

**“Suffering and the Second Coming”
II Thessalonians 1:1-12**

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II Thessalonians was written only a few months after Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. The background of this book indicates that the Thessalonians were going through a terrible time of persecution. In the midst of these trials they began to wonder if they were actually in the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is a time predicted in the Bible when great judgements will be poured out on the world before the Second Coming of Christ. They wondered if they were in this time of trouble—contrary to Paul’s teaching in I Thessalonians 5:9 and I Thessalonians. 1:9-10. So Paul writes this letter to correct their misunderstandings about the coming Day of the Lord and to encourage them in the midst of their suffering.

Paul opens his letter with a greeting. No matter what our earthly circumstances may be, our position before God never changes. We are “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul is reminding them that they are a **FAMILY** (under the **care** and protection of a wonderful, loving Father) and that they are **SERVANTS** (under the authority and leadership of a wonderful Lord).

“Grace to you and peace.” **You have an eternal relationship with God based upon his** unmerited favor. That’s grace. Grace means He has given you just the opposite of what you deserve. The wrath of God has been put aside and you are now the objects of his favor. No matter what your circumstances may be, as you meditate on God’s *grace* to you in Christ, and his constant care for you, your soul will be filled with a *peace* that passes understanding.

Outline:

- 1. Words of Praise (3-4)**
- 2. Words of Promise (5-10)**
- 3. Words of Prayer (11-12)**

After greeting them in vv. 1-2 Paul launches into words of praise to God for what He has been accomplishing in their lives:

I. WORDS OF PRAISE (vv. 3-4).

Their faith was growing (3). *“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more...”* Faith is a relationship of trust and confidence in God. As we grow as Christians our trust and confidence in God should grow. Learning to really trust the Lord about everything is a process. It is amazing that some Christians are perfectly willing to trust God about eternity but the little problems of today and tomorrow seem too big to commit to the Lord. These Christians had a growing faith because their faith was being stretched and tested by difficult times. The great men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 all **suffered** in one way or another, or **faced**

tremendous obstacles so that their faith could grow. As we go through life and face those hard experiences that are sometimes so difficult we don't think we will make it through, we find as believers that these experiences ultimately cause our faith to grow.

Their love was increasing (3). *"...and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."* Not only were they growing in their relationship with God, but they were also growing in their relationship with one another. They were coming to trust God more and more and they were coming to love God's people more and more.

Their perseverance was encouraging others (4). READ. The word "PERSEVERANCE" is one of the great New Testament words. It means "steadfastness" or "spiritual staying power." James tells us in James 1: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its **work so that you may be mature and complete.**"* Suffering produces perseverance (spiritual staying power) and perseverance results in spiritual maturity.

Paul says the spiritual staying power of these Thessalonian believers caused them to become a blessing to many others. So our sufferings not only help us to grow—they can help others grow as well. We become channels of blessing for others as they observe how we face the suffering that has come into our lives.

ILLUSTRATION: In 1949, when the communists took over China, the missionaries had to flee; and there was great concern over the churches left behind. Would they survive? But in just the past few years as Christians from the free world have been able to return to China they have discovered strong thriving churches. The sufferings of the church in China purified the church and helped strengthen the faith of the true believers. This has been a tremendous encouragement to churches all over the free world. This is what suffering does in our lives. It refines us and causes us to be a blessing to others as we grow in steadfastness and Christ-like character.

Words of Praise in vv. 3-4 are followed by Words of Promise in vv. 5-10...

II. WORDS OF PROMISE (vv. 5-10).

*"**All this is evidence** that God's judgement is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well..." (5-7a).*

Paul says he sees in their perseverance and faith in the midst of suffering "evidence that God's judgement is right"—that God is a righteous judge. **How? How does our suffering and response to it prove that God is a righteous judge? Paul defends God's justice by making three points:**

(1) FIRST, God is just because enduring suffering for Christ's sake is God's way of fitting us for his kingdom.

