

2 THESSALONIANS

1. Hang tough!

June 21, 2007

This is the “Now” generation. When trouble comes, we want relief – NOW. When wrong occurs, we demand justice – NOW. When disease strikes, we expect healing – NOW.

From fast food to fast relief, we seek drive-through-window solutions to any range of painful experiences we encounter in life. We are so familiar with thirty second commercial, thirty minutes sitcoms that we expect our life problems and trials to be solved in a half hour or two hours at the maximum like the TV shows we use to watch.

On the contrary, the Lord has all the sweet time in the world. As a matter of fact, He is not a bit concerned with our busy timeline at all.

The Christians in Thessalonica were grateful to God for Paul’s first letter, but it did not immediately solve all their problems. In fact, the persecution grew worse and some believers thought they were living in the time of the Tribulation. Then a letter arrived claiming to be from Paul, stating that the Day of the Lord was actually present. Needless to say, the assembly was confused and frightened by this concept.

Some of the believers concluded that since the Lord’s coming was so near, they ought to quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for Him. This meant that the other members were under an extra burden to care for them. Satan was working overtime – as the lion, he was seeking to devour, and as the serpent, he was seeking to deceive.

It was in response to these needs that Paul wrote his second letter. He began with their most pressing need, the persecution they were experiencing because of their faith.

A. INTRODUCTION

1) Author

It is rather obvious – apostle Paul. Most sequels lack the punch of the original. However, as the sequel to Paul’s first letter to the church at Thessalonica, 2 Thessalonians swiftly dispels such a conclusion. He wrote it while he was in Corinth.

2) The purpose of the Book

To encourage the Thessalonians and us to stand firm and to correct misunderstandings about Jesus’ return.

3) Time

Many biblical scholars believe that it was written about A.D. 51-52.

B. GREETINGS

2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his customary fashion, apostle Paul extends his greetings to the church of Thessalonica.

Silvanus, a.k.a. Silas, was a long and experienced companion of Paul. He traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey and was imprisoned and set free with Paul in the Philippian jail according to Acts 16:19-24.

From what we read in Acts 17, we know that Paul himself founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. He was only in the city less than a month because he was forced out by enemies of the Gospel. But the church of the Thessalonians left behind was alive and active.

C. PAUL'S AFFIRMATION TO THE AFFLICTED

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

As a result of a false letter that pretended to be from Paul, the believers of Thessalonica was confused and disheartened. So, to bolster their spirits, Paul affirms them with his praise.

We need to be quick to encourage and quick to affirm each other's effort for the Kingdom of God. It seems that we have more discouraging remarks toward each other within the body of Jesus Christ than strength against our enemy satan.

The famous novelist Victor Hugo stated, "Man lives more by affirmation than by bread." How true!

Even though these precious believers of Thessalonian church were going through persecutions and tribulations, apostle Paul does not pray that the Thessalonians' afflictions to be diminished. Rather, he offers assurance and affirmation that their character had grown and flourished.

I was told by a Pima County Sheriff's Dept's sergeant who just won the first place in a southern Arizona body building competition that human body muscles must be challenged with more weights and repetitions to be big and strong.

A faith that is not tested cannot be trusted. New believers must expect their faith to be tried, because this is the way God proves to them if their decision is genuine. Faith, like a muscle, must be exercised to grow stronger. Tribulation and persecution are God's ways to strengthen our faith.

Faith is not something we order from eBay or buy from WalMart, rather it is the relationship with God. The deeper and more intimate relationship we have with our Lord Jesus, the stronger faith we have.

An easy life can lead to a shallow faith like many American Christians have. The great men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 all suffered in one way or another, or faced tremendous obstacles, so that their faith could grow.

But if we are not careful, suffering can make us to be selfish. However, when suffering is mixed with grace and faith, it produces love.

God never wastes suffering. Trials work for us, not against us. If we trust God and yield to Him, then trials will produce patience and maturity in our lives. If we rebel

and fight our circumstances, then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials that He might build character into our lives. He can grow a mushroom overnight, but it takes many years-and many storms-to build a mighty oak.

D. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PROMISE

2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6 since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

God's purpose is not as much to prevent suffering in this world as it is to sanctify His people.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

C.S. Lewis once noted:

"Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

We usually think that God is absent when we suffer, and that our suffering calls God's righteous judgment into question. Paul took the exact opposite position and insisted that their suffering was evidence of the righteous judgment of God. Where suffering is coupled with righteous endurance, God's work is done.

The fires of persecution and tribulation were like the purifying fires of a refiner, burning away all the gunk from the gold, bringing forth a pure, precious metal.

Reward in heaven is one of God's purposes in permitting our suffering. As Christians, we must live for eternity and not just for the present. In fact, living "with eternity's values in view" is what makes our Christian life meaningful today. We walk by faith, and not by sight.

E. THEY ARE GONNA BE SO DEAD

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

What kind of a future does the unbeliever face? Let's go over the dramatic words Paul used to describe it again: tribulation, vengeance, flaming fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction. The Christ-rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave to God's people. When God take vengeance to the unrighteous, He will pay them in full. Because there is a law of compensation that operates in God's economy. They are gonna be so dead.

The Gospel is an invitation from the King of kings and the Lord of lords to mankind. It is the highest offer to any human. No refusal will go unanswered. Refusing the offer of the Almighty God is the ultimate eternal suicide coupled with separation from His presence.

This brings up an interesting point that I've never thought about. We all know that our God is Omnipresent which means that He is present everywhere at the same time and Omniscient which means that there is not one thing that He doesn't know and not aware of.

Matthew 25:41 Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

The Lord will banish those non-believers to the place where He is not going to be purposely even though He can be everywhere and the situation that He chooses not to know even though He knows all things. That is the true separation from God.

Hell will be completely devoid of God and every aspect of His character, except one: His unrelenting holy justice through His unending wrath.

F. PRAYING FOR OTHERS: MUST

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 Therefore we also 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, 12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someone said, "Christians are like tea bags. You don't know what kind of flavors they have until you put them in hot water." Trials do not make a person. They reveal what a person is made of.

When our faith is tried, we are revealing our worth. God certainly knows our hearts even before we are tried, but we do not know our own hearts. And others do not know what we are worth. We need to pray that God will build our worth and make us more valuable Christians because of the trials we have endured.

We can never do more than start by praying. Prayer is our first priority and our most powerful means of helping. It is because in praying, we actively participate in what God is doing to bring about His will in the situation.

Prayer is making deliberate contact with God in word or thought. It is the voice of faith.

During the time of trials and sufferings, it is not that difficult for us come to the Lord. But in time of prosperity is more important time to run to Him. If we don't, it is then we can be in real bad mess, because we tend to rely on our own intelligence and strength rather than Him.

Here are some important reasons for our prayers for ourselves and others:

1) Prayer is important because it refocuses our perspective.

Without prayer, we see only the visible. But with prayer, God shows us the hidden dimensions of life.

2) Prayer quiets our fears and calms our nerves.

We may come to prayer fearful and anxious, but when we give our worries to the Lord, we come away calmed and assured.

3) Prayer transfers our burdens to the Lord.

It takes the big load we've been carrying and shifts it to the shoulders that can handle all the burdens of the world.

4) Prayer upholds others who are in need.

It is the way we help bear one another's burden and lift them to the One who knows best.

5) Prayer brings glory to the Lord, not us.

There is absolutely nothing we can claim when the Lord answers our prayers. It is Him who makes it happen, not our prayer. Prayer is a desperate plea of sinner to God Almighty who can do all things.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Let's look around and reach out and encourage others.

It is so easy for us to lick our own wound and feel sorry for ourselves during the time of affliction. But if we look around, there are many more people who are in far worse situations than we are. Who knows, the Lord allows us to go through this difficulties, so that we can comfort others with the same comfort we receive from Him.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2) From our perspective, suffering is an evil to be avoided at all costs. But from the perspective of the Lord Jesus, it is the character-building course for all of His saints.

We must not think that whatever our circumstances, our trials are not a result of some God's oversight.

3) Prayer is the way we align ourselves with the Lord to see as He sees and want what He wants.