

Studies in 2 Thessalonians-01 2 Thes 1:1-5

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, love, and endurance in the face of persecution, and how our ability to suffer for Christ now fits us for service in the kingdom.

Duration: 32:17

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:8

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of knowing God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He explains that those who refuse to know God will face the vengeance of Christ when he comes in flaming fire. The preacher urges the audience to obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus and receive him as their Lord and Savior. He also highlights the purpose of suffering and persecution in the lives of believers, as God tests their fitness for ruling and manifests the fitness of their persecutors for judgment. The sermon concludes with a message of comfort and hope for Christians and a warning for those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel.

Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles now to 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, and I'd like to look at some of these verses with you this morning. 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because as your faith groweth exceedingly, to the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer. Seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you that are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, because our testimony among you was believed in that day. Wherefore, also, we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all

the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The dominant theme in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's appropriate that we should be studying this on this Lord's Day, because of events that are taking place in the world that point to the soon return of the Savior. The turmoil in the world today is very similar to conditions that existed before World War II.

Only there is this significant difference, and that is that events are now centering in the Middle East around Israel. History is moving back to the Middle East, and the nation of Israel is coming into prominence as never before. Those who are acquainted with the word of God, and what it teaches about the prophetic future, find their heart beating just a little faster, because they realize that God is setting the stage for the last act in the drama of this world's history.

I believe it with all my heart, and as I travel around and meet Christians today, most of them are saying it must be time for the Lord to come. Even when the war was going on in Vietnam, our governmental leaders kept saying, it isn't what's going on in Vietnam that's important, it's what's going on in the Middle East. Although many of these men did not know the Lord personally, God had given them insight to realize that the searchlight of history was shining down on Israel and the surrounding countries, and we see it happening before our eyes today.

And so, it's good for us to turn to the word of God, and it's a message of comfort and hope for those who are Christians, and a message of warning for those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. On his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul went into the northern part of Greece, and he visited a city called Thessalonica, and he went in there and he preached the gospel, and a revolution took place, a spiritual revolution. Good to God we had more of it today.

A famous bishop in England once said, Everywhere Paul went, he started a revolution. Everywhere I go, they serve me tea. I think that's a commentary on Christian life today.

Paul went there, and he saw an assembly of God's people planted, and he taught them in the basics of the Christian faith, and he left and left behind a functioning New Testament church. Pretty wonderful. He was only there in the synagogue for three Sabbaths.

I personally think he spent more than that time in the area, just three Sabbaths in the synagogue. And then he left, and the fires of persecution began to burn in Thessalonica. Well, that's nothing new.

It seems to me that wherever a real work goes on for God, there's opposition and affliction and persecution, and God strengthens the work in this way. Whatever is really of God will stand the fires of persecution. And this was a great concern now to the apostle Paul.

How were the Thessalonians, in his absence, how were the Thessalonians standing up under persecution? Were they willing to endure shame and suffering for the namesake of the Lord Jesus? And he got back good reports. They were. They were standing true to the Lord through it all.

That's a wonderful thing. When young people in high school today can take a stand for Jesus Christ and not wince. When young people in college can stand up against all the atheistic, immoral propaganda that's going on and be true to Jesus, though a thousand voices from the world may call.

And so, Paul was encouraged, and he writes this further letter to them. At the introduction, he says that the letter comes from him and that Silas or Silvanus and Timothy are with him at the time. We've heard of Silvanus or Silas before.

Silas was with Paul in Philippi at the time of the great earthquake. They were singing praises to God at midnight when there was a great earthquake, and the Philippian jailer was saved. Timothy, we've heard of him before, too.

He was Paul's younger disciple. He's the one who traveled with Paul, and Paul poured his life into him and found a kindred spirit in Timothy. He could write to the Philippians, I have no man like-minded who cares for your state.

So that was high praise for Timothy. Now, it doesn't mean that the free men wrote the letter there in verse 1, but it means that Silas and Timothy were with Paul when he wrote the letter. The letter is addressed under the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I've often pointed out that that word church in the New Testament is a very general word. When we think of a church, we think of a building, an edifice. It never means that in the New Testament.