Jesus taught that suffering is the unavoidable path to glory (Mark 8:31ff). In Romans 8:17 Paul said, "...we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we **share in his sufferings** in order that we may also **share in his glory**." **ONLY** if we share in Christ's sufferings will we ever share in his glory. Since God was allowing them to suffer for Christ's sake, they could know that he was preparing them for glory.

First, it is right because its purpose is to fit unholy people for the holy kingdom of God. Its design is not to punish believers but to purify them and refine their faith the way gold is refined through fire (as Peter says in 1 Peter 1:7). That is the point of verse 5: "This (that is, this persecution and affliction) is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering."

God's design in the suffering of his persecuted people is that they be found worthy of the kingdom at the last day. This doesn't mean that we become deserving of the kingdom. It means we become fit for it. There is a holiness (though not a perfection) without which we will not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) and God works that holiness in us (Hebrews 13:21) largely through the discipline of suffering (Hebrews 12:3-11).

So it is utterly crucial how we respond to suffering in our lives. It is God's school for heaven. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that afflictions are producing our eternal weight of glory. And in Romans 8:17 he said we will be "fellow heirs with Christ if we suffer with him in order that we might be glorified with him."

And in all this we must not forget how the letter began: this just and holy God who hates sin and goes to painful lengths to burn it out of us is our Father, who loves us and knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. But Hebrews 12:5 says, "The Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

So Paul's first defense of the justice of God in ordaining the suffering of his people through persecution is that his design is holy and loving: he is fitting unfit people for the holy joy of the kingdom of God.

PETER wrote to the Christians in Asia Minor: "... *you have been distressed by various trials, 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 . . .*" (1 Peter 1:6,7).

Writing to the Philippians, PAUL said: "*Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the sake of the gospel: in no way alarmed by your opponents, which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too from God. **For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake . . .***" (Phil. 1:27-29).

(2) SECOND, God is just because the evil that seems to have the upper hand now will be brought to ruin (V. 6).

The tables will be turned, and God will pay back trouble to those who trouble you! (verse 6). We live in a moral universe. There is a time coming when God will judge your persecutors. He will pay back those who persecute you. This Christ-rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave God's people. The wicked only triumph temporarily.

Paul's second defense of God's justice in this matter is to show that the evil which seems to have the upper hand now will be brought to ruin. The tables will be turned and persecutors will be confounded. This is the point of verse 6: ". . .since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you."

There is a grave injustice happening when evil men persecute Christians just like there was when evil men crucified Jesus. Yet God was in charge there and he is in charge here and he will show that his own design in all this is just because when all is said and done the afflicter will become the afflicted and justice will be exacted from all who do not believe.

(3) THIRD, God is just because those who suffer for Christ's sake will one day be vindicated and given rest and joy at the coming of the Lord from heaven (verse 7). We see only the surface appearance. We see the malice, cruelty, power and arrogance of the evil men who persecute God's people. We also see the sufferings of the people of God who are opposed, ridiculed, boycotted, harassed, imprisoned, tortured and killed. **We see** the injustice—the wicked flourishing, the righteous suffering. “Why doesn't God do something?” we complain. He will. But for now, (1) He is allowing his people to suffer, in order to qualify them for his heavenly kingdom. (2) He is allowing the wicked to triumph temporarily; but he will one day pay them back. (2) He will vindicate his people, giving them rest and joy.

In Revelation 6:9-11 the martyred saints of the tribulation call out, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.”

How long will the Lord delay his judgement on evil men, evil systems, evil governments that today are persecuting believers? Just a little longer.
But judgement is coming!

When is this judgement coming?

Verse 7: “...**WHEN THE LORD JESUS IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN in blazing fire with his powerful angels.**” It will come when Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven. That will be a glorious sight for those who love him, but a terrible sight for his enemies.

Verse 8: “**He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.**”

This is either referring to two groups, or it is a parallelism (explain).

