

Kingdom Saturated Affliction

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Why another letter to the church in Thessalonica?

- Difficulties continued with on-going and increased persecution.
- There was false teaching and continued confusion about “the day of the Lord.” (Eschatology)
- Warning for those who are idle (disorderly, irresponsible) 3:6-15

vs. 1-2, Paul, Silas, and Timothy are heavily invested in the Thessalonian church.

vs. 3-4, Healthy Community

Faith (loyalty, perseverance)

Love

Both are essential to the vibrancy of family life.

We ought (must) thank God for you.

We must depend on the work of God in you and your community.

The Thessalonians have very real and personal experience of what it is like to be rejected by friends, neighbors, family members, co-workers, and fellow citizens.

Don't Forget! Meditate on God's thoughts about you!

He has filled you with honor.

We (Paul, Silas, Timothy) are boasting to others about your faith.

Faith -> loyal endurance.

Paul is not describing a mere inner personal spirituality.

He is describing bold kingdom living despite the difficulty of circumstances.

Love -> you are growing in maturity and your honor is increasing (vs. 3).

What types of hardships were the believers in Thessalonica enduring?

Verbal harassment, social ostracism, political sanctions, and at times physical abuse.

We know you are dealing with a constant attempt by others to pour shame over you and the church.

But...

We are so proud

- You are tenacious.
- You are spiritually resilient.
- You are faithful to God through Messiah Jesus.

Question: Do you experience everyday living as an outlier? Are you engaged with on-going encouragement filled with faith and love from other brothers and sisters (within Second Mile)? Are you giving as much as you are receiving?

vs. 5-10, Theology of Suffering

1. Allow the truth of God and the work of Jesus to encourage you.
2. God's work is just! (Even in and through persecution).

Clear evidence of God's righteous judgment.

Suffering and Perseverance

2 Main responses to affliction

1. Faithfulness, loyal endurance, growth
2. Rebellion, denial, selfishness

In both cases there exists judgement (God's righteous wisdom).

In #2 it could very much lead to vengeance (flaming fire), the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord presence.

In #1, could it be that you are experiencing what you are experiencing because of God's righteous wisdom? He is molding, shaping, refining his children for his purposes.

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. **16** I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

There is suffering, there is evil, and there are consequences. They are distinctly different.

Suffering -> laying down the various difficulties and trials that we face at the feet of Jesus and asking him to use them **redemptively**.

There is a suffering that has purpose and meaning.

It is the kind that enriches the lives of others and brings healing to the world.

The entire life of Jesus shows us the compatibility of grace and suffering.

In redemptive suffering we stand with people in their sin and in their sorrow.

This is the up close and personal reality of the messiness of humanity.

I have been crucified with Christ.

WE pray in our suffering, as we do, we are changed!

Our hearts are enlarged to see the dignity of humanity and not the disgust!

WE only stand under the cross as servants.

"Joy, not misery, is the compelling energy behind redemptive suffering. God is using us for the greater good of all." ~ Richard Foster (Prayer - Finding the Heart's True Home)

Hebrews 12:2 keeping our eyes on Jesus,^[a] the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

1 Peter 4:13 Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 1:6-9 You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials **7** so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. **8** Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, **9** because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

There is abundant comfort in Jesus, but it goes through suffering, not around it.

- We enter into others stories consciously prepared to shoulder the sins and sorrows of others in order that they may be healed and given new life.
- With spiritual maturity comes the ability to discern between the trials that are a normal part of living under the cross and the injustices of an evil world that demand correction.
- It is vitally important to not continue shouldering the burdens of others, but rather we release them into the arms of the Father.
- Our task in reality is small one: to hold the agony of others just long enough for them to let go of it for themselves. Then together we can give all things over to God.

~ Richard Foster

Question: How do you need to re-orient your understanding of suffering? How are you entering the stories of others with care and discernment? Are you experiencing encouragement in your faith? Are you participating with others in the freedom of kingdom living? How?

vs. 11, God will make you worthy of his calling.
God is at work in you, fueled by faith!

The goal and purpose of this calling...

vs. 12, So that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified.

To defy the world leads to affliction.

It is God's will for you to be defiant! (Not be shaped by the world).

The church embraces the suffering that is redemptive.

It is used by God to change and transform and draw people in the way of Jesus.

This is narrow-path kingdom living!

Question: How are you living your life with distinction?