The word church really means assembly, gathering of people, people gathered out and gathered together. For instance, the Jewish people wandering through the wilderness in the Old Testament is called the church in the wilderness. Not the New Testament church, but the assembly, the gathering of people in the wilderness.

In Acts, you find that same word used of a heathen mob, the church. It was a gathering, but this shows you that it's a different kind of a gathering. It says the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father.

That meant that it was not a pagan gathering. It was a gathering of people who acknowledged God as their Father. And then it says in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that means it wasn't a Jewish gathering.

It was a Christian gathering. Gone the Father means that these people acknowledged God as Father. The Lord Jesus Christ means that they acknowledged Jesus Christ as their Lord, and so that expression sets this assembly in Thessalonica apart as being a gathering of born-again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Paul goes on with his customary greeting, Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice two blessings, two blessers. Two blessings, grace and peace.

Grace means strength and supply for God that is all that is needed in the Christian life. When Paul wishes grace to these Thessalonian Christians, he wishes for them a great imploring of undeserved, unmerited favor from God, and peace means he wishes for them serenity and tranquility in a world of strife and unrest. It's a wonderful thing to have peace in one's heart after watching the news on television, isn't it? Wonderful thing to be able to say peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin, the blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

A man can have very little of this world's goods and yet have the peace of God reigning in his heart. Notice that grace comes first and then peace. He believes that not only the words of Scripture are inspired, the very order of the words of Scripture are inspired.

He can't have peace till first you've got grace, and a person never can know peace in his heart till first he has known the grace of God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the source of grace and peace, twofold source. God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul doesn't hesitate to name these two in the same dress. Why? Because they're equal, because they're equal members of the Godhead. Think of how incongruous it would be if I came up to you this morning and said, great be to you and peace from God the Father and Jimmy Carter.

You say, oh don't say that. No matter what your political affiliation would be, it would just kind of irritate your ears, wouldn't it? Why? Because they're not equal. It wouldn't be right to put the President of the United States on the same level as God the Father, but I can say to you, great be to you and peace from God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You say, what? Right. It's confident, it's congruous, it's fit. Why? Because both are God.

God the Father and God the Son. Paul doesn't hesitate to honor the Son even as he honors the Father. That's a great downfall of all the cults, of all the false cults in the world today.

They do not honor the Son as they say they honor the Father. They actually condemn the Son with faint praise. God's word will have none of it.

Then, Paul begins his letter with thanksgiving. This is characteristic of the apostle Paul. We're bound to give thanks to God always for you brethren as it is me.

It's a nice thing to do, you know. Nice thing to do to find things in God's people for which you can be thankful, and incidentally there are virtues in God's people. If you study any child of God, you'll find a very strong point in that person, and if you take the sum of all those fine points of all God's people, you've got the Lord Jesus.

I like to think of that. None of us incorporates them all. We all have our warts and wrinkles and defects, but if you take all the virtues that you see in all the Christians in all the world in all time, that's what the Lord Jesus is like.

He embodies all perfection. Well, let's look for the virtues in God's people instead of their faults. A man once took a pencil, and he took a white sheet of paper, and he put a dot on the white sheet of paper, and he said to people, what do you see? And all they saw was a black dot.

Nobody saw a sheet of white, and that's often the way it is with us and with one another. All we see is the black mark, and we don't see all the white. Let's look for the white.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is me, because that your faith groweth exceedingly. Now, you say, what do you mean your faith groweth exceedingly? Well, actually, it doesn't exactly mean their trust in the Lord here. They did.

They trusted the Lord Jesus. They received him as their Lord and Savior, and they lived day by day in dependence upon him. But, in the context of these two letters, what Paul was thinking about was how their faith was standing up under persecution.

If you'll turn back to the first epistle and chapter three, the key words in this chapter, and I'm just going to go over it very quickly, are your faith. Let me show you. Verse two, the end of this verse, to comfort you

concerning your faith.

Verse five, I sent to know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain. Verse six, when Timotheus came from you unto us and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity. And then, verse seven, the end of the verse, therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.

