

5] Assurance in God's Call, Power, and Judgment (Sunday, December 6, 2020)

Scripture: 10 Commandments; 1 Thess. 2:10-16

Introduction

Consider again the incredible work of God through Paul, Silas, and Timothy that a church was established in Thessalonica.

Jews and Gentiles were converted.

And this young church suffered for the truth of the gospel.

We do consider how we would respond if we were called to suffer in a similar way.

Would we endure if so tested?

Now we know that what has been given to us in this book is not so that we glorify Paul and his team or the Thessalonian church.

It is not man that we celebrate.

These things have been written so that you bring glory to God.

These things have been written to encourage you to persevere and remain steadfast.

As I mentioned last week, it would seem that a central purpose for the first part of 1 Thessalonians 2 is to deal with false charges brought against Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

And as I mentioned, it is not that they had to defend themselves. Their concern was for the Thessalonians.

1Th. 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, **as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.**

The theme of assurance is important as we continue in 1 Thess. 2.

The calling of Jesus Christ is a serious calling.

It is God who works in our hearts.

Suffering and judgment also are connected with assurance.

God's Word repeatedly reminds us that those who follow Jesus will be tested and tried.

In this world of injustice, we must rest in God's perfect timing and justice.

There is great assurance knowing that God's call is a matter of life and death!

- 1) A Serious Calling, vv. 10-12
- 2) God's Power in His Word, v. 13
- 3) Suffering and Judgment, vv. 14-16

1) A SERIOUS CALLING, VV. 10-12

As I was reflecting on this text this week, I thought of the richness, the depth of God's Word and how familiarity does not equal faithfulness and obedience to God's truth.

As much as we might like to laugh and be entertained, we realize the Christian life is a call both of life and of death.

There is no room for just playing games.

There is in our text almost a court-room type of setting.

Paul and the others are giving a defense and as prosecuting attorneys.

The Thessalonians play the role both of jury and defendant.

In verse 10 Paul uses the word **witness**.

You are witnesses. This word is used 34 times in the NT.

This word witness you might know is the basis for our word **martyr**.

Jesus Christ in Rev. 1:5 is called the **faithful witness**.

Look also at verse 11, the word **charged** is the verb form of the word witness. It is a word that sometimes is translated as to **bear witness**.

The seriousness of the language that we have here is because Paul and the others know that there is a spiritual battle taking place.

Similar then to what we saw last week in the opening verses of the chapter, Paul and the others call for the Thessalonians to remember how they had conducted their ministry in Thessalonica.

Three adverbs are used: devoutly, justly, and blamelessly.

Leon Morris writes:

The first term, *holy* (*hosiōs*), points to the character involved in being set apart for God, and the second, *righteous* (*dikaiōs*), to conformity to a norm; for biblical writers that norm is the law of God. The third, *blameless* (*amemptōs*), means without cause for

reproach. The combination makes an impressive witness to Paul's certainty that no accusation could fairly be levelled at the conduct of the little band of evangelists.¹

Then in verse 11 they again reflect on the nature of their ministry – exhorting, comforting, and charging each one like a father does with his own children.

Exhorted is a common word in the NT sometimes translated as giving comfort or encouragement.

I think in this context is probably best speaks of preaching.

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

The second word **comforting** is not a common verb in the NT. It has a connection of bringing comfort to those facing difficulty in connection with death or other trial.²

The word **charged** in verse 11 is the word that is the verb form of witness. It can be translated as insisting or implored.

There is also something important to observe in verse 11 that maybe is not so emphasized in our English translations.

I am speaking of the words **every one of you**.

It speaks to the fact that true gospel ministry is not just restricted to public preaching but also to individual ministry.

¹ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 13 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP / Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 60.

² BDAG.

John Calvin wrote:

For instruction given in common is sometimes of little service, and some cannot be corrected or cured without particular medicine.

