

I want to direct your attention this morning to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians.

Back in 2004 we studied his first letter to this remarkable church.

As we embark on his second, we will see how he comforts (chap.1), corrects (chap.2), and confronts (chap.3) these believers in Thessalonica.

Let's look at these first 4 verses as I read them.

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

Paul begins his second letter like the rest with a...

GREETING (vv.1-2)

This greeting followed the customary style of his day which consisted of *his name, the names of his companions, the readers, and the greeting of “grace and peace”*.

His Name (Paul)

For those of you new to Paul and his companions, this is the man who formerly persecuted the Church but now by the grace of God a teacher to the Gentiles.

He says of his former life in 1 Timothy 1:13 that he “was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and violent aggressor.”

In Acts 8:1, he was “in hearty agreement with putting [stephen, who was one of the first evangelists in the early church] to death.”

Luke says “on that day [the day of Stephen’s death] a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (v.1).

Verse 3 says that “Saul [which was his Jewish name] began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

So here is Saul, a young zealous man persecuting those who followed Jesus.

We're even told on the day of his conversion, which is recorded in Acts 9, he was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (v.1) and had "asked for letters from [the high priest] to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

But something happened "as he was traveling" to Damascus.

Verse 3 says, "Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”

Verses 18-19 says that after a disciple named Ananias came and laid his hands on him “immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.”

So not only did he receive his sight and strength but verse 18 says he was also “filled with the Holy Spirit” which indicates the Lord Jesus saved and transformed him because as he later wrote in Romans 8:9 that if “anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

That is evident from the rest of verse 19 into verse 20 which says, “Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

He is no longer searching for those who were of the Way to arrest them, now he's proclaiming Christ with them.

So the man who was a persecutor of the church was now a “chosen instrument of [Jesus’], to bear [His] name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (v.15).

Even those who heard him proclaim Jesus in the synagogue in Damascus were “amazed, and were saying, ‘Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’” (v.21).

Paul, which is the name he starting using after his conversion (Acts 13:9), tells the Philippians a little more about his life when he says in chapter 3:

“Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from

the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (vv.4-9).

So we briefly learn that the man who persecuted the church was now a preacher of the gospel and a planter of churches.

The Lord Jesus used Paul in a very mighty way also penning 13 letters in the New Testament, one of which we are studying this morning.

In verse 1, Paul also mentions...

His Companions

Silvanus

Silvanus was his Jewish name but he was also known by his Greek name Silas in Acts 15:40.

Like Paul, he was a Jew who held Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37).

According to Acts 15:32, Silvanus was a prophet in the early church as well as one of the “leading men among the brethren” (Acts 15:22).

He later joined Paul at Antioch after Paul and Barnabus split over John Mark.

This was during Paul’s second missionary journey.

The New Testament reveals that Silvanus ministered with Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:19-34), Berea (Acts 17:10) and Corinth (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor.1:9).

Paul’s second companion was...

Timothy

Timothy was a protege of Paul and a beloved son in the faith (2 Tim.1:2).

He was from Lystra, a city in Asia Minor (Acts 16:1).

He was the son and grandson of believing Jewish women (2 Tim.1:5) but had a Gentile father (Acts 16:1).

Paul met Timothy on his second missionary journey and quickly became Paul's most valuable assistant.

Now, just because Silvanus and Timothy are mentioned in the opening words of this letter, doesn't mean they co-authored it.

Paul says in 3:17, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write."

So two times, Paul indicates he is the author of this letter to the Thessalonians.

In the rest of verse 1, Paul tells us about the...

Readers

He says, “To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This verse is almost identical to the first letter with one exception.

In the first letter he says, “To the church of the Thessalonians in God *the* Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the second letter, instead of saying God “the” Father, he says God “our” Father.

The use of this possessive pronoun “emphasizes that God is the Father of believers.”¹

Notice how this is used in the New Testament:

We already heard its use in 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

Listen to it as it is used two other times in the first letter to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 3:11, “Now may *our* God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you.”

Verse 13 says, “so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before *our* God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

¹ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 224.

He addressed the believers at Rome the same way when he said in Romans 1:7, “to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God *our* Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We find the same designation in 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3-4; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 4:20; Colossians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; Phile.3.

Given the context of 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, we find it used as an appropriate reminder of the Father’s care for a church undergoing severe persecution.²

Paul references their “persecutions and afflictions” in verse 4.