And then, the end of verse ten, night and day, praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith. You have it over and over again, and first Thessalonians three, your faith. And what the problem was, will the Thessalonians stand firm in spite of anything that might happen to them? Well, I'm sorry to say that there are Christians that seem to go to all the pieces at the slightest jarring note, and that's not a good thing.

I think it's a good thing for all of us to pray every day of our lives, Lord, deliver me from becoming cold, bitter, cynical, or defeated, no matter what may happen to me in the Christian life. We all get our knots, we all get our blows, we all get our discouragements, and all around. What are you going to do, wilt and give up under it? No.

Lord, deliver me from becoming cold, bitter, cynical, or defeated, no matter what may happen to me in the Christian life. And, I want to tell you something, if you pray that prayer, and mean it, God will answer it, and you'll go through the trial not somehow, but triumphantly. Well, that's what Paul was concerned about here, and he got back the report that they were doing very well in spite of the tribulation.

The tribulation, the persecution, was only drawing them closer to the Lord Jesus, so he mentions your faith. Your faith groweth exceedingly, and then he also says the love of every one of you toward each other aboundeth. But, why did he introduce love? I think for this reason, that when Christians are in the pressure cooker, and trials and troubles are coming from every direction, it's easy to get short-tempered, it's easy to have a short fuse, and who do you take it out on? Those who are closest to you.

You know, this even happens in Christian homes. That's one thing, one lesson we learn in life when journeying to the West, that when the trials and troubles come, we take it out on those we love the best. It shouldn't be that way, really shouldn't be that way.

But, these dear Christians of Thessalonica, because they were leaning upon the Lord and the strength of his might, they were not only able to stand up to the persecution, but they were still able to show a spirit of love to one another. Very, very good. So, no matter what, no wonder that Paul was encouraged.

The love of every of you toward each other abounded, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience. Patience there really has the idea of endurance. It's not sitting there passively, waiting till the storm passes.

It's endurance, a triumphant endurance under the blows and pressures of life. Your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure. It's wonderful to read the stories of the martyrs of the Christian church, men who were really persecuted for the faith, who regretted they only had one life to lay down for Christ, who under the most fierce assaults would not renounce the name of the Lord Jesus, but would testify for him boldly no matter what the cost might be.

Now, the Apostle Paul goes on to say something very interesting in these next verses. Notice, "...your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God,

that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer." Now, this is very interesting. Paul is saying here that our ability to suffer for Christ now fits us for service in the kingdom when he comes back to reign.

As far as worthiness to enter the kingdom, that's all taken care of when we're saved. When a person trusts the Lord Jesus Christ as his savior, he's worthy of heaven itself, not in himself but in the Lord Jesus. The only worthiness we have before God is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, there is a very direct connection between our suffering for Christ now and our reigning with Christ then. If we suffer with him, that we shall also reign together, the scripture says. And what the Bible really teaches is that lifetime is training time for reigning time.

Lifetime is training time for reigning time, and God is putting us through his school here, and he's allowing these lessons to come into our life, and he's watching us to see. Someday he'll say, rule thou over five cities, rule thou over ten cities. That's what Paul is saying here.

God's action in allowing his people to be persecuted, and in even permitting the existence of these persecutors, has a double purpose. First of all, God is testing the fitness of his people for suffering, and he's manifesting the fitness of their persecutors for judgment. The two-sided picture.

God is testing the fitness of his people for government, and he's manifesting the fitness of their persecutors for judgment. It says that which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that he may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which he also suffered. And the kingdom of God here means when the Lord Jesus comes back to earth and sets up his kingdom with Jerusalem as his capital, sitting on the throne of David, seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled with us.

God is righteous. You say, what's the righteousness? Christians suffer more than non-Christians in the world today. It's true.

I believe that with all my heart. I believe more people have been martyred in our generation than in any other generation in the history of the church. You think of it.

You say, why does God allow that? Why does he allow his people to be slain like that? Well, for one thing, Christians get all their suffering in this life. Then it's all over, and rest forever. And that's what this verse says, rest with us, for the Lord Jesus shall be revealed.