Leon Morris writes similarly:

In other words, he had not contented himself with giving the message in general terms to the Thessalonian public at large, but had been sufficiently interested in individuals to bring it home to them one by one, evidently in private conversations (cf. Phillips, 'how we dealt with each one of you personally').³

To appreciate this, we only have to consider the ministry of our Lord.

At times, Jesus preached to thousands.

He ministered also both in terms of rebuke and comfort to individuals.

We pray that we will be faithful in a similar way – whatever public opportunities we have for speaking God's truth but also and maybe especially the ministry that God gives one by one.

We also observe in this passage in verse 7 the reference to a nursing mother and here in verse 11 to a father.

God blesses His church with both mothers and fathers.

Children need mothers and fathers.

³ Morris, 61.

There is also in our own actions ways that we act in a very compassionate way as a nursing mother would act and ways where we give direction as father is called to give his own children.

Then let us consider verse 12.

The goal of their ministry is expressed in terms of the calling given to the believers in Thessalonica.⁴

that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

It has been a little while now, but remember how the verb walk is very important in the book of Ephesians, used 8 times.

Eph. 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

Three times the verb walk is used in 1 Thessalonians.

An important aspect of assurance is to know that you have been given the full truth of the gospel and then the calling to walk in terms of the gospel.

Consider this also:

We are not seeking to be blazing a new path.

It is faithfulness to what has already been revealed.

Take comfort knowing that we are seeking to follow as much as we can the ancient truth that was first given by the apostles to the first century believers, even though our situations are so much different.

⁴ It is possible that we also have a contrast with verse 12 given in verse 15. Verse 12 begins with a preposition translated as that. The same preposition is used in verse 16 translated as so.

To walk worthy does not mean that you show how much you deserve God's grace.

It has nothing to do with your own goodness or ability.

Lexicons note that the word worthy was used in ancient inscriptions of praise for people.

Here this word is used for ordinary believers showing an incredible change because of God's grace given to us.

Live in a way that is appropriate to being called into God's kingdom and glory!

The word walk is an important word also.

There should be growth, even if it is considered unspectacular. The Christian life is not just sitting still.⁵

It is walking with the Lord and in service to our Lord.

2) GOD'S POWER IN HIS WORD, v. 13

I know that verse 13 doesn't just stand on its own, but I wanted to separate it here for emphasis in terms again of the theme of assurance.

Look back to 1 Thess. 1:2 – We give thanks to God always for you all...

⁵ Morris, 61.

Here the theme of thanksgiving is repeated in connection with the transforming power of God's Word.

Isn't this another powerful witness to the authority of Scripture?

There are those who just hear the word of God as the word of men.

Even worse, there are supposed Christians who want to turn the Bible into simply the word of man.

But by God's grace and power, the Thessalonians received the word of God as truth.

You know that if you are honest, you still sin and fail God in so many ways.

But here is a word of encouragement.

If you have a sincere belief that God's Word is truth, that the Bible is not just some man-made word, then that is an assurance of God's gracious work.

Look at the end of verse 13.

The word of God effectively works in you who believe.

It is not that we make it work.

It is God who causes His living Word to be at work in the lives of His people.

Do you see that evidence of God's Word and work in your life?

John MacArthur provides a great listing of how God's Word works:

The work of God's Word includes: saving (Ro 10:17; 1Pe 1:23); teaching and training (2Ti 3:16, 17); guiding (Ps 119:105); counseling (Ps 119:24); reviving (Ps 119:154);

restoring (Ps 19:7); warning and rewarding (Ps 19:11); nourishing (1Pe 2:2); judging (Heb 4:12); sanctifying (Jn 17:17); freeing (Jn 8:31, 32); enriching (Col 3:16); protecting (Ps 119:11); strengthening (Ps 119:28); making wise (Ps 119:97–100); rejoicing the heart (Ps 19:8); and prospering (Jos 1:8, 9).⁶

3) SUFFERING AND JUDGMENT, VV. 14-16

Listen again to the key summary verse in Acts.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We are most familiar with the ministry of the Apostles in Jerusalem.

