

While I'm Waiting
(Week 13)
2 Thessalonians 1:1-10
"When Christ Sets Things Right"

Introduction

*I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. **John 16:33***

A few months after Paul had written his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he sent a second. For it seems that there was still a great deal of confusion regarding some of the questions and concerns that the church had expressed to Timothy, when he came to see about them. Paul wanted to make certain that the church remained on solid footing, when it came to their doctrine, so he quickly dispatched another letter to address their concerns and clarify any misconceptions.

It had not helped matters in Thessalonica when a forged letter arrived at the church, claiming to be from the apostles. The letter had no doubt been sent by some of their persecutors in an attempt to discourage the young church. This is what Satan often does in the life of a new convert (and many times even in an older weaker one) to discourage them so that they will "drop out" of the race, as it were. The narrow path that leads to righteousness is often littered with the bodies of those who lost heart along the way. It is called "spiritual warfare", and it was alive and well in the city of Thessalonica.

The phony letter had claimed that Paul and his companions had changed their minds in regard to the end times. And that they were now convinced that the "Day of The LORD" (Great Tribulation) had indeed already begun. This would have meant that the Thessalonians had been "left behind" in the rapture of the Church, and therefore, had been abandoned by God to face the horrors of the apocalypse alone. One can understand how such news would be disheartening to a people who had placed their trust in Christ for deliverance from the wrath of God. Paul wanted to reassure them that God would see to it that they were kept safe in Christ.

The three main themes in the book of *2 Thessalonians* are: Enduring Persecution, The Proper Sequence of The End Times, and Idleness. For it seemed that many in the church were convinced that because the end times were so near, the wise thing for them to do was to quit their jobs and hold up in their homes and wait for The LORD. They had become thoroughly convinced that the time was imminent for Christ's return, due to the persecution that they were facing and that the Day of The LORD was already upon them. Therefore, a portion of them had assumed (erroneously) that it was expedient for them to shelter in place, living off the saved wealth of their brothers and sisters in Christ in order to survive until Jesus came for them. Paul wanted them to have the proper perspective, and therefore, he carefully outlined the eschatological (end times) sequence for them in great detail, so that they would no longer have any confusion.

He began his letter by praising them for their continued faithfulness in spite of difficult circumstances, as well as, for their continuing love for one another. It is interesting to see how Paul carefully encouraged these young believers, rather than chastise them for their ignorance in some vital points of scripture. He prefers to acknowledge what they are doing correctly and then correct what needed to be corrected. We would do well to follow his example, when admonishing our brothers and sisters in Christ. To love someone is to correct them gently and not make them feel worthless. I've known a lot of "preachers" who were experts at being right, the wrong way. Can I get a witness?

In the first portion of his letter, Paul points out three absolute truths that apply to every Christian who has ever tried to live for Christ in a fallen world. He wanted the Thessalonians to have the proper perspective, when it came to the Christian experience, and the reason that this letter has been preserved for all time is that Almighty God wants us to understand these truths as well. If you decide to follow Christ, then you will be persecuted for it. And this is what God's Word tells us about the trials we must face. There are three things that we can count on as believers: The **Resolve** of God's true Witnesses, God's **Retribution** for the Wicked, and The eventual **Rest** for the Weary . Please allow me to explain.

Resolve of the Witnesses (vs. 3-5)

We ought thank God always for you, brother and sisters, and rightly so, since your faith is flourishing and the love each one of you has for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you among God's churches — about your perseverance and faith in all persecutions and afflictions that you are enduring. It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering. **2 Thessalonians 1:3-5**

The Bible gives us a much different view of suffering than that of this world. We, in our flesh, tend to think of hardship as something to be avoided at all cost. We live in a world that has no shortage of whiners and complainers, when hard times come. Apparently, it is the belief of the masses that no suffering should ever befall them, and when it does, someone must be to blame for it.

The church at Thessalonica was being put under tremendous pressure by its unbelieving neighbors. Life for the believer in Thessalonica was, to put it bluntly, close to being unbearable. Paul doesn't send the church a letter to tell them to run away from their troubles, rather he commends them for the way that they are persevering through them! The word that he uses for "persevere" (*patience* - KJV) in the Greek text is "*hypomone*" (pronounced *hoop-om-on-ay*), and it means to "*cheerfully remain under*". In other words, Paul is commending the church for being steadfast and joyful in the midst of intense pressure (*thlipsis* in The Greek), and as a result, the faith of the fledgling church was increasing, rather than decreasing!

For you see, it is through hard times that genuine faith is tested and proved genuine. Listen to the words of Christ, when He tells His disciples the parable of the sower:

So listen to the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path. And the one sown of rocky ground — this is the one who hears word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. Now the one sown among the thorns — this is one who hears the Word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful. But the one sown on the good ground — this is one who hears and understands the Word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown. **Matthew 13:18-23**

So there you have it. It is by suffering that faith is proven genuine. This is why Paul reminds the church at Thessalonica that it is "God's righteous judgment" for them to suffer persecutions. God proves His children to the world by the way that they remain faithful to Him in spite of hardship. If you don't believe me, just ask Job. No matter what the devil threw at him, he refused to "quit on God". Even his own wife came to him and said, "**Curse God and die**" (**Job 2:9**). What she was really saying was, "if I were in your shoes, I would quit on my faith". But Job was proved righteous by the way he persevered under his trials. For the child of God, suffering is not something to be escaped, but rather, patiently endured in order to prove our faith is genuine. This is exactly what was happening in Thessalonica, and Paul commended them for it. So in this life, we can rest assured that there will be trials of various kinds in order to test our faith. Rather than run from them, we are to patiently endure them and "**consider it a great joy**" (**James 1:2**), for they are the proof that what we have been given in Christ Jesus can never be shaken. When you get squeezed, what is inside you will come out! This is the unshakable resolve of the witnesses of Christ.

