

SUFFERING & BLESSING

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

2 Thessalonians was written soon after 1 Thessalonians; perhaps within a few months in the summer of 51 A.D. Before writing 2 Thessalonians, Paul received news that both encouraged him and concerned him. He was encouraged to hear the Thessalonians were growing in faith and love in spite of persecution. But he was concerned to learn false teachers were troubling the church family. This prompted Paul to write this letter.

Greeting (1:1-2)

After greeting the church family, Paul shared his gratitude to God for enabling the Thessalonians' growth and perseverance.

God Be Thanked (1:3-4)

Contrary to what one would expect, the faith and love of the Thessalonians were growing in the midst of persecution. How was that possible? Through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Paul understood that and felt it was his righteous obligation to give God thanks for their growth and perseverance.

Growth and perseverance under persecution are powerful testimonies to the reality of life in Christ. The history of persecution bears this out. An early Christian author named, Tertullian, wrote, "The blood of martyrs¹ is the seed of the church."

In 1949 China became a Communist nation under Chairman Mao Zedong. Mao had expected religion to die a natural death — however (when China reopened in 1979) Chinese Christianity had not only survived but had grown tremendously. The Protestant Church had grown from 1 million to 3 million....²

How was this possible? It was through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the lives of believers who were trusting and obeying Jesus.

Paul was not only grateful to God, but he, Silas and Timothy were also proud of the Thessalonians. Paul was proud of their growth and perseverance and told other churches about them in order to give those other churches a model to follow.

Perseverance Vindicates God's Plan (1:5-10)

What is God's plan? God's plan is to relieve the suffering of believers' worthy of His Kingdom and to punish their persecutors.

What is being described in verses 7-10 is the day of the Lord, what we also know as the Tribulation. In 1 Thessalonians it is the "wrath". Here, Paul gave special emphasis to the culmination of the day of the Lord which will be the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will result in the defeat of God's enemies at that time. It is clear the Apostle Paul that it possible that the day of the Lord could come in the lifetime of that generation of believers. As explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, believers will be rescued from the day of the Lord by being removed from the earth. This is the relief about which Paul spoke in verse 7. God's plan is to relieve the suffering of persecuted believers at the end of the age by means of the rapture and then avenge them by punishing their persecutors by means of the day of the Lord and the second coming of Jesus.

How does the perseverance of the Thessalonians vindicate God's plan?

Their perseverance vindicates God's plan as to who should be relieved and who should be punished and why. Their perseverance under persecution demonstrated a genuine faith in Jesus. They genuinely believed the Gospel as preached to them by Paul as he says in verse 10. There is no doubt the Thessalonians are citizens of God's Kingdom and should be among those who are relieved of suffering if the rapture takes place in their generation. On the other hand, those who persecute them prove they have rejected the Gospel and are not of God's Kingdom, but are God's enemies and deserve to be punished by the day of the Lord and the second coming of Jesus.

¹ Those killed for being Christians.

² <https://www.christ.net.au/history-of-missions-to-china.html>

Paul closed this section of his letter praying for the Thessalonians and revealing a second blessing that will come from their sufferings.

Perseverance Leads to Future Glory (1:11-12; Romans 8:116-17)

Paul didn't pray that God would simply help the Thessalonians to "hang on". Paul expected the Thessalonians to continue to actively serve Jesus by doing good to one another and to their community. And he asked God to enable their continuing service to Jesus. In this way they glorified Jesus. And, in this way, by the grace of God, they will earn for themselves glory in the coming Messianic Kingdom.

The Thessalonians, and all who faithfully endure suffering, will be glorified and honored along with Jesus in His Kingdom.

APPLICATION

As we descend deeper in spiritual darkness and the possibility of aggressive persecution against the church increases, let us follow the example of our spiritual ancestors, the Thessalonians.

Let us continue to grow in faith, trusting the Holy Spirit to enable us to serve Jesus and one another.

Let us continue to grow in our love for one another and members of our community.

Let us be encouraged that we will be rescued from the day of the Lord either by death or by the rapture.

Let us look to the inheritance God offers us in Christ Jesus, that if we suffer with Christ we will be glorified with Christ.

GRACE NEWS AND NEEDS

Mexico Missions Fundraiser- April 7, 14 and 21 the Mexico Missions team will be out on the patio selling t-shirts to raise money for their short term mission to Mexico.

Ramona Pregnancy Care Clinic *Walk for Life*: Signups to Walk and/or Sponsor on Patio.

Business Meeting: Sunday, April 28th, 4:00PM, Childcare provided. Everyone Welcome!

VOM Needs for April: *Financial donations to purchase needed items.*