous if He *didn’t judge/repay evil*? He would be *unrighteous* if He *didn’t* punish it. Imagine what you’d think of the judge who shrugged off the child murderer, the rapist, the molester & did nothing to balance the scales of justice. *You’d be beside yourself w/disbelief w/the corruption & injustice of the judge. How much more than is it a righteous thing w/God to repay w/tribulation those who do evil? & To give you who are troubled rest when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven w/His mighty angels...*

Vs 8-10

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 1:28–29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& This (Ladies & Gentlemen) is why there's such urgency imposed upon you & me to get the gospel message out to mankind. Because hell is both real & it's forever. Listen, when you hear the word "vengeance" don't think of "revenge" it's the meeting out of justice. -- & Who is it who will be subjected to the righteous judgment of God? Is it limited to Hitler, Osama Bin Laden... mass murderers & ruthless oppressors? No. All will be subject (notice) who do not know God, & who do not obey the gospel of our Lord J.C.

Jesus said, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*⁶ & Those who do not obey the gospel, that is, they refuse to believe upon J.C. who God has sent (Jn 6:28-29). God doesn't pre-ordain people to hell, people make a choice to reject J.C. whom He has sent.

"These shall be punished w/everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord & from the glory of His power." When you read the word "destruction", don't think of annihilation as though they will simply (eventually) cease to exist. Think of *ruination*. Those who reject J.C. will experience everlasting ruin (suffering the loss of all things that make existing worthwhile) in flaming fire... But it's not the fire that makes hell what it is (Daniel 3, 3 Hebrew boys were just fine in the fiery furnace so long as the Lord was w/them). -- What truly characterizes hell is the phrase, "From the presence of the Lord & from the presence of His power." Hell will be completely devoid of God & every aspect of His character w/the exception of one: His unrelenting holy justice.

Listen; as uncomfortable as it may be to talk about, we can't be moved from the idea that the punishment of the wicked is everlasting. Even as the blessings of heaven are eternal, so to is the penalty of hell. (Isa 66:24, Matt 18:8, Mark 9:43-48, Rev 20:10) Infinite isolation in darkness forever, loneliness, emptiness & pain... How can we stay silent & not share the gospel?

But in you He will be glorified, because you have believed the message of the gospel. It's truly that simple. The difference between salvation/condemnation is essentially summed up in a single word, "Believed". Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved. It changes everything. – Paul has given them praise, he's shared w/them a promise, now he offers for them a prayer.

Vs 11-12

They were going through persecution; Paul was praying for them.

When we're going through tough times, it helps to know people are praying for you. Paul was praying that the power of God would be on display in their lives. That they would fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness & the work of faith w/power.

To the Philippians he said it like this, *"...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."*⁷

& Ultimately; eternally it's that the name of our Lord J.C. may be glorified in you (all that He is, all that He stands for on display through you) not through your strength, or my resolve, but according to the grace of our God & the Lord J.C. Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the richness of Your Word. The ready reminder to maintain the eternal perspective in turbulent times. May we be those whose faith is growing, whose love is abounding, that we might fulfill all the good pleasure of Your goodness & the work of faith w/power, that Jesus might be glorified in our lives.

The bible is clear, the wages of sin is death. The penalty for sin is eternal separation from the presence of the Lord in everlasting ruination. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. That includes you. If you've not called upon Him, believed *in* Him, do so today. Find forgiveness of sin & new life in J.C.

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Php 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.