² John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 224.

In the midst of these persecutions and afflictions, God, your Father is with you giving you the same grace that saved you.

That's true comfort.

When Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, he told them to minister the comfort they received to those who were in need of comfort during their affliction. This comfort came from "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He says in 1:3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and *God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are*

ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."

This was the true church.

They were members of the one body of which Jesus Christ is the head.

And as the church (ekklesia), they were the *called out assembly of believers who were called out of the world, Satan, and sin.*

Galatians 1:4 says Jesus rescued them from this present evil age."

2 Timothy 2 tells us they were called out from Satan having "come to their senses and [escaped] from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (v.26). Lastly, they have been called out from sin.

Romans 6:6 says, “knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.”

So this called out assembly of believers was the church “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

They enjoyed union with both the Father and the Son.

This church was also located in the city of Thessalonica, which boasted a quarter of a million people in Paul’s day.

It was the capital of Macedonia (the northern region of Greece) ³ founded in 315 B.C. by the

³ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 223.

Macedonian General Cassander and was named after the step-sister of Alexander the Great.

Now when Paul wrote this letter in late 51 or early 52 A.D. from Corinth, he wanted to encourage them in their persecutions and afflictions.

He begins in verse 2 first by his...

Greeting

of “grace” and “peace.”

He says “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v.1).

When you’re suffering, you need encouragement that you’re suffering for the right thing not because of some sin you've committed.

Though Job's so called counselors believed he had sin since he suffered so much and had great loss.

Peter says in 1 Peter 4:15-16, “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

So Paul greets them with “Grace” (chairein).

That is favor given by God and then “peace” which is the result of that grace.

This grace and peace was needed as they experienced these persecutions and afflictions mentioned in verse 4.

This grace and peace Paul says, comes from a dual source---“God the Father and the Lord

Jesus Christ” and it identifies Jesus as being co-equal with God.

Jesus who underwent the persecution and affliction of the cross knew what they were experiencing and gave them his grace and peace.

Now in verses 3-12 Paul expresses his...

THANKSGIVING AND COMFORT FOR THE THESSALONIANS

He says in verse 3, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting.”

This, Paul says, is our duty to God.

He commands us to give Him thanks in everything (1 Thess.5:18) and that why we

“ought” (opheilo) to give it. It is
“fitting” (axion) or “proper”⁴

God saved you by his marvelous grace and has made you what you are today and we praise His name for it.

Isn't that also true for us today?

We are who we are because of what God has done in our lives.

I am no longer a drunken drug addict who lived only for himself.

I am a “new creature” in Christ.

⁴ *Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).*

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

So Paul says it is only “fitting” that we give thanks to God for what He is doing in you.

He continues in verse 3 by saying he was thankful to God because their...

Faith was Greatly Enlarged

Not only did they have true faith as indicated by the fact they were “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v.1) but that faith was “greatly enlarged.”

That means they were ever growing in faithfulness.

The words “greatly enlarged” (huperauxano) is one compound word in the Greek and could be translated “increased beyond measure,” or “grown beyond what could be expected.”⁵

Their “growth was entirely beyond natural expectation.”⁶

Despite the persecutions that have continued since the visit of Timothy and the sending of the first letter.

These persecutions did not upset the faith of the Thessalonians; instead, their faith “grows exceedingly,” they cling more intensely to Christ.⁷

⁵ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 225.

⁶ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 280.

⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937). 377.

When Paul wrote his first letter to them, he said in 3:2-3 the reason he sent Timothy was “to strengthen and encourage [them] as to [their] faith, so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions” (v.2). He kept telling them they were going to “suffer affliction” (v.3).

When Paul and his companions came to Thessalonica it ended not only with conversions but also persecution from the Jews (Acts 17:5). It was such that the Thessalonians sent Paul and Silas to Berea (v.10) to avoid the mob.

But the mob also persecuted these new believers.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 that they “endured the same suffering at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews”.

But despite the persecution, their faith did not fail.

In fact the opposite occurred. It grew exceedingly.

John MacArthur says, “The Thessalonians’ faith had grown not only despite the persecution they were undergoing but also because of it. Persecution destroys false faith.”⁸

And not only does it “destroy false faith,” but it also “strengthens believers’ faith by driving them to God.”⁹

Do you remember how Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor.12:7) and that he prayed “three times that it might leave [him]” (v.8)?

