



Perseverance in Suffering:

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

March 01, 2020

Pastor JD Farag

2 Thessalonians chapter one. Our text today will be verses 1 - 5. I'll have you turn there if you're not there already and if you are, I'll ask you to stand. You can follow along as I read. If not, that's all right, where you're seated is fine. By the way, just for the record. So, you understand the why behind the what? The standing for the reading of God's Word comes from Ezra when they would read the scrolls and the people would stand for the reading of God's Word. That's why we do it. In case you were wondering that's the why behind the what. All right.

Verse one, "Paul, Silas and Timothy to the Church of the Thessalonians, 'In God, our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you.'" This is the customary greeting that Paul, in the beginning of his letters, always begins with. "Grace and peace to you from God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so because your faith is growing more and more and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

Therefore [verse 4] among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right and as a result, you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God for which you are suffering."

Let's pray, if you would join with me, we'll ask God's blessing on our understanding. Lord, thank you for your Word. Thank you for this portion that we have before us this morning. Just five verses here but, Lord, there's so much here. We need for the Holy Spirit to get our attention and hold our attention. So that we don't miss anything that you have for us. We don't want our minds to wander as they're prone to do and get distracted thinking about other things. So, Lord, as we do give you our undivided attention, speak into our lives in and through your word we pray. In Jesus name. Amen and amen. You can be seated. Thank you.

So, I want to talk with you today about persevering in suffering. Specifically, as it relates to pressing on and bearing up in the face of difficulty and adversity. As I was preparing my heart for today's teaching, the Lord reminded me of a powerful truth. It's one of those things that you know. It's not a new truth but you need to be reminded of this truth. And that's what the Lord kind of did for me and with me this last week. It was a much-needed reminder of this powerful truth related to the trials that we all experience in the Christian life.

In our time together, I'm hoping that we'll all be encouraged with two principles of paramount importance when it comes to our suffering in our Christian lives. The first one is in verses 1 – 3 and it's that trials are what produce perseverance. Oh, how I wish it were not so. I wish that there was another way or something else that would produce the perseverance that I need for the trial.



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But the problem is, it's actually the trial that produces the perseverance for the trial. There're no shortcuts. There's no way around it. This is one of those places in God's Word where we would do well to know a little bit more about the backstory. So, if you'll bear with me, I want to fill in some of the blanks.

It's been about a year since Paul wrote the 1st letter to the Thessalonians. Actually, it's believed that this was the very first letter he ever wrote. It was to this church in Thessalonica. He wrote the letter in lieu of going back to Thessalonica, where he was actually run out of town. He was forced to leave. Some believe he was only there for the better part of maybe a month, 3 weeks? Three sabbaths, we're told in the Book of Acts. So, he wasn't there very long. He wanted to stay longer and get this church grounded, these new believers grounded, more in the word of God. But he couldn't as he was run out of town.

So, he longed for and loved this church so much. He couldn't go back. So, he sent Timothy to go there and find out how they were doing. Then Timothy comes back and gives Paul this good report. Oh, Paul, they're doing so well. They're growing and they're going. They're growing in their faith. They love one another. They genuinely love one another. They have hope and they're so encouraged. This is good news and Paul is just delighted.

So, he writes this first letter to the church, there in Thessalonica. And actually, responds to some of the questions that they sent back to Paul with Timothy. So, about a year has gone by. Now, Paul writes this second letter and rightly so. Because of what happened in that period of one year since his first letter.

Do you know what happened? Get this. Somebody there wrote a letter, forged a letter, and circulated it as if it was from Paul. I mean in this letter, this false letter, fake news, fake letter... This forged letter... They had told the Thessalonians that they were already in the tribulation. The tribulation had already begun and this is why they were experiencing so much persecution, so much suffering and so much adversity. And it seems to have worked.

In fact, I was just reading it this morning in Acts Chapter 20 where Paul says that he knows that after he leaves, there's going to be these wolves in sheep's clothing that are not going to spare the flock. They're going to come in and he says that for 3 years, day and night, he would just weep and cry out to God. Because he knew the enemy would come in after he left and try to destroy this work and the believers there.

It seems to have happened here in Thessalonica. And very interesting, I don't know if you noticed this or not. I need to point this out. It's going to be germane to our understanding of what Paul is saying here at the beginning of his letter. But conspicuously absent from his 2nd letter is any mention of their hope. In the 1st letter... Well, listen to what he says, in verses 2 - 3, chapter 1.



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He says, "We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God, and Father, your work produced by faith. Your labor prompted by love and [listen] your endurance, inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Oh, that's interesting.

Because now, in his 2nd letter a year later, there's no mention of hope. What happened? Well, it seems that in a period of just one year the new believers there had lost hope in the soon return of Jesus Christ. And absent that hope? There's no endurance; There's no perseverance. They had lost hope. What do you mean, we're already in the tribulation? We're already suffering all of this persecution? They had become hopeless.

Here's the question. Why? Answer? The enemy. The author of confusion caused confusion and robbed them of that hope. Dare I say the Blessed Hope of the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first letter? They're so excited! Paul writes them, chapter 4, "The Lord's going to come in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet is going to sound, the dead in Christ are going to rise first. The Lord's coming!