Those who do not know God, could be referring to the Gentile world that rejected the revelation of God in nature. God has revealed himself in nature, but men willfully choose to suppress that knowledge. They are without excuse.

Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus could refer to Jews and Gentiles who have heard the gospel and rejected it.

Or perhaps we are to take it all together: He will punish those who do not know God, that is, those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

It is tragically true that there are millions of people like that all over the earth. They do not know God because they have not submitted to the good news of Jesus Christ. They have heard that if they trust in the Lord Jesus Christ they will be saved. But they have not done that. They have heard, but they have turned their backs and walked away time and time again. That is what Paul is describing. Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father but by me. When we submit to Jesus Christ and trust him as our savior, we know God.

Illustration: A missionary who had served in Pakistan for a number of years, wrote a letter to be read at her funeral because she was dying of cancer. She said, “Loving family and friends have been my second greatest treasure in this life. My first greatest treasure has been knowing God. To those of you who do belong to God’s family, let me share an observation of these past final weeks of my life. Material things mean **nothing**—absolutely **nothing**. It seems we work all our lives gathering things only to leave them behind when we go into God’s presence—and this is for eternity. To intimately know God and keep his commandments is all that counts—in this life.

When Christ returns to judge he will judge those who do not know God—that is, those who have not obeyed the gospel. But those who do know God through Jesus Christ and are part of his family will not be a part of that judgement. Romans 8:1
READ.

What about the consequences of this judgement for both the lost and the saved in verses 9 and 10:

Consequences for the lost in verse 9: *“They will be punished with everlasting destruction (or ruin) and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”*

The gospel is an invitation from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. To refuse that royal invitation is the greatest insult we can give to God. Our refusal will not go unanswered: God will have the last word. And for those to whom He speaks, it will be the last word they hear from Him as they are eternally banished from His presence.

That is what HELL is—banishment from the presence and power of God forever. HEAVEN is just the opposite—being in the presence of the Lord and the presence of His power.

Consequences for the saved or the believers at His coming. is seen in verse 10: “...on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you have believed our testimony to you.” Christ will be glorified, as all the family of God is together, gazing upon our glorified savior—Because of what he has worked in us, He will be glorified. We will be exhibitions of his power and grace and goodness.

Notice: “...because you believed...” All because our testimony to you was believed! Paul went to Thessalonica and preached the gospel to them and they believed. Now they are part of the family of God and will share in these glorious events. The glory that awaits us Paul said, will make all suffering pale by comparison (Romans 8:18).

Finally....Paul breaks into word of prayer in vv. 11-12

III. WORDS OF PRAYER (11-12)

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you....”

First: “...that our God may count you worthy of his calling...”

And he will. We read in I Thessalonians 5:23-24: “...The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” Philippians 1:6 READ.

Second: “...and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.” That we might be able to fulfill every inner desire and every outward action to serve and love and worship Christ. That is only possible by his power working in us.

The ultimate aim of all this is that the “*name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified.*”

So that was Paul’s prayer. That we might be made worthy of this high calling in Christ Jesus. Specifically that we might be able to fulfill all inner desires to love and serve and worship Christ, and the outward activity of faith with God’s power. The ultimate purpose that the name of Jesus Christ might be glorified...

Illustration: George Mueller, who had the great orphanage ministry in England in the 19th century was preaching in Dublin, Ireland and he said to his audience: “How many purposes are there in life? Three? Then you have two too many! Two? Then you have one too many! One? And that the glory of God? Then you are following the master.

That was Paul’s prayer...that Jesus Christ be glorified in you, Therefore, said Paul, “*whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*”

CONCLUSION

This is a very sobering chapter, yet very encouraging. Sobering for those who do not have the assurance that they know God. May anyone here who has not accepted this gracious offer of salvation do so today. As believers we are encouraged by the lives of the Thessalonians believers whose faith was growing and whose love was expanding in the midst of difficult times. May that be true of us as well who know and love Jesus Christ.

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