



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 11, 2010
Released on Wednesday, July 7, 2010**

"Glory to Christ"

Printed Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Background Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1

Devotional Reading: 1 Peter 5:6-11

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4 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:

5 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:

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 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.

11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

12 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.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to observe how Paul comforted believers in Thessalonica who were disturbed by persecution.

Principle: to see that human oppression of Christians will more than be matched by divine judgment.

Application: to help believers today bring glory to Christ.

Introduction

The Thessalonian church was characterized by spiritual growth in faith and increasing love toward each other. The believers were maturing in Christ beyond what would be expected. The process was not impeded at all by their circumstances, which included experiencing severe persecution.

God counted them worthy of His kingdom due to their endurance of distresses and trials for the sake of the gospel. They were assured of God's help for the present, for He had saved them and would sustain them by His grace. He receives all the glory for what they had become.

Further, they had hope for the future with the revelation of Jesus Christ. Christ will also be glorified in the saved for His work of salvation in their lives.

Believers are to live lives of commitment to God until Christ returns. This involves fulfilling His good pleasure in acts of love and kindness promoted by faith in Him. Christ will accomplish these things through His sovereign working in the lives of believers with His enabling grace. For this, He receives all the glory.

Lesson Background

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and thus a Roman province of considerable political clout. A Roman official resided there, and strict measures were taken to assure cordial relations with Rome. Loyalty to the emperor was thus of utmost importance, as evident in this city's construction of a temple dedicated to Caesar and coins minted with the images of Caesar Augustus and Julius Caesar, both of whom were considered divine.

In such a climate, Thessalonian Christians constantly walked on eggshells. They taught about another king and His kingdom, another Lord whom they also deemed divine. It is not surprising, then, that when the Jewish opponents of Paul's preaching had wanted to discredit him before the authorities, they used loyalty to Caesar as the benchmark: "And these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things" (Acts 17:7, 8).

In his previous letter to the Thessalonians, Paul was looking to encourage these believers in their trials, and to instruct them concerning the coming of the Lord.

Apparently, things had since become worse. In this second letter, Paul addressed these persecutions in a more prominent place, right at the beginning. Likewise, confusion remained concerning the day of the Lord. Apparently an apostle's work is never done, and we continue to find inspiration in this follow-up letter to a persecuted church.

Faith of the Persecuted (2 Thessalonians 1:3,4)

1. Why was Paul thankful for the Thessalonians believers? (v. 3)

Our target passage, 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12, is a thanksgiving prayer. This is the way Paul often began his letters (see Philippians 1:3–11; Colossians 1:3–14; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–4), yet it was more than a mere formality. In these prayers, Paul often communicated his deep love and respect for the letter's recipients.

The Christians at Thessalonica were steadily growing in their faith. Instead of falling to false doctrine, they stood fast in the Gospel. The Thessalonian church displayed had displayed ongoing faith, love, and persistence in the midst of persecution. For those reasons, Paul was thankful.

Paul had also encouraged them to increase in their love for each other (1 Thess. 1:3; 3:12). Their love toward each other was growing beyond bounds. Love for fellow believers is an outcome, or fruit, of faith (Eph. 4:15). A growing love for other believers is also indicative of spiritual maturing in a believer's life.

2. What did Paul boast to other churches about? (v. 4)

Paul is not silent in his thanksgiving for what God is doing among the Thessalonians. He cannot help but tell the story of the Thessalonians' *faith* wherever he goes. First-century churches are not formally connected by a denominational structure or creedal statement. They are bound in an indissoluble kinship of shared commitment to Christ. Those who travel from church to church spread the news of the gospel's advance from city to city, and churches thus encourage one another. Paul is especially fond of spreading the news of the Thessalonians' perseverance through their *persecutions*. Their faithfulness under fire provides strong evidence that these new believers have truly embraced Jesus as Messiah.

PRAYING FOR THE PERSECUTED

Have you prayed for other Christians lately? No, not just your Christian friends or family, but for Christians who live where it is dangerous to be a Christian? The annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is dedicated to encouraging Christians around the world to pray for our brothers and sisters who live where lives and livelihoods are threatened.

In many countries in the world, the government places limits on Christian gatherings. Some countries have laws in place that make it illegal to convert to Christianity. As of 2008, at least seven states in the Hindu nation of India had enacted falsely named "Freedom of Religion" legislation specifically designed to prevent conversion to Christianity. Christians are fallaciously accused of bribing, "alluring," or coercing converts to the faith. Missionaries are accused of conspiring to turn India into an American satellite nation. The government often turns a blind eye to the persecution.

Paul set an example for us in his prayers for the Thessalonian Christians who lived in trying circumstances. Just as he did, we should thank God for the faith shown by our persecuted brothers and sisters and for the faithfulness of their testimony. We should also pray for their power to resist the evil forces aligned against them.

