

## 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12, pt. 2

January 17, 2010

Last week we looked at the opening thanksgiving of this chapter

### I. Thanksgiving (1:3-4)

Paul praises God for this church

- Their faith
- Their love
- Their endurance despite the trials and persecutions

This church served as an example and model to other surrounding churches

- In many ways, because they were enduring horrendous persecution for their allegiance to Christ

Let's read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

### II. God's vengeance (1:5-10)

*This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. <sup>6</sup> For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed.*

Since this is a study on prayer, I am not going to cover this section in painstaking detail as I would at other times

- But I don't want to skip it as if it is not important

Paul writes as a pastor and a shepherd to these believers

- He very much wants to be with them
- He wants to help them grow in their understanding of the Christian life

We know that some of these believers at Thessalonica were misled and confused about some matters related to the future

- The apostle has already dealt with some of these misunderstandings in the fourth and fifth chapters of the first epistle

It could very well be that some in the church were leading these young believers away from the teachings of Paul

- So he writes to set the record straight

It is also possible that some of these young Christians were beginning to think that the persecutions were because of something they were doing *wrong*

- Could they be led to believe that this suffering was actually a result of misplaced zeal toward the things of God?

Paul writes to instruct these young believers that the persecution they were enduring was actually a sign of God's righteous judgment

- Not judgment upon them
- But judgment upon those who were causing this persecution

In bearing under such persecution and suffering, these young believers were demonstrating that they were **“worthy of the kingdom of God”**

- As a matter of fact, verse 5 says that it was for this kingdom that they were suffering!

For those of us who have endured times of hostility and righteous suffering, we are tempted to ask, “How long?”

- We read some of the psalms whereby David cries out for Divine vengeance upon his enemies
- How can God allow this to take place?

Well, here is the answer to those questions

- God *will* **“repay with affliction those who afflict you”**
- Three times in Scripture, God tells us that vengeance is His (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30)

This should be a great source of comfort to us, shouldn't it?

- God is in complete control
- Our limited, earthly mindset oftentimes wants immediate judgment and retribution

Paul would tell this young church, **“Don't worry about these trials! God will one day repay those who are causing you to suffer. Your trials may last for a lifetime; however, their suffering will be eternal. Look to God and trust that He knows best. Keep enduring, dear friends!”**

To put it Biblically, consider these words from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, **“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”**

- Suffering does not appear to be **“momentary”** or **“light”** at the time of suffering
- But when compared to the glorious future, our perspective will be so much different

Even our perspective of God changes in light of this passage

- **“God is not merely a stern dispenser of justice, nor merely a lover who lavishly forgives, but the Sovereign who is simultaneously perfect in holiness and perfect in love. His holiness demands retribution; his love sends his own Son to absorb that retribution, and cries out that it is the evidence of God's love. This is why, in the Christian view of things, forgiveness is never detached from the cross...Forgiveness is possible only because there has been a real offense, and a real sacrifice to offset that offense.”<sup>1</sup>**

Perhaps the clearest description of hell is found here in 2 Thessalonians 1

- It does not include the idea of worms, flames, or Satan
- The apostle writes with a heavy heart about hell when he says in verse 9, **“And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power”**

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 48.

We know that the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)

- But the long-term wages of rejecting God will be getting what they ask for
- Eternal separation from God

You think about the fact that even now, unbelievers have the benefit of common grace

- The heaven tells of the glory of God's design and handiwork
- God sends the rain on the just and the unjust
- God provides health, money, jobs, and other "stuff" so that unbelievers can live and function

But one day, all of this will be removed

- No more common grace
- No more conviction
- No more pains in the conscience

God will eternally give these unbelievers over to their own sinful desires

- Somehow that is only explainable to God, He will separate unbelievers from Himself
  - o *Forever!*

While those who reject Christ will suffer "**eternal destruction**," those who have followed Christ will see Him "**glorified in His saints on that day**"

- What a day that will be!
- And we have a part in it

We pray and long for God to be glorified in our lives

- But one day, those prayers will come to an ultimate fulfillment

Not only will Christ be glorified

- But Paul says that those who "**have believed**" will marvel at Him
- We will stand in complete awe and reverence of Him

*It is with this thought in mind that Paul now prays for these precious believers who were being assaulted for their faith*

### **III. Prayer (1:11-12)**

To this end also we pray for you always

Some of us may ask, "What in the world can you possibly pray after such a statement about the eternal judgment and destruction of those who reject Christ?"

- The apostle shows us how to pray for those who were being persecuted

We see Paul's heart related to the salvation of the unbeliever in Romans 9

- "**I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren**" (9:1-3a)

Paul was ready, if he could, to give up his salvation so that others could go to heaven

- Would you desire that?
- Is there some family or friend who is lost that you would (if you could) exchange your salvation so they would be spared from God's wrath?

We know that was Paul's desire

- Of course, God never allowed that to be an option for the apostle
- But it is an amazing testimony to his love for his unbelieving friends

Here in 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul's focus is still on the believers

- He informs them that “**we pray for you always**” (emphasis mine)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were faithfully and frequently interceding for this church

- What exactly were they praying?

that our God may count you worthy of your calling.

