

This morning we are returning to our study of 2 Thessalonians chapter 1.

I would like to invite you to take God's Word and turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 as we look together at verses 5-7.

In our last study of this letter, we were introduced to the Thessalonians and the thanksgiving Paul and his companions had for them.

Their faith was "enlarged" (v.3).

Their love for each other grew "ever greater" (v. 3).

And that caused Paul and his companions to "speak proudly of [them] among the churches of God" (v.4).

Paul continues in verse 4 to tell us what also caused their “faith” and “love” to grow.

He says it was their “perseverance and faith in the midst of all [their] persecutions and afflictions which [they] endure[d].”

In other words, the testing of their faith and enduring through those tests caused their faith to grow.

They not only persevered, their faith didn't fail.

It stayed intact during the persecutions and afflictions.

Looking back at their beginnings in Acts 17, we learn the circumstances that surrounded their hearing of the Gospel.

According to verse 4, when Paul came into Thessalonica and “reasoned with them from the Scriptures for three sabbaths” (v.2), “some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.”

God gave a great harvest but as soon as the Gospel was received it was also rejected.

Verses 5 says, “But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.”

They attacked “the house of Jason...seeking to bring [Paul and his companions] out to the people. [But] when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some of the brethren before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have upset the world have come here also;

and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.' (vv.5-7).

In no uncertain terms, Luke says, this “stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things” (v.8).

To acknowledge any other king but Caesar was one of the most serious crimes in the Roman Empire.¹

The politarchs (as they were called) were troubled by these reports.

They required Jason and those with him to post bail, probably adding instructions for his guests to leave the city.²

¹ John MacArthur, *Acts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). Ac 17:5.

² William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). Ac 17:8–9.

Since Paul had to leave so quickly and wasn't able to return to Thessalonica, he sent Timothy to learn about the fate of these believers.

Upon Timothy's return and report, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians encouraging and strengthening them in the midst of their ongoing persecution and to express his thanksgiving for their faith.

The persecution did not diminish their faith because it was real.

The persecution tried their faith like gold being refined in a furnace.

It passed the test!

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 that they possessed a "faith...love and steadfastness...in our Lord Jesus Christ."

And as such they were “imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (v.6).

They were also “imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for [they] also endured the same sufferings at the hands of [their] own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews” (2:14).

Paul had earlier said to the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

The Thessalonians were no exception because suffering according to Philippians 1:29 is God's will.

Paul said to the Philippians, “It has been *granted* for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to *suffer* for His sake.”

That goes against all human reasoning.

Yet not against faith because it's part of it.

When you read Hebrews 11 what do you hear?

By faith...by faith...by faith.

What is “by faith?”

Their heroic deeds as well as their persecutions and afflictions.

Look at Hebrews 11:32ff.

It says, “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson,

Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith.”

Both victories and afflictions were *by faith*.

And both faith and suffering were God's will.

Peter understood this when he wrote in 1 Peter 2:21-23, "*For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.*"

In chapter 4, verse 12, he also said, "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that*

also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

He concludes with the same thought as Paul in verse 19:

“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

It was much earlier when Peter first heard this from Jesus.

Jesus was telling him and the rest of the disciples He was leaving and that after His departure they would have "tribulations but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We have tribulation in this world but it is through tribulation that we come into the kingdom.

But in the meantime, you must understand the world "hate[s] you" and because of that they "ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man" (Luke 6:22).

But Jesus says, "Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets" (v.23).

You're no different so stop thinking you are.

The prophets suffered.

Every believer at some point in their life suffered according to the will of God, so will you.

Understanding this helps to understand the Thessalonians' attitude.

They persevered.

They endured.

They remained faithful.

Perseverance in the Christian life is a ceaseless warfare against the forces of the kingdom of darkness (cf. Eph. 6:10ff.).

That's why Christians need to be reminded to expect hardships and persecution and not be dismayed by them.³

³ John MacArthur, *Acts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). Ac 14:21.

That's what Paul did when he was with the Thessalonians.

He kept telling them they would suffer so don't be shocked when it happens (1 Thess.3:4).

Let's ask the bigger question in this.

