

2 Thessalonians (1): Every Good Purpose

(2 Thessalonians 1:3-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Our work in Zhitomir, Ukraine begun in 1993 with a campaign & church plant
 - 1. Missions are always hard, but 3 things made this particularly so
 - a. **Area:** Western Ukraine was at the time unevangelized and pretty remote
 - b. **Opposition:** Government official tried to control & derail the work there
 - c. **Follow-up:** There was no missionary to move to Ukraine—letter and visit
 - 2. Today, there's a thriving church in Zhitomir— and still no local missionary
 - a. We've nurtured the church through visits (2-3 year), letters, emails, etc.
 - b. God has raised up leaders, and the church there continues to flourish
- B. This “*missions w/o missionary*” strategy was one used by Paul in Thessalonica
 - 1. Paul same problems we did in Ukraine (*little bit louder and a whole lot worse*)
 - a. **Area:** Thessalonica was unevangelized & remote (*2nd church in Europe*)
 - b. **Opposition:** Jewish leaders stirred up a Gentile mob to come after Paul
 - c. **Follow-up:** Paul had to flee Thessalonica after 3 weeks there (**Acts 17:2**)
The church would be nurtured through letters (1-2 Thess) and visits (Timothy/Silas)
 - 2. **1 Thessalonians** is one of Paul's earliest letters, and his most personal
 - a. He praises them for their faith despite difficulty and struggle (**1 Th 1:6-7**)
You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 - b. As you would expect, there were specific doctrines Paul will stress
 - 1) A long section on sexual purity to new church in pagan city (**4:1-12**)
 - 2) A longer diction on misunderstandings of 2nd coming (**4:13 - 5:11**)
 - c. Good thing we don't struggle with sexuality or second coming today!
 - 3. **2 Thessalonians** was written within a few months of sending the first letter
 - a. Likely deliverer of first letter (Timothy?) told Paul they weren't getting it
 - 1) So Paul writes again to teach and encourage to encourage this church
 - 2) Do we need to be taught and encouraged? Maybe this book is for us!
 - b. Maybe there's something in this short book for us (about 6 weeks worth)
 - c. Paul begins by assuring us God is at work despite the ways things seem

II. Praise: Their Faith Was Growing (Read: [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](#))

- A. Paul began the first letter praising and thanking God for their faith
 - 1. Here he expresses thanksgiving to God for this church and their growth
 - a. Their faith wasn't just surviving; he says it was "*growing more and more*"
 - b. Also growing in their love for others (Paul's prayer in [1 Thessalonians](#))
May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ([1 Thess 3:12](#))
 - c. There was a lot of good things going on in the church at Thessalonica
 - 2. This was despite "*all the persecutions and trials you are enduring*" ([1:4](#))
 - a. **Setting:** Paul had to leave Thessalonica because of Jewish opposition
 - 1) Jews stirred up mob ("*lewd fellows of baser sort*" ([Acts 17:5](#), KJV)
 - 2) When mob didn't find Paul, they grabbed others to attack ([Acts 17:6](#))
 - b. So the church had been suffering opposition from the very beginning
 - 3. The church was growing in love and faith despite struggle and hardship
- B. This flies in the face of what many, both then and now, believe about faith
 - 1. Paganism of Thessalonica sought to appease gods and thus avert bad things
 - a. Floods, famine, fire, disease—those were all the acts of angry gods
 - 1) Religious ritual served to appease the gods so they wouldn't be angry
 - 2) So you pour a cup of wine into the sea to appease Poseidon/Neptune
 - b. Point of religion was to get the gods on your side and avoid bad things
 - 2. But isn't that precisely the view that many have of Christianity today?
 - a. If you do what's right, then God will bless you with material prosperity
 - b. So if you aren't prospering in every way, you don't have enough faith
 - 1) Years ago, I heard Ken Copeland talking about faith and prosperity
 - 2) **Question:** "*Why doesn't God bless Ethiopia with prosperity like you*"
 - 3) **Answer:** "*He'd bless them with my prosperity if they had my faith*"
 - c. That has more in common with paganism than with Christianity!
 - 3. Last week: Two things may happen if faith leads to prosperity and I suffer
 - a. I may think I'm doing something wrong; I don't have enough faith
 - b. Or I may think God is doing something wrong—didn't do his part
 - 4. Well, Paul's next point is that God is always going to be RIGHT