Retribution for the Wicked (vs. 6, 8-9)

...since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you...

2 Thessalonians 1:6

...when He takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our LORD Jesus. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the LORD'S presence and from His glorious strength...

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

Obviously, for the sake of the sermon outline, I am breaking up these verses into two separate categories. First we will discuss what the return of Christ will be like for those who have refused to place their faith in Him. And later on, we will discuss what will happen to those who **do** put their trust in Him. **The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)**, and therefore, those who choose to remain in their sins, rather than repent and trust in Jesus, have God's retribution in store for them when The Day of The LORD comes.

It is important for us to know that "the rapture" of The Church, and the "second coming" of Jesus Christ at the end of the tribulation period are two entirely separate events. And as such, Paul uses different language to describe the two. When describing the rapture, he uses the word "*parousia*", meaning "*the presence of The LORD*". Jesus will call His faithful to meet Him in the air, BEFORE the Day of The LORD (Tribulation) begins (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). Immediately following the rapture, The Day of The LORD will begin, as God begins to pour out His wrath upon the world. Things will begin to fall apart for the lost, just as they have turned to their world leader the antichrist to rescue them. When they are saying "peace and security" (**1 Thessalonians 5:3**), sudden destruction will come upon them. All this will happen as unexpectedly for them as a "thief coming in the night". And they will feel God's retribution for all that they have done.

The word that Paul uses to describe Jesus second coming at the end of the Tribulation period, (translated "*revelation*" in **verse 7**) is *apokalypsis* (pronounced *ap-ok-al'oop-sis*). It is where we get the word for apocalypse, and it refers to something that was once hidden being suddenly revealed for the first time. Those who do not know Christ, will be shocked and awed at His coming, and they will marvel at His mighty power. The crucified lamb of Calvary will be revealed as the mighty Lion of The tribe of Judah. And then those who have brought affliction upon God's people will have it returned to them with infinitely more ferocity.

Just as Haman, the wicked vizier in the story of Esther wished harm upon the righteous queen and her people and ended up being hanged upon his own gallows, so shall it be for those who stand in opposition to the people of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. God will allow His people to suffer here on this earth as a testimony of their faith, but at the revelation of Christ Jesus, the tables will be turned. This is the resounding truth that rings out in the cry of the martyrs from underneath the altar in Revelation:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the Word of God and the testimony they had given. They cried out with a loud voice, "LORD, the One Who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?" So they were each given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters, who were going to be killed just as they had been.
Revelation 6:9-11

For you see, God's people have been called to suffer for just a little while. But to those who have caused their suffering, the retribution will last for an eternity.

They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the LORD'S presence and from His glorious strength...
2 Thessalonians 1:9

God will not be mocked, my friends. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap (**Galatians 6:7**). The wicked will receive their just retribution for the things that they have done. The suffering of God's chosen people lasts but a season. Hell is forever. Jesus says:

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to fall away — It would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses. For offenses will inevitably come, but woe to that person by whom the offense comes.

Matthew 18:6-7

Rest for the Weary (vs 7. 10)

...and to give relief to you who are afflicted along with us. This will take place at the revelation of The LORD Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels....

2 Thessalonians 1:7

...on that day when He comes to be glorified by His saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed.

2 Thessalonians 1:10

When Christ comes to set things right, those who have kept the faith, those who have not fallen away because of persecution and testing, will inherit the kingdom of God. So is *The Bible* saying that some will lose their salvation and fall from grace? Quite the contrary, it is saying that the truly saved, they to whom the seed of The Word has fallen upon good soil, will endure to the end. Those who do not endure were never saved to begin with. God will finish what He has begun in you (**Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**) if you are in Christ. Your patient and joyful endurance under the trials and testings of your faith will only make it grow stronger. You, like those in Thessalonica, will prove that nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. The “proof” is in the endurance. God’s *real* children will never give up on Him. The word that Paul uses to describe what is waiting at the end for the believer (translated “*relief*” in the CSB) is *anesis* in the Greek, and it means simply, “*rest*”. When these trying times are at an end, God had promised to give us... **rest!**

Now, I don’t know about you this morning, but I am certainly looking forward to the rest we are promised when Christ comes to set things right in this world. I long for it a bit more with each passing day. I am growing increasingly weary of what I see going on around me in this wicked place. I am longing for home. I keep listening for the trumpet. I do not want Him to find me surprised and unprepared when I hear it!

Christ is coming again. And when He does, He will set all things right in this world. The faithful will be rewarded, and the wicked shall be punished. But for a time, we must patiently endure the hardships that are necessary for the discipline of our faith. Or as the Apostle Peter has said:

Blessed be The God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ. Because of His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. You are being guarded by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith — more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire — may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-7

Now, I don’t know about you this morning, but that, to me, sounds like something that is definitely worth waiting for! So take heart. No matter what you are going through in this life, it will only be for a “little while” longer, until the day when Christ Jesus returns to set things right. Will you be one of those in whom the seed of The Word has found “good soil” in which to take root? Will you persevere until the last day, when Jesus will give you the rest that He has promised? Keep the faith, my friend. Jesus is coming soon! So to you who are weary and burdened, come to The One Who has promised to give you rest (**Matthew 11:28**).

Let those who wait upon The LORD say... TRUTH!!!