“Why did they endure the “persecution and affliction”?”

They suffered unjustly.

They suffered for a wrong they didn't commit.

William McDonald says, this suffering “was an indication of the righteous dealings of God. He was supporting them, strengthening them, encouraging them. If they had not received His divine power, they would never have been able to demonstrate such patience and faith in

suffering for Christ. Their heroic endurance proved them worthy of the kingdom of God.”⁴

Their focus was not on personal comfort, fulfillment, and happiness, like many today.

It was on the glory of God and the fulfillment of His purposes.

They were not moaning about the injustice of their persecutions. Rather, they were patiently enduring the sufferings they did not deserve (v. 4).⁵

This church was living out Jesus' command to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

⁴ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). 2 Th 1:5.

⁵ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997). 2 Th 1:5.

That perspective enabled them to successfully endure the inevitable persecution that comes to the bold faithful.⁶

Peter reminded his readers in 1 Peter 1:6-7, “Even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

In other words, yes, trials distress you but they are necessary to test and prove the validity of your faith as well as strengthen the true faith you have.

So, in the case of the Thessalonians, the outcome was positive.

⁶ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002). 229.

Verse 5 says they were enduring.

They were, as James 1:4 says, letting
“endurance have its perfect result.”

They didn't complain but took the example of
suffering and patience from “the prophets who
spoke in the name of the Lord” (Jas.5:10).

And “the endurance of Job and have seen the
outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is
full of compassion and is merciful” (Jas.5:11).

Now that's what Paul is saying in 2
Thessalonians 1:5.

Because they had the attitude of persevering in
their persecution and affliction, “this” was “a
plain indication of God's righteous judgment so
that [they] [would] be considered worthy of the

kingdom of God, for which indeed [they] were suffering.”

The “plain indication” (endeigma) meant this was the “evidence” (ESV) or the “proof” of God’s righteous judgment”.

What was the evidence or proof?

The very fact that God rewards his children with fortitude indicates that he is a righteous God,
who, accordingly, will also manifest this righteousness in the final judgment, which judgment will have as its purpose to state openly that his loyal followers are worthy of entering his everlasting kingdom.⁷

⁷ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001). 156.

And not only that but God's righteousness will also be manifested in his judgment of those "who afflict you."

Paul says in verses 6-7, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven."

Paul continues this theme to the end of chapter one.

But understand God's righteous judgment is not only seen in afflicting those who afflicted them.

It is also seen in the purging and chastening of His children.

Hebrews 12:5-11 gives us the purpose of chastening.

It says, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Lenski says, “To endure persecution and painful affliction in perseverance and faith may seem like a hardship, often like a needless hardship for the believers. Viewed in its true light, it is “an indication of the righteous judgment of God.”⁸

When God would judge the Thessalonians they would be declared worthy of God's kingdom.

And that is God's righteous judgment.

Understand endurance in trials does not make one worthy of heaven; one does not earn heaven by suffering. *But endurance in trials does demonstrate one's worthiness.*

⁸ 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). 382.

*A Christian is made worthy by God's grace,
which he receives as a free gift by faith in Jesus
Christ.*

*His trials simply expose what is there already
and since the character that emerges through
the fire of testing is God-given, God receives all
the glory.*

The grace of God that makes it possible for a Christian to withstand the fires of human experience, which destroy non-Christians, is a Christian's only claim to being worthy of God's kingdom.⁹

CONCLUSION

So remember God is righteous and just.

⁹ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-). 2 Th 1:5.

And because of this His judgment is righteous and just.

What He is doing in our lives today is righteous and just just as it was then in the lives of the Thessalonians.

So what He will do in the future will be no different.

Our suffering is to make us “worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed [we] are suffering” (v.5).

So don't give up!

You are being made worthy of the kingdom.

Rely on the strength of God to carry you in those times of severe testing.

God will provide future “relief” (v.7).

He will also judge those “who afflict you” (v.6).

We will talk more about the future of unbelievers next time.

Let's pray.

LIFE APPLICATION

Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? If yes, how?

If you have been persecuted for your faith in Jesus, how did you respond?

If you were persecuted today, how will you respond?