—C. R. B.

God's Righteous Judgment/Relief for the Persecuted (2 Thess. 1:5-10)

3. How did the Thessalonians respond to their persecution? (v. 5)

Paul pointed out that the endurance of persecution by the Thessalonian believers was a "manifest token," an evidence or proof, that God's judgment of them was righteous.

Paul views persecution quite differently from the way that many Christians do today. Those who seldom *suffer* for their faith typically count it a great privilege to live on friendly turf. The apostle, however, counts it a great honor to suffer for God's *kingdom* and share in Christ's sufferings (see Philippians 3:10,11).

It is important to note, however, that faithful endurance while experiencing trials does not make a believer worthy of heaven. But it does demonstrate his worthiness. Salvation is by grace, not grace plus works (Eph. 2:8,9). We neither are worthy, nor can we ever become worthy in ourselves, of God's salvation.

God has called His people to enter into His kingdom, for which they will suffer trials during the present time. God's grace sustains believers as they experience such trials due to the hostility of the enemies of the gospel. Consequently, God alone receives all the glory and honor for enabling them to be worthy of His kingdom in their fidelity to Him.

4. What will our Heavenly Father do to those who persecute us? (v. 6)

Our heavenly Father is *righteous* not only to include His suffering faithful children in His kingdom, but to punish their persecutors. God's people have always affirmed God's just retribution (Deuteronomy 32:35, 36, 43). He keeps tabs on oppressors and brings judgment on the unrepentant. What we Christians must never do, however, is take such judgment into our own hands. Since God will avenge us, we are free to love our persecutors and overcome their evil with the love of Christ (Romans 12:17-21). Our hope is to turn them from their self-defeating ways, but we are not responsible to ensure their repentance or judge their stubborn resolve. God alone knows their hearts, and we can rest assured that He will judge them appropriately at the right time.

Christ's Glorious Revelation (2 Thess. 1:7-10)

5. What hope does Christ's future revelation hold for persecuted Christians? (v. 7)

God's justice is not one-sided. God will not only bring low all oppressors; He also will end all suffering. Paul can sympathize with this need for *rest*. As God's traveling missionary, he encounters new trials and tribulations wherever he goes. Having

found a way to coexist peacefully in one region, he is beset by a new adversary in the next. In his previous letter to the Thessalonians this partnership in suffering received greater attention (2:1, 2; 3:4, 7). It is important for the Thessalonians to know that they are not alone. Many of Christ's followers long to enter God's rest, many are tempted to relax their convictions, and many are waiting patiently for God to finish what He has started in them.

God's rest is not promised in this lifetime, however. It will not arrive fully until Christ returns to earth with His heavenly host. These *angels* are not merely a heavenly escort for God's Son. In Mark 13:24–27 they assist in the gathering of God's people from the ends of the earth, and in Matthew 13:41, 42 they are agents of God's judgment. Until Christ returns in power, we cannot fully know His peace, and we may also find ourselves called to join those counted worthy to suffer for Him.

6. On whom will Christ take His vengeance when He returns? (v. 8,9)

Paul portrayed vividly the dramatic scene of judgment upon the unbelieving for what they justly deserved. The "flaming fire" is descriptive of the fierceness of divine retribution. Paul drew upon Old Testament imagery of divine judgment (Isa. 66:15,16; Dan. 7:9,10).

God the Father has committed all judgment to His Son (John 5:22,27). The Lord will take vengeance on the unbelieving and disobedient. Those who do not know God are those who are willfully ignorant of God's truth (Rom. 1:18-22). They also do not obey the gospel (John 3:36). Their disobedience is an outcome of their refusal to know God. The word "obey" in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 refers to obeying on the basis of having paid attention. God's vengeance will fall on those who have not listened or paid attention to the gospel. Unbelief has grave consequences.

Their *destruction* is not a temporary setback but an *everlasting* lot (see Mark 9:42–48). Worse than that, they will be permanently separated from the only true Lord, Jesus Christ, whose very *presence* is salvation. They will be barred from His glorious *power*, which far exceeds whatever limited power they may attain in this world.

7. Suppose a fellow Christian said, "I love these verses. It's just like I tell my unbelieving neighbor—"God's wrath is coming!" " How would you respond?

Knowing the ultimate victory, the eternal victory that comes for those who are in Christ should motivate us in our faith. But it ought to motivate our love as well. This brother or sister needs to be reminded of Jesus' words: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Perhaps he should also be reminded that God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). He will take no delight in exercising His vengeance, and the idea should not delight us either. Rather, it should motivate us to reach out in love to those who are lost—before it is too late.