Acts 1-7 is focused on the work of the Apostles centered in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was the starting point, but the gospel was to spread to Judea, Samaria, and then to all the nations.

When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost in Acts, we know that Jews who lived in Judea heard the message.

Listen also to two other verses in Acts.

Acts 8:1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of **Judea** and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 9:31 Then the churches throughout all **Judea**, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 23685.

Jerusalem is part of Judea, but the Roman province of Judea is larger than just Jerusalem.

These churches were the first churches in the Apostolic era.

We should be very thankful for their early witness to the gospel and their service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that Paul starting in verse 14 compares the Thessalonian believers to those in Judea and not to those in nearby Philippi.

We have in verse 14 the word imitators, which is the same word translated as followers in 1 Thess. 1:6.

The point of comparison is remaining steadfast and faithful despite suffering for the sake of the truth.

The second aspect of comparison is that just like believers in Judea, the persecution was driven by unbelieving Jews.

The Jewish people were the first to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and the glorious message of salvation.

Sadly, many of the Jewish people were the first to reject the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel.

As we read and seek to understand these verses, we do so knowing that Paul did everything he could to reach his own people.

The strong language that we have in verses 15 and 16 is very reminiscent of the rebukes of the prophets.

Four or five words of judgment are brought to the unbelieving Jews in Judea.

1] They killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.

There is emphasis on the fact that they killed the Lord. This is the most wicked indictment, not that these things are in any particular order.

2] They persecuted Paul, Silas, and Timothy

3] They do not please God.

The word **please** is the same word used in verse 4 and also in 4:1.

4] They are contrary to all men. The word contrary means to be in opposition.

I would connect this description to what we have at the start of verse 16.

This opposition to all men is connected with their desire to keep others from hearing the glorious news of the gospel.

Look at the start of verse 16 – **forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved.**

We do consider historically that the first great obstacle to the spread of the gospel was from Jewish unbelief.

Later it would be the wicked power of Rome that would harass and persecute the church, but it started with unbelieving Jews.

The language that we find in verse 16 resembles what we see in the words of Jesus in Matthew 23.

Matt. 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' *guilt*.

The writers of Thessalonians saw that the Jewish people who did not believe were filling up the measure of their sins and as a consequence God's wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

There is a question again here in terms of the meaning of God's wrath.

We could understand this in terms of **present** trials that the Jewish people were already facing in the first century that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

We also can speak of the final pouring out of God's wrath that will take place in the return of Christ and the final judgment.

But here we also consider another connection with the words of our Lord found in John 3.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Paul, Silas, and Timothy dearly loved their people. These words were not spoken in any way out of sinful anger but a profound love for God's truth.

And in a similar way, we speak God's Word of both salvation and judgment, not out of our own righteousness or out of anger but a love for others and a love for our Lord.

But we see here, don't we, that God will deal with all of His enemies and our enemies in His perfect way and in His perfect timing.

We speak God's truth, but there is no reason for us to be filled with anxiety or fear or a desire that we have to take control.

Let us think for a moment on these words.

Truly these words are the most terrifying words in Scripture – **wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.**

You know very well a situation that you might face with someone who is angry with you about something.

Think of how much you can dwell on an incident where there has been a disagreement with someone.

If some issue with another person can bother you and cause you to lose sleep or think without stopping, then how much more to be dealing with a holy God!

There are no human words that can express the blessing of knowing that you are no longer under God's wrath, fearing His deserved justice.

Only the words of Scripture present adequately this relief.

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **25a** I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!...

Rom. 8:1 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Conclusion

There is great assurance knowing that God's call is a matter of life and death!

We see this clearly set forth in the Lord's Supper, life and death, incredible blessing and fearsome judgment.

Worthy or worthily: ἀξίως

1Th. 2:12 that you would **walk worthy** of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Unworthy or unworthily: ἀναξίως

1Cor. 11:27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an **unworthy manner** will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

1Th. 2:13 ¶ For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Prayer

Hymn 434

BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.