

**Faith Under Fire:  
Thriving in a Hostile World**

**Suffering for the Coming Kingdom  
2 Thessalonians 1:5-12**

**Introduction**

Inherent paradox of the gospel—a manger to a cross to a crown.

Inherent paradox to gospel living—deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ. Then you'll find your life. If you try to save your life, you'll lose it.

2 Thessalonians 1:5

This is evidence . . . .

2 Thessalonians 1:4

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

We've already learned that the Thessalonian believers' steadfast faith in persecutions and afflictions demonstrated they were truly born again. Their endurance served to encourage many other believers elsewhere. And it brought praise and thanksgiving to God. But there is yet more value and significance to their suffering for Christ.

Whatever we face as we give ourselves to living for Jesus in the present age, we want to know that our afflictions have meaning and value. Paul want us to know that what we suffer is all connected to a greater cause and will really matter when all is said and done as well as in the current situation.

Their faithful endurance through all they were going through was inseparably connected to the coming of the Lord Jesus at the consummation of the age and all that He would accomplish at that time. They are a significant part of the redemption epic that runs through human history and culminates at the coming of the Lord.

So they were suffering not only for the present benefits of proving their faith, of providing encouragement to other saints, and of generating thanksgiving to God for His transforming work in them. They were suffering for the sake of the coming kingdom at the return of the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— <sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty

angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. <sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Suffering for the Coming Kingdom

1. Shows the Worth of God's Kingdom (5,11a)
2. Vindicates God's Wrath on His Enemies (6-9)
3. Reveals the Glory of the Lord (10-12)

### **1. Shows the Worth of God's Kingdom (5, 11a)**

<sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—

<sup>11a</sup> To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling

One of the ways we establish value is by the price we are willing to pay. We love finding a good deal—to pay a small price for a great treasure. We hate it when it turns out that our great deal was not worth the price we paid. Buyer's remorse.

What is the value of belonging to the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus? What is the value of standing blameless before God on the merits of Christ Jesus? How could anyone afford a residence in the royal capital of the universe, the heavenly city? Who could buy immortality? Who could earn sinlessness never to sin again ever? Who could pay passage to a land where death is gone, and all pain, sickness, sorrow, and tears?

Paul told the Romans that the sufferings of the present time aren't worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us. We will never suffer buyer's remorse.

But how can it be righteous for God to account sinners like us worthy of such an infinite kingdom? The text says that He's putting it forth plainly, that He's presenting evidence that we are worthy when we endure persecution and affliction with steadfastness and hope.

And in verse 11 Paul says that he prays for these believers so that God will account them worthy of God's calling of them to be part of that everlasting kingdom. We will see that there are ways we bring glory to the reputation of Jesus Christ by how we live in the power of God's grace to us.

He does not view praying as an unnecessary exercise on their behalf, but as part of God's design for how God's will is fulfilled in the lives of His people. Just as Christ prayed that despite Satan's attacks Peter's faith would not fail, Paul prays that despite the affliction the enemies of the gospel are bringing on the Thessalonian believers, their faith will not fail either.

*God's sovereignty is not a call to prayerlessness. Just the opposite. Because we desire His will to be done, because He is all-powerful, and because He has commanded us to pray, we pray for others. We don't have to understand fully how prayer works. The prophet Samuel said to the Israelites, "Far be from me to sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you." Daniel prayed for the Jews' return from captivity on the basis of Jeremiah's prophecy that their exile would last 70 years.*

Without the persecution and affliction, the evidence of our calling would not be nearly so

clear. And thus the vindication of God's righteousness would not be nearly so obvious. Our suffering for the sake of the kingdom highlights its worth and displays God's righteousness in those who are part of His kingdom.

### **Applications**

- When you compare the worth of the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus, what afflictions are you willing to endure?
- How does keeping in mind that the afflictions or persecutions you face right now have kingdom value encourage you to endure?
- What are ways you can increase your estimate of how valuable Christ's kingdom is?

### **2. Vindicates God's Wrath on His Enemies (6-9)**

<sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Sometimes it looks as if those who do harm to others are getting away with it, but not so. God will pay them back for what they have done. That is true of any mistreatment of those made in God's image. And it is doubly true of those not only made in God's image as all humans are but also redeemed by Christ and predestined to be conformed to His image, His character, His godly life.

As moral human beings we have a natural sense that wrongdoing, especially that which does obvious harm to others, ought to bring real consequences. But in the human courts of law that does not always happen. God will not fail to repay. He is the one in the universe who has every right to exercise wrath against evil. We are sinners ourselves, and our feeble attempts to bring judgment on evil-doing is tainted by our own sin, misdirected by our misperceptions, and limited by our weakness. *God is the only One who can dispense righteous judgment absolutely perfectly, and He will do so at the appointed time.*

He will pay back with affliction those who have afflicted Christians. At the same time He will grant welcomed relief to those who have been persecuted. Suffering makes relief from it all the sweeter.

God grants rest to His people. Jesus calls to us, "Come to me all you who labor and are

heavy laden, and I will give rest to your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11).

Revelation 7:15-17 describes the saints who will come out of the great tribulation:

**15** Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. **16** They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. **17** For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

When will this settling the score happen?

2 Thessalonians 1:7b-8

**7b** when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels **8** in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Revealed—the last book of the NT is The Revelation (apocalypse) of Jesus Christ

From heaven—He's returning!

With His mighty angels—far more powerful than human beings



In flaming fire—the fire of judgment

Inflicting vengeance—complete punishment at deserved

On those who know not God—a willful ignorance in that God had made Himself known through what He has created (Romans 1), through our consciences regarding right and wrong and therefore aware of a ruling moral law. When we do wrong we have to suppress the truth we know. The wrath of God is already being revealed from heaven against such resistance to God.

