

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 - Pressed for Glory

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Introduction - This chapter reframes suffering by directing us toward Christ's work in us and His work at the end of the age. Paul encourages believers that persecution is proof of growing faith and love: justice and glory come with Jesus. Believers grow in faith and love with peace in affliction knowing that God's retribution and glory are coming.

Background - Thessalonica (present day Salonica or Thessaloniki) is located in Greece/Macedonia.¹ Paul preached there and many Greeks were saved, but Jewish leaders were jealous and caused a huge uproar (Acts 17:1-10; 2 Thess. 2:4, 15). Paul (main author 3:17), Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy later write to them from Corinth (Acts 18:1-5). Written between 50-54 AD, it is likely Paul's 3rd letter, the first is Galatians.¹ It was probably written a few weeks or months after 1 Thess.

v1-3 - Praise God: Growing in Faith and Love - These three brothers in the Lord ministered to this church "in God." By God's grace, we're forgiven and given peace with God and of God. Paul is obligated to give thanks for them. Their faith is growing abundantly (like plants and babies¹) and love is increasing (Jhn 13:34-5; Gal 5:22; 1 Cor 13; 1 Thess 1:3-8).

v4-12 - We are Pressed for Glory and Comforted in His Justice and our Identity - Faith and love grow because of persecution and affliction. The Thessalonians are learning to trust in God and grow in love (Rom 5:3). *Thlipsis* - literally pressing, pressure, so figuratively oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress.² Christ promises His followers will be persecuted (Matt 10:16-25; Jo 15:16-25; Phil 1:29-30; 2 Tim 3:10-13) but encourages perseverance (Jo 16:33; 17:14-18). Suffering gives us endurance in Christ (Ja 1:2-4), results in glory and honor at His coming (1 Pet 1:6-9; Rom 8:17-18), helps us entrust our souls to God (1 Pet 4:12-19), teaches us God's precepts (Ps 119:67-71), is part of the kingdom (Matt 5:10-12), and was experienced by Jesus as our example (Heb 5:7-9).

God will avenge the believer, pouring out the cup of His wrath in the end (Rev 14:10; 16:5-6). Relief will come in God's justice (Eccl 8:10-13; Ps 73:16-20; Rev 6:9-11; Rom 12:19). The Day of the Lord will bring fiery, never-ending judgement on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel (Matt 25:41; Mark 9:43; Rev 20; Heb 10:27; 2 Pet 3:7-10). That judgement was ours before we knew God (Gal 4:8-9). One day Jesus will come and be glorified in His redeemed, fully sanctified, and resurrected saints who believed the gospel (1 Thess 2:13). We cannot make ourselves worthy, instead God declares us worthy in His Son and sanctifies us through suffering and affliction, resulting in His glory.

So, what? Now, what? Wiersbe suggests 5 steps for believers who are suffering in the will of God (not being chastened due to sin - this assumes we've already asked God to examine our heart and reveal unrepentant sin): 1) Thank God for His salvation and that He is with us. 2) Surrender to the will of God without complaining. 3) Ask God to give wisdom to understand His will. 4) Watch for opportunities to witness and glorify God in the situation. 5) Wait patiently until God's purposes have been fulfilled.³ All of those things take God's Spirit working in our heart. We take comfort knowing that He loves us and any "press" we experience will produce glory for God and we will experience that glory by being in Christ.

For reflection:

- Suffering is painful, and we must grieve and process our emotions. When we are "pressed" in affliction, what comes out? Grumbling, doubts in God, and ungodly desires, or, like Christ afflicted in the "oil press" of Gethsemane, a demonstration of love and power and a commitment to the Father's will?
- Since last year, have we grown steadily in our trust of the Lord? What about in love and care for one another?
- What things in this chapter are examples we can model? (ex: rejoice and thank God for believers walking in faith)
- Do you suffer for the gospel of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
- What are some of God's promises throughout Scripture that can encourage someone who is suffering?
- Read: 1 Thess. for more background information. See 1 Pet or Ps 73 for encouragement in the midst of suffering.
- Resolve to glorify God in affliction and trust Him with the outcome.

¹ Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. 687-689, 714.

² *Strong's Definitions*.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines: New Testament*. 610.