As we read this prayer, we see what Paul did not pray for

- He didn't pray for the trials to stop
- He didn't pray for God to cause the trials to lessen<sup>2</sup>

Herein lies the content of the prayers of this missionary team

- Once again, we encounter this word “**worthy**”

We saw this during our study of Colossians 1

- The word literally means “balance”
- It implies living in a manner that corresponds to a higher goal

When Paul prays for these young believers that God would “**count you worthy of your calling,**” he is reminding them of the expectations and responsibilities that accompany being a Christian

- It implies living up to a standard that Christ sets
- It implies living a life that corresponds to what the Bible says

This is not to insinuate that we somehow earn God's favor or His calling

- That would be totally alien to what Paul is trying to convey

As a matter of fact, the end of verse 12 attributes the working of this prayer to “**the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ**”

- So this is not an attempt to earn or merit salvation

The “**calling**” that is in view here is God's effectual invitation to be His child

- Those who are called are truly chosen

“**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;<sup>30</sup> and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified**” (Rom 8:29-30, emphasis mine)

We think of the author whose name was Saul before his conversion

- He was persecuting the Church, trying to destroy it
- But God intervened and immediately changed his heart

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Mayhue, *Focus on the Bible, Second Thessalonians*, 167.

He certainly wasn't worthy of God's salvation

- But Paul now seeks to live in a manner that is befitting to Christ
- Hence, that is the same model that he sees being lived out in the lives of the Thessalonian believers

and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power;

Paul prays that God would count these believers “worthy” of their calling

- But he doesn't stop there

As we walk in a manner worthy of our calling, we will find that our desires and goals and aspirations will begin to align themselves with God's Word

- We will begin to desire God's will to be done in our lives (vs. having our will be done)
- We will begin to have godly goals (vs. selfish goals)
- We will begin to see more and more areas that need to be brought to obedience (vs. being complacent with where we are spiritually)

Falling closely on the heels of a prayer for God to count us “worthy” of our calling is a prayer for God to make our desires and spiritual work fruitful and pleasing to God

Paul would tell the Philippian believers, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (2:12-13)

What a humbling reminder that even our desire to serve God is a gift from Him!

- We would have no desire or goal to please Him without His initiative in our lives

The “desire for goodness” is not some selfish, fleshly pursuit

- Rather, “goodness” is a fruit of the Holy Spirit
- A manifestation of His work in the lives of believers

Paul pray that God would bring this godly desire to full fruition and fulfillment

<sup>12</sup> in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you,

The more that this young church at Thessalonica exhibits godly desires and seeks to manifest a living faith that produces works, a higher goal is being carried out

Verse 12 is the apex of the Christian faith

- It is the highest goal and motivation for any Christian

As we progress in being counted “worthy” of our calling and as we continue to set godly goals, we need to be reminded of the greatest and highest and noblest end of our lives, “that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you”

- *What higher goal could any Christian have than this?*

If we think about sin – both generically and specifically – the root is always a selfish desire<sup>3</sup>

- Adam and Eve usurped God’s authoritative Word and believed a lie
- Satan wanted to be like God and was cast out of heaven

In our lives, the same principle applies

- Even in service here at the church, we must guard our hearts so that we don’t make ourselves the primary object
- Instead, we must seek to honor and glorify Christ, pointing all the attention away from us

and you in Him.

We would have probably stopped our letter at this point of Christ being glorified

- But Paul adds a small phrase that has confused some
- We need to examine this lest we fall into erroneous thinking

After mentioning the highest goal of the Christian life being that of glorifying Christ, the apostle adds the little phrase, “and you in Him”

- Let’s read it together, “**in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him**” (emphasis mine)

Is Pastor Paul allowing for a little bit of arrogance?

- Just a little bit of self-glorification?

Certainly not!

- “**I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another**” (Isa 42:8)

We know from Romans 8 that after the death or the Rapture that we will be glorified

- “**whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified**” (Rom 8:30, emphasis mine)

But this doesn’t mean that we will be the object of worship

- For us, it means that we will be rid of the flesh and the presence of sin
- We will be sinless like never before

When we glorify God, we are not adding to His character

- We are simply ascribing and agreeing with His revelation of Himself in the Word

When we will be glorified, there will be something added to us

- We will be transformed into a likeness that we have never experienced before

God is the Eternal One, never changing

- Thus, He is the One to be honored and magnified

It is His kindness and grace that even allows us to be sanctified and glorified

- There is no way that we can transform ourselves into a glorious state
- That is obviously another evidence of God’s work in our lives

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<sup>3</sup> Carson, 58.

And that takes us full circle

- Who gets the praise from our lives?
- God!

Even as we are being transformed from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18), God is the One to be credited, praised, honored, and glorified

This highlights the closeness and union that exists between God and His children

- His work in our lives brings His glory<sup>4</sup>

according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that salvation, from beginning to end, is all of God

- He is the One who is to be glorified

But we don't just sit back in passive resignation

- There is a work for us to do
- “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12)

Every command in Scripture is a call to action

- An opportunity for us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling

It is not as if we are to do the best we can without God until we run into trouble

- No, from beginning to end, God's grace is the source of strength that we should be asking for

Grace is Divine empowerment

- His strength in times of our weakness

I want you to think about the time when you will be called to be with Christ

- Perhaps after your death
- Perhaps in the Rapture

Think of the glorious privilege it will be to see Christ in His full glory

- What a privilege to have our minds ultimately renewed and corrected from errors
- What a privilege to bow down and worship Christ in sinless adoration with no distractions

Imagine how all the glory will go to Christ

- How the scenes from Revelation will come true before our very eyes
- The angels, beasts, saints – everything in heaven – will give praise to Jesus Christ

Imagine when you are called upon to stand before Christ at the bema seat and give an account for how you have lived your life

- As your life is being reviewed before you, you are made aware of how unfaithful you were at times
- You are made aware of how you had wrong motives in serving others at times
- You are reminded of times when your worship was less than desired

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<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, 2 Thessalonians*, 164.

Now I want you to keep those thoughts in mind as you think about this prayer

- How does your life need to change in light of that glorious truth?
- How does your prayer life need to change?
- What selfish goals do you need to give up?
- What godly goals do you need to adopt?