It is the fool who says there is no God. And to say we cannot know for sure whether God exists is to count as nothing all the evidence God has freely given: the creation, our conscience, the written word of the prophets and apostles, the person of the Lord Jesus Himself.

That's why Paul goes on to say—  
And on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus—the gospel is the good news; you obey good news by receiving it in faith and acting upon it.

John 6:28-29

<sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus

answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

It is one thing as a sinner by birth and by choice to rebel against God and refuse to obey Him. That is our nature. But to add to these sins the insult of refusing His kind gifts of forgiveness, reconciliation with Creator, the indwelling Holy Spirit and a forever inheritance of eternal life as immortal, incorruptible inhabitants of a new heaven and new earth where righteousness has taken up residence is nothing short of an outrage against the most glorious Being in the universe and to despise His priceless gifts offered to us.

2 Thessalonians 1:9

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

The punishment will be eternal destruction—ruination (not annihilation) that never ends; torment forever in the lake of fire.

Away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might

Those who reject God will get their wish, but it will not be anything like what they thought it would be. God is the Source of all that is good, all that is fruitful, all that is beautiful. When we refuse Him all that is left is misery

and destruction. It was the presence of God with man that made the Garden of Eden a paradise. It is His presence that makes a church family alive with the power and love of God. It is His presence in an individual believer that gives him or her life as a new creation in Christ. It is His presence that makes heaven heaven. In His presence is shining splendor—the glory—of His strength to rescue us and make us and the entire universe new. *To be driven from His presence is perpetual misery, darkness, and death. We were made by Him and for Him. If we are cut off from Him we lose what it is to be truly human. We lose a destiny of splendor.*

### **Applications**

- Given God's devastating perfect judgment, what wrongs done against you can you leave to God's wrath rather than seeking vengeance yourself?
- If you have refused to trust in Jesus despite God's gracious offer of salvation, how do you think you can endure His wrath on you forever?
- How much better would it be to seek the forever relief God grants to His people?

### **3. Reveals the Glory of the Lord (10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all

who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

He comes to be glorified in His saints—those who belong to Him will be revealed in all the splendor of their transformed identity and character—blameless, incorruptible, immortal, full of the goodness that is theirs through Christ and through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

To be marveled at among all who have believed—they are the only survivors of His wrath, and the goodness they will experience will be beyond what we can even imagine now. It will be astonishing.

Because our testimony to you was believed—their part in this amazing future is rooted in the moment in history when they put faith in the gospel. Their moment of conversion seems such a small thing in comparison to the grand destiny that will become theirs. Nothing they did. Nothing they paid. They just took the gift of salvation on faith that God was telling them the truth.

2 Thessalonians 1:11

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

A constant prayer for God to make them worthy of this destiny to which He has called them. That worthiness shows up in their daily living now.

That God may fulfill every resolve for good—God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Philippians). Our desire for good grows, and our capability to do good grows. Paul prays that that growth process will reach its full capacity.

Every work of faith by his power—saving faith does not remain alone because once we are born again God's mighty power is at work in us energizing good works.

The purpose?

2 Thessalonians 1:12

So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

His character, His reputation made to shine in you—for people to see the beauty of Jesus clearly in you. He gets the honor He deserves.

More astonishing yet—

And you in him—we are to be glorified in Him—we get honor He deserves. His work for us and in us makes us into people who shine, who are admirable, whose character and

conduct is beautiful and beneficial, people who deserve praise because they have become authentically good themselves because of what God has done. We see the beginnings of this even now, but one day it will be perfect and complete.

We now live in difficult days, days of battle against sin, days of enduring persecution and affliction, but by the power of God we endure, we remain steadfast, and our faith holds firm. The outcome of all this on the day of Christ's return is that the Lord Jesus will be glorified in us and we will be glorified in Him.

Knowing this makes whatever we go through now worth it. It is not wasted effort; it is not wasted pain; it is going to magnify the shining splendor of Jesus; it is going to display the glory of what we have become because of Him.

### **Applications**

- How does knowing Jesus gets great glory now and forever through your endurance of suffering help you remain steadfast in your faith?
- How does knowing Jesus is making you into a glorious person of shining splendor give you strength to remain faithful now?

- What good are you resolved to fulfill, and what works of faith would show His power in you?

## **Conclusion**

When your life is hard, when the pressure of affliction is great, when mistreatment because you love Jesus is hounding you, remember the infinite value of enduring such suffering for the sake of the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself put it in His sermon on the mount, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

1. Shows the Worth of God's Kingdom (5, 11a)
2. Vindicates God's Wrath on His Enemies (6-9)
3. Reveals the Glory of the Lord (10-12)

Closing Song: Rejoice, the Lord Is King

## **Summary of Application Questions**

- When you compare the worth of the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus, what afflictions are you willing to endure?
- How does keeping in mind that the afflictions or persecutions you face right now have kingdom value encourage you to endure?

- What are ways you can increase your estimate of how valuable Christ's kingdom is?
- Given God's devastating perfect judgment, what wrongs done against you can you leave to God's wrath rather seeking vengeance yourself?
- If you have refused to trust in Jesus despite God's gracious offer of salvation, how do you think you can endure His wrath on you forever?
- How much better would it be to seek the forever relief God grants to His people?
- How does knowing Jesus gets great glory now and forever through your endurance of suffering help you remain steadfast in your faith?
- How does knowing Jesus is making you into a glorious person of shining splendor give you strength to remain faithful now?
- What good are you resolved to fulfill, and what works of faith would show His power in you?

### **Additional Discussion Questions**

1. How often do you think or talk about the return of the Lord Jesus with other believers, and why do you think that is?
2. Given what Paul has outlined in this passage, what connection does the



return of the Lord have with our  
everyday life challenges?