⁸ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 226.

⁹ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 227.

His thorn in the flesh drove him to God just as it does every true believer.

When you consider trouble, distress, affliction, pain, and suffering, they drive those with genuine faith to a greater dependence on the Lord.

That increases their knowledge of Him, which in turn increases their ability to trust Him.

That's why the psalmist could confidently declare, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word" or "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statute" or "I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me" (Ps. 119:67, 71, 75).¹⁰

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 227.

Each affliction teaches you more about God and encourages a greater dependency on Him.

They also provide the path to spiritual growth:

James wrote in James 1:2-4, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, *knowing* that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Peter reminded his readers in 1 Peter 5:10, “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

The Thessalonians’ increasing faith in the face of persecution affirmed their genuine

conversion and provided the path to their spiritual growth.

Not only did their faith increase but also their...

Love for Each Other

Paul says at the end of verse 3, “And the love of each one of you toward one another grows even greater.”

This was the answer to his prayer from his first letter.

He said in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-12, “Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.”

He also wrote in 4:9-10, “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. *But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.*”

This is exactly what happened!

God caused their love to "increase and abound" and it was excelling “still more”.

Increased “faith” and “love” were two desires of the apostle.

And that’s what the Thessalonians were growing in.

Paul saw it and it left an indelible impression.

He “constantly [bore] in mind [their] work of *faith* and labor of *love* and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father” according to 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

He said in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, “For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your *faith* toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.”

Is this the evidence others turn to after spending time with you?

Do they see your enduring faith in the midst of your persecutions and afflictions?

Do they also see your love for each other or do they witness your stress and anxiety and your disagreements?

Jesus said in John 13:35, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

No wonder Paul and his companions...

Spoke Proudly of Them in All the Churches (v.4)

They had “perseverance and faith in the midst of all [their] persecutions and afflictions [they] endured.”

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “As the founders of the church they would be slow to boast of anything to their own credit, but they are doing so now. Such boasting on their part was unusual, but the unusual qualities of their converts constrained them to this unusual action. Others are talking about the Thessalonians, and the founders, justly proud of their converts, cannot

restrain themselves from doing likewise. It is indeed high praise for the readers, intended to encourage them in their affliction.”¹¹

What were they speaking so proudly about the Thessalonians?

He says in verse 4 it was because of their “perseverance and faith in the midst of [their] persecutions and afflictions which [they] endured.”

“Perseverance” (hupomone) is not a meek submissiveness but patient, courageous enduring of trouble.

The key is patiently enduring or as the word literally means to “remain under,” or sustain hope under difficulty.

¹¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971). 282.

It is not a grim waiting but a joyful hoping.

As it does in Romans 3:3, Galatians 5:22, and Titus 2:10, *pistis* (faith) has the sense of “faithfulness.”

Paul was thankful for and proud of how the church remained faithful to the Lord despite the persecutions (hostility from enemies of the gospel) and afflictions (suffering resulting from persecution) they endured.

They refused to renounce their faith, let their love grow cold, or abandon their hope.¹²

Their perseverance was closely linked to their faith. Without it they would not have been able to remain steadfast under their afflictions.

¹² John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 229.

Their perseverance also manifested the reality of their faith.

Trials are distressing says Peter (1 Pet.1:6) but they also serve as proof of the validity of your faith” (v.7).

What could be said of your faith and love?

Is it strong enough to withstand those who are hostile to the gospel like that of the Thessalonians?

Can it withstand constant hostility from unbelievers?

CONCLUSION

True faith cannot be destroyed regardless of the circumstance.

Though your faith may be weak, it will not fail if it is genuine.

John MacArthur says, “True faith, on the other hand, is indestructible, because the Lord Jesus Christ will not allow it to be destroyed. He warned Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). But though Peter’s faith would be severely shaken (cf. Matt. 26:69–75), it would not be destroyed because, as Jesus went on to say, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32; cf. John 21:18–19).”¹³

Do you have true faith?

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

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¹³ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 226.

It comes by surrendering your life to Jesus Christ.

You have to come to the place of disowning yourself, repenting and following Christ.

Let's pray.

LIFE APPLICATION

In what way does faith grow?

How can you increase your love for others?

How can you remain strong while experiencing persecution or afflictions?

Do you view your life trials with joy? Why?

How do you comfort those with a troubled heart?