III. Promise: God's Judgment Is Right (Read: [1 Thessalonians 1:5-9](#))

- A. Struggle should not cause them to doubt God; they were proving Him true
1. Their faithfulness showed they were “*counted worthy of the kingdom of God*”
 - a. Many of labor under the fantasy that God's wants to make things easy
 - 1) Jesus did the heavy lifting, and we're on a Sunday stroll with Jesus
 - 2) So we're a bit flustered when the sky starts falling and things get hard
 - b. Paul sees their “*persecutions and trials*” ([v. 4](#)) as “*evidence*” God is right
 - c. Trials shouldn't bother us; faith being too easy should bother us!
 2. Jesus makes an intriguing statement about the kingdom in [Matthew 11:12](#)
From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.
 - a. The context is Jesus' praise of John the Baptist and his message
 - 1) Kingdom was forcefully advancing— John's message, “*... is at hand*”
 - 2) Now “*forceful men*” were taking hold of it (“*take it by force,*” NASB)
 - b. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; Christian come to doors of a palace
 - 1) The door is guarded by fierce warriors; everyone is afraid of guards
 - 2) Christian saw man w/ “*very stout countenance*” and sword-n-helmet
 - 3) He called, “*set down my name sir*” and fought his way into the palace
 3. The struggle the Thessalonians faced for faith should not be surprising
 - a. Jesus insists that his disciples count the cost before following ([Lk 14:28](#))
 - b. One who puts his hand to the plow and looks back can't follow ([Lk 9:62](#))
 - c. Paul: Discipleship as strict training where we buffet body ([1 Cor 9:24-27](#))
- B. The other part of trusting God's judgment as true— He will punish the wicked
1. Those who persecuted the church would suffer everlasting punishment
 - a. Jesus will appear with blazing fire and mighty angels in a final judgment
 - b. Paul is the apostle of grace, but he isn't adverse to hellfire-n-damnation!
 2. Two promises should capture our hearts as it must have theirs ([2 Thess 1:10](#))
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 believed our testimony to you.*
 - a. When Jesus comes in his glory, those who believe will **marvel** at Him
 - b. Paul promises these beleaguered believers, they will be there to marvel!

IV. Purpose: Every Good Purpose (Read: 2 Thessalonians 1:11)

A. Paul actually prays two things for the Thessalonians in verse 11

1. **First**, Paul prays that God would “*count them worthy of his calling*” (v. 11)
 - a. Earlier Paul spoke of them being “*counted worthy of the kingdom of God*”
 - b. This echoes Eph 4:1, “*live a life worthy of the calling you have received*”
 - 1) Eph 4 goes on to describe what living worthy of their calling means
 - 2) There are specific do’s (unity) and don’ts (lying, anger, stealing)
 - c. The Thessalonians faced difficulty, but they had to live up to their calling
 - d. We don’t really know the strength or maturity of faith until it is tested
 - 1) Peter sees struggles as fire that burns off faith impurities (1 Pet 1:7)
These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.
 - 2) That’s why it’s **WRONG** to see struggles/problems as a lack of faith
 - 3) **Profound Idea:** The way our faith can pass the test is the **be tested**
2. **Second**, Paul prays God would “*fulfill every good purpose of yours*” (v. 11)
 - a. When you are suffering struggles, what do you concentrate on the most?
 - 1) When I started on sermon, had a headache (*not great tragedy, but pain*)
 - 2) I tried to focus on the sermon, all I could think about was my head
 - b. Hardships have this way of being very distracting—all we can see
 - c. Paul points them beyond their struggles to what God could do (NLT)
May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do.
 - 1) This church needed to look beyond the difficulties of the moment
 - 2) They needed to imagine all that God could do in them... so do we!

B. The church at Thessalonica didn’t look like much—new, small, persecuted

1. They just didn’t have a lot of power or resources in themselves
 - a. But they served a God with unlimited resources who worked in them
 - b. They didn’t have to supply the power—God had all the power
2. What they need to do was to remain faithful and focused on God
 - a. That’s what God is calling us to do as a church and as Christians
 - b. Difficulty and struggle are not a sign of God’s disfavor in our lives
3. Like the Thessalonians, God may use them to accomplish His purpose