8. How will Christ "be glorified in his saints" (v. 10)?

Paul turns next to the future glory of the saints, when Christ comes, He will be glorified in His saints. We will fully mirror His glory. This reflection of Christ has al

ready begun in the present (2 Cor. 3: 18). Christ will be the object of great honor, for His saving grace will be evident for all to behold and to praise.

All believers will be spectators of His coming and will greatly marvel at Him (2 Thess. 1:10). The phrase "our testimony among you was believed" is a special reference to the Thessalonians who believed Paul's testimony to them. These words were meant to be an encouragement to the troubled Thessalonians. All of them would participate in the glory of that day. What a privilege it will be to see those who accepted our gospel witness glorified along with us!

God's Sovereign Purpose (2 Thess. 1:11,12)

9. What did Paul desire to see God accomplish among the Thessalonians? (v. 11)

While we eagerly anticipate the glory of the future, we nonetheless need to see continued achievement and persistence in faith until then. Though Paul has reason to hope in the future glory of the Thessalonian believers, he is nonetheless aware that the race is not finished. He continues to *pray* for these believers and the powerful work God is doing in and through them. Though God has counted them *worthy* to receive His call and to suffer for His call, this does not mean they will automatically remain faithful to that call. Since God is not finished with them, Paul must continue to pray for them.

This also means that God has much more in store for His church. He is pleased for us to surpass previous accomplishments and move faithfully into His future *work of faith*. He also provides us the *power* we need to accomplish this work. Now is not the time for rest. It is the time to remain alert and stay active so God may finish what He started with us (see 1 Thessalonians 5:6,7).

10. How do believers glorify Christ in their lives? (v. 12)

The ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer was that the name of Christ would be glorified in the Thessalonians and that they would be glorified in Him. Christ is glorified when we conduct ourselves in a worthy manner, which means fulfilling God's good pleasure in our lives. We are glorified in Him as the source of our strength and wisdom to do His will (Phil. 4:13). This mutual glorification reflects the union that believers have with Christ (John 17:21-23).

Though the Thessalonians may not know the specific plans God has for them, all such plans entail *Christ* being *glorified* in them. Christ's glory is the rudder that guides all Christian actions (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is the constant criterion for faithfulness. This is not a task, however, that we may accomplish by our own strength. We are only capable by *the grace of our God*. God calls us to this task and empowers us for it, and He is faithful to see it to completion.

Paul prays this prayer precisely in order to encourage the Thessalonians to remain active. Persecution must weigh heavily on these believers. It is one thing to absorb an insult or two or even to suffer unfair prices in the marketplace, but these believers likely have had to watch their loved ones suffer as well. Parents watched their children suffer exclusion. Spouses watched their mates endure public shame and disrespect. Paul therefore knows that he needs to pray for these believers and to remind them of their faithfulness up until this point. Without the power of prayer and

memory of God's previous provision, they might easily succumb to temptation, and so might we.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Growth in faith and love honors God and also causes others to praise Him (2 Thessalonians 1:3).
- 2.** Endurance and faith in suffering reveals true faith and encourages others (vs. 4,5).
- 3.** God is just, but the revelation of His perfect justice awaits a future day (v. 6).
- 4.** As we suffer, we can rest in the assurance that God's justice is perfect and sure (vs. 7-9).
- 5.** God's glory should be seen in us now; it will be seen fully at Christ's return (vs. 10).
- 6.** It should always be our prayer that the Lord will be glorified in His people (vs. 11,12).

CONCLUSION

The believers in Thessalonica had a particular calling: to glorify Christ by suffering for Him. Paul gives thanks to God because these believers have previously risen to this task. Yet past performance is no guarantee of future success. So he encourages these Christians by affirming their flagging hope and lifting them before God in prayer.

Our calling will look different in some ways, but in others it will be the same. We too have been called to glorify Christ to the point of suffering, over against the arrogant taunting of today's power brokers and idol worshipers. We, too, must remember that the momentum of our past faithfulness is not enough to carry us into the uncertain future. Each day we must choose anew to glorify Christ with our life, since each day we are tempted to glorify ourselves or seek to secure our identity by our own strength. We need to encourage one another by telling the stories of Christians who have remained and continue to remain faithful in the midst of tribulation. We need to lift one another up in prayer and beseech our God to finish the work He has begun in us.

PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, we hesitate to pray out loud about persecution. To lift up those who suffer for faith is to identify with them. It means confessing that we are like them and that if only we were in a similar situation, then we would do what they are doing. So we fear, Lord, that by extolling their faithful endurance that we may be inviting You to make us like them. Forgive us, Lord, for not truly wanting that and for wanting, instead, to keep them at a safe distance. Make us a people who so desire to make You known that we welcome the opportunity to suffer publicly so that Your gospel may be made visible. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Thank God for His persecuted followers.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Study all of Thessalonians 2, including verses 1-12 and the short lesson text of verses 13-17 "Chosen and Called."

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