Then a year goes by. Satan just comes in, as he always does and he robs them of that Blessed Hope. If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the most successful strategies of Satan? This would have to be it. Namely, that of stealing our hope. Stealing our hope. It's an easy verse in Scripture to remember, John 10:10. Listen to what Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. But I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Dare I say that not much has changed in our day. Oh, how busy is the enemy at trying to discourage us and steal from us that hope? That we have, that Blessed Hope, in the soon return of Jesus Christ. This is what he did to the Thessalonians. He's doing it to the church today. I've said this many times and I'll say it again. I hope you don't of tire me saying it. But when you know what you have to look forward to? It makes whatever you're going through easier to get through. But, boy, you take that from me? Now I can't look forward to that? I have no hope. And if I have no hope? I'm unable to persevere.

You've probably heard about this study that was done back in the 1950s. Very cruel, actually. I feel so sorry for lab rats. All of the testing that is done on rats. So, back in the '50s, they took these rats, they put them in water and they all drowned. They were trying to figure out what would make some of the rats swim longer than the other rats who just, I mean, gave up hope. They ended up drowning.

What they found was if they reached down into the water and picked up the rat who was about to drown. And gave them a reprieve, a respite? Let them catch their breath, give them hope and then put them back in the water? They kept swimming. They kept enduring. They



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kept persevering. Why? Because they had hope that they would be taken out of that water and not drown.

Is it disturbing to you? I know it is to me that they use rats to come up with these studies on us, as humans. Is it just me? But is that not true for us? When it comes to rats, the hope, they would actually last for days. Why? Because they had hope.

Maybe you've heard it said that you can only go a certain amount of days without food. Less number of days without water. But you can't go seconds without hope. So, wouldn't it stand to reason? Think this through with me. Wouldn't it stand to reason that if the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy? In that order, by the way. But the one thing he's going to want to steal is that hope that we have? And it seems that he succeeded here with this Thessalonian church.

Well, this brings us to the 2nd one in verses 4 - 5. It's that trials purify our faith. What Paul is saying here is that their suffering is evidence to the contrary. Such that it proves God's ways are right in counting us worthy. Let me explain this. This can be very easily misunderstood. Especially, when it comes to counting us worthy.

The fiery trials and tribulations prove us as they purify us, preparing us for the Kingdom of God. The reason being is that counted worthy carries with it this idea of a judicial decree as Christ's worthiness is accounted to us. It's not our righteousness. It's Christ's imputed righteousness that counts us worthy.

So, this letter that's circulating is basically saying to them, "The suffering, the persecutions, the trials, the difficulty, is evidence of this." And Paul is saying, "No, it's not, to the contrary. It's evidence that you are being proved and counted as worthy."

Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8:18. Let me parenthetically say while you're turning there. For anyone that is really struggling, discouraged and down and giving way and giving in to despair? You need to spend some time in Romans chapter 8, that specific chapter. It will change your life because it's all about the love of God for you and how nothing can separate you from the love that God has for you. "Neither height, nor depth, nor power, nor principality, nor anything created can ever separate the love that God has for you. God loves you.

It's sad that we live in a day where when you say it that way? it doesn't seem to pack very much weight. What if I said it to you like this? God likes you. He does? Yeah. Isn't it sad that we live in a day and age where the word "love" has been so marred, for lack of a better word? That the word "like" carries more weight? God likes me? Yeah. He's really into you. Yeah, he follows you on social media. He's your friend. He loves you. He likes you. Every time you post something? He pushes "like". He likes it. He likes you. Nothing can change that.



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Why do I emphasize that? Because is that not what the enemy tries to do? He tries to, in and through: the adversity, the trials, the suffering, the difficulties of this life, the trials of this life. He tries to put a question of doubt in our minds as to God's love for us. This is how it kind of plays out and what it sort of sounds like. God's angry with you. God's punishing you. See, because Satan's sole goal is to distance you from the Lord. How's he going to do that? By starting to plant seeds of doubt about God's love for you.

You might be here today, going through a very difficult and painful trial and Satan is trying to lie to you and put thoughts in your mind. He can't read your mind but he can certainly put thoughts in your mind. Thoughts like, Wow, this this isn't good, is it? No. Well, God isn't good then, is he? I don't know. God can't be trusted, can he? "Hath God said?" I mean, there's nothing new under the sun. He'll try to bring in doubt and confusion because he wants to steal from you that hope that you have.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the church in Rome, verse 18 Romans 8, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us." In other words? Yeah, we're suffering now. There's trials and difficulty, now. But it's not even worthy to be compared. It's not even on the same level. The sufferings of this life that we experience, that we go through. Not to be compared with the glory that awaits.

1 Peter chapter 4 and we'll close. The Apostle Peter is writing his 1st epistle, verses 12 - 13, of chapter 4. And he says, "Beloved, do not think it's strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ sufferings and that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

So, you're in this fiery trial, the furnace of affliction, as Isaiah says it. And the doubt is setting in, fast giving way to discouragement, which is fast giving way to despair. Don't you see what God is doing? God is allowing it. Never imagine that God allows anything into our lives without it having the sole purpose of preparing us, purifying us and drawing us near to him in complete reliance and dependence upon him.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you. Lord, I just sense in my heart that there are some who are just heavy laden, downcast, discouraged, fearful. Lord, as only you can? Would you encourage and strengthen their hearts? We know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by your Word.

So, Lord, I just pray that your Word, which never returns void, would have that much needed effect of building up, encouraging, replacing the fear with faith as we're going to talk about here in a moment.



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Lord, thank you that your word is truth and that you do always have the final word on whatever it is that we experience in this life.

Thank you, Lord. In Jesus name. Amen and amen.