

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

“Three Tools to Triumph over Trials”

I.) Intro.

II.) Vs. 1-4 Praise

III.) Vs. 5-10 Promise

IV.) Vs. 11-12 Prayer

I.) Intro.

This area of the world where Paul writes his 2nd letter was part of Macedonia and the place where Paul had brought the gospel to Europe. It had been the kingdom of Alexander the Great, in fact Thessalonica was named after Alexander's half-sister. Within a few months of Paul's first letter being sent back to the church in Thessalonica word has gotten back to him while still in Corinth about their condition. When he took opportunity to write to them the first time after having only been with them 3 to 4 weeks Paul's concern was to praise, encourage and further instruct them with regards to the rapture and 2nd coming of Christ. Apparently his first letter wasn't well received or it miss the mark with regards to their misunderstanding as Paul needed to write this 2nd letter to make clear what these believers were still uncertain about. Paul praised its virtues least it be discouraged by its faults.

I'm certain most of us have had to write a 2nd letter or email to clear up our first correspondence, so from that standpoint alone I'm excited to take a look at this 2nd letter to the Thessalonians. *I'd be a miss if I didn't at least allude to the practical nature of God has He has in His wisdom used human confusion in correspondence as the place to hide His words to us in plain sight and language.* It seems to me to be a metaphor of

this short three chapter letter... “*God making plain what we humans are still confused about.*”

II.) Vs. 1-4 Praise

Apparently a false teacher sent a letter claiming to be from Paul that said that Christ had already come which caused them to lose hope. Paul begins this letter with what they needed to understand the most how to overcome suffering for their faith as he gives them *three tools to overcome suffering: Praise, Promise and Prayer.*

Vs. 1-4 *Praise: One of Satan’s greatest tools to discourage believers is suffering:* As such the greatest antidote for this is praise. Because of their suffering these saints had felt that they were not progressing in their walk but Paul tells them that their standing in God was well known. *An easy life makes for a shallow faith, dear ones!* Furthermore their love was abounding in their suffering because it was mixed with grace and faith! Suffering causes us to reach upward to God but it also causes us to reach outward in love. Their patience was increasing even as their suffering increased. These believers took the suffering to the throne of grace and waited in his loving arms.

Vs. 1-2 Paul uses the standard formula of greeting utilized in 1st century letters as they always identified the writer before they greeted the reader, which is just the opposite of how we do today. Think of how beneficial this would be with all the junk mail that is sent our way, as we could just toss it out. These three men were familiar to this church, they had been with them from the beginning so no doubt their introduction was well received.

I can’t help but notice the twice repeated phrase in verses 1 and 2 of “*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

- The 1st statement is one that shapes their identity as they are “**IN** *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”
- The 2nd statement reveals what resources they have constantly at their disposal as “Grace and Peace which are **FROM** *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

I love the simplicity that God has for His children when faced with the complexity of life, don't you? *No need to search earth for the treasures we so desperately need, when we can look up and see that they are laying in plain sight in heaven!*

Vs. 3-4 Paul says, “*We are bound to thank God always for you...*”! In Paul's first letter to them he said, “*We give thanks to God always for you all....remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope....*” Saint's adversity is not the tool of the enemy but the opportunity granted by God to reveal what otherwise would have often remained hidden the inward character and beauty of a life surrendered to the Lord! Notice that Paul doesn't include a part of their character that he first mentioned being present in his first letter? Paul said that there:

- “*faith grew exceedingly*”
- “*the love of every one of them all abounds towards each other*”

But Paul doesn't say in this 2nd letter anything of their “**patience of hope**”! Even though Paul shared about the soon return of Christ this church had lost its hope! *Don't pass by this to quickly as we can become discouraged when we don't have a clear understanding of whom we are waiting for.* Without a proper understanding of who we are waiting for our work will lose its urgency as I said last week. Church history is littered with generations of believers whose lost hope caused them to lose their faith and love as well.

III.) Vs. 5-10 Promise

Vs. 5-10 **Promise**: No matter how much these dear saints suffered Paul wanted them to realize that God would never break his promises to them. Those who rejected Him and persecuted those that He loved would have to deal with Him. And those that received His love would be glorified with Him. For the believer what awaits us is rest and reward, for the unrepentive they will be repaid for their rejection and persecution.

Paul moves on to tell these suffering saints three things about their suffering:

1. Vs. 5 **TRANSFORMATION**: *The fact that they had endured the suffering for their faith revealed that they had truly switched kingdoms.* The world's persecution served as proof that they were no longer living in this world and the fact that they were enduring proved that they were now fit for the kingdom of God.
Saints what we value reveals our values and Paul encourages these Christians for valuing life differently than they did before.
2. Vs. 6-10 **CONSUMMATION**: *There suffering revealed the world's coming condemnation and their commencement.* When the world places someone in the "Hall of Fame" they do it on completely different criteria than God does. When you read through God's "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews chapter 11 you quickly discover the **common denominator was not their earthly achievements** but rather their **unwavering faith when facing the greatest suffering.** In verses Hebrews chapter 11 verses 36-38 we read of those in the Hall of Faith as having endured the "trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered

about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- of whom the world was not worthy.” Paul tell these suffering saints **2 important truths**:

- a. Vs. 6, 8-9 **RETRIBUTION**: God’s judgment will come upon two classes of people: “*Those who do not know God*” and “*Those who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus*”. In fact Paul says that it would be unrighteous if God didn’t repay those who have treated those who have placed their faith in His Son. Their greatest punishment is getting what they wanted: **Never to be around the presence, power and glory of God.** C.S. described hell as a “*place where everybody will be at an infinite distance from everybody else so each person can have what they wanted without it infringing on another’s self-interest*”. Ah but they will have no relief from what they lusted from and they will have it to their own ruin for eternity!
- b. Vs. 7,10 **REWARD**: God is going to give rest as well as reward to believers for faith: God not only deals with the unrepentant Hitler’s of this world He will also bring “relief” which is the translation of the word rest in verse 7. A part of that “***relief***” is to ensure that the suffering of the saints will never be forgotten. But He will also glorify all those who glorified Him in this life. Paul tells us the timing of when this will all take place is a series of events known as the presence or “parousia” of Jesus. All of which Paul wrote to them about in his first letter in chapter 4:16-17.

IV.) Vs. 11-12 Prayer

1. Vs. 11-12 **Prayer**: Finally Paul wanted them to realize that prayer is the key to their endurance during their suffering. The word “Therefore” suggests that the purpose of our present suffering ought to have positive present results in our day to day life. Paul’s prayer for these suffering saints was that they stay the course now that they knew the purpose of suffering and outcome to both those that have caused you to suffer and that those have suffered for their faith. Paul’s prayer for them was for **three specific areas**:
 - a. **Worthiness**: Their calling was in grace and love and Paul’s prayer is that in spite of their present suffering that they would continue to live up to their calling. Suffering trials don’t make the person; they reveal what a person is made out of!
 - b. **Work**: Character always must lead to conduct and Paul prayed that their trials wouldn’t direct their walk or work instead he prayed that the Holy Spirit would direct and empower them to fulfill “*all the good pleasure of god’s goodness in them*”.
 - c. **Witness**: Despite the challenges of persecution Paul prayed that their witness to all would continue to be to God’s glory. This of course can only be accomplished by His power and grace working in our lives.

The only way we Christians can endure the stresses of life is that who we contain is greater than what causes the strain! Such knowledge concerning our suffering ought to cause us to live differently. Do more of our prayers sound like, “*Lord, help me!*” or “*Lord help Yourself to me*”?