But, you know, the sufferings of the unsaved in this life are only a foretaste of the pangs of hell that they will endure forever. Isn't that a solemn thought? The sufferings of unsaved people have no redemptive value in this life at all. All they are is a little foretaste of what eternity is going to be like for them.

If I weren't saved, I'd want to be. It says, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Two things here.

People that know not God. My brother was a little boy. We were living in a three-tenement house.

We were up on the top floor, and there was a family named Hammond on the second floor. And my brother was just a tot. And he went to talk to Arthur Hammond one day, and he said, do you know God?

And this adult man says, I don't know him at all.

And my little brother came running up to my mother, weeping his heart out. He said, what in the world is the matter? He said, Arthur Hammond doesn't know God. Well, listen to this verse.

Christ is going to come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God. Who are these people? These are people that could have known God. They could have known him in creation.

They could have known him in conscience. They could have known him by the word of God, by the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they refused to know him. My dear friends, I'd like to ask you this morning, do you know God? There's only one way to know him, and that's through the Lord Jesus Christ coming in simple faith and trust, and receiving him as your Lord and Savior.

And that's what it goes on to say, and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Obey not the gospel. The gospel is a message to be obeyed.

The gospel is a person to be received. I ask you this morning, have you obeyed the gospel? When the Spirit of God came speaking to your heart and telling you you ought to repent, you're a sinner, and you're in danger of eternal judgment, but if you repent and turn and take to Christ, you'll be saved. Will you do it? Not until you seal yourself against obedience to the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Well, this passage of scripture says that one day Christ is going to come and descend from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. How very solemn it is. Then it goes on to say, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power? Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction? The Bible does not teach annihilation.

The word destruction in the New Testament does not mean the loss of being, but it means the loss of well-being. It doesn't mean that you cease to exist, but it means that the purpose for which you were created is not fulfilled. An illustration of that issue is given by the Lord Jesus.

He said, you don't put new wine in old wineskins because the wine would ferment and destroy the wineskins. Now, the wineskins don't cease to exist, but they're no longer usable for the purpose for which they were intended, and destruction in this passage of scripture doesn't mean annihilation. The false cults teach that.

They teach soul sleep and annihilation of the wicked dead, but the Bible doesn't teach this. It says everlasting destruction away from the face of the Lord, literally away from the face of the Lord. Dear friends, as far as the spiritual mind is concerned, nothing could be conceived as worse than being eternally away from the face of the Lord.

There's nothing worse than that. You can argue whether the fires of hell are literal or not. That begs the issue.

The fact of the matter is that those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ are punished with everlasting destruction away from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. It means eternal separation from God and good. It means the blackness of darkness forever.

It means where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. It means the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and forever. What a wonderful thing that we're still living in the day of grace, that God's long suffering is still being manifested.

You know, if you and I were running the earth, we could wipe mankind long ago. You wouldn't have put up with the nonsense that goes on in this world, the sin and the degradation, but God is rich in mercy. He's still crying out to men and women, young men and young women today, come to Christ, and he saved for time and for eternity.

But, I just wonder if he's speaking to somebody's heart in our meeting today, first Sunday of this new year, maybe the last year, maybe the year that the Lord will come. If he comes, will he find you ready? Tell me prayer. Father, we thank you that you are indeed a faithful God, and we just are amazed today at your long suffering, your long suffering with us.

We think how we refused you a thousand times, told you to go away. He stood at my heart's door in sunshine and rain, and patiently waited an instance to gain. What shame that so long he entreated in vain, for he's so precious to me.

Father, perhaps there's someone here this morning who's keeping the Savior outside the door, refusing to obey the gospel, refusing to know you. Father, we pray that by the Spirit of God we'll break down the stubborn walls of resistance, that some might come in simple trusting faith and say, Lord Jesus, I want to be saved from the wrath of some. I'm guilty and deserve the worst, but I believe you died for me the best way I know how.

I receive you as my Lord and Savior. We pray that some might close in with him today. Father, we do think of the troubled world situation.

We think of our president. We pray for him. We pray for the hostages in Iran today.

Pray for the rulers of the world as they seek to sort out this most difficult situation. We pray that we as Christians might exercise our power in prayer, wielding the balance of power in world affairs. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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