

2Thessalonians 12-08-03a

This is Friday, the 3rd of August 2012. We continue our study in the book of 2 Thessalonians. We resume in the last half of chapter 1, specifically at verse 5 and 6. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, focus our concentration, cultivate the active ministry of God's Holy Spirit, and we'll begin.

Father, what a blessing it is for us to set aside all of the requirements and tasks and assignments and responsibilities that we are subject to and gather as believers who share appreciation for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the revelation of His truth in Your Word as we approach the study of this great passage in 2 Thessalonians. We ask Your blessing on us as we look at it. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will illuminate it for us, impress it on our hearts, and enable us to see its application so that we can live lives that are worthy of Your calling.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, 2 Thessalonians, you remember that the Apostle Paul is writing after a visit that came to a rather hurried conclusion.

He has written one letter, and the substance of that letter toward the end dealt with, among other things, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as a comfort and as an encouragement. Apparently, this had other than its intended effect because 2 Thessalonians largely is a follow-up to the first letter, clarifying primarily the material in the first letter dealing with the return of Christ. It does have other purposes.

It has other sections. There is the greeting that we have been looking at since last time. But you will notice as you peruse or scan this letter that after the introductory matter, you have an entire chapter on the return of the Lord, and then chapter 3 is an appeal for prayer that the teaching and proclamation ministry of Paul will continue and a final closing warning not to fall away or lose sight of the objective.

So it's a shorter letter. It appears to be designed specifically to illuminate some aspects of the return of the Lord Jesus that weren't covered in the first letter. And in fact, as we get into chapter 2, we're going to see that there are things here that aren't anywhere else in Scripture.

This has caused some to doubt the authenticity of the letter, but if you think about that, it's kind of a circular argument. If nothing in the Bible exists that isn't repeated somewhere else, how would you ever check the second book? It would only have to be a duplicate of the first, and you could never get up to 66 books in the Bible because, well, we can't have this one. It's got information that's not in the other books.

You would hope that each book of the Bible makes a contribution that is unique, and the various sections are that way. Well, let's review what we have seen in chapter 1 and read the chapter. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 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, 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, 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.

This is about as far as we have gotten, but notice those last couple of verses. In verse 4, it says, we boast of you among the churches of God for what? Your patience and your faith. We have other passages that specifically mention these two attributes.

You have need of faith and patience. Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. You have need of endurance, so that after you have suffered a while, you inherit the promises.

These are constant references that we find throughout the New Testament Scriptures, particularly in the letters of Paul, as things that we require. So, we look at ourselves and we say, well, I'm pretty patient. Sitting here, aren't I? Listening to this guy.

I've got patience or I wouldn't be here. I have faith. I believe God's in His heaven.

I think it will all come right in the end. Jesus will come back. We'll all move into the eternal future.

So, I've got faith. What is this really talking about? What kind of faith and what kind of patience? This isn't patience in the abstract, is it? And this is not faith in the abstract. What is the situation? Look at the passage.

In what situation are these two things called for? What requires patience? What requires faith? We had two words, didn't we? In all your persecutions and in all your tribulations. Right? Verse 4. This is the context. This isn't just, oh, he's such a patient young man.

She's such a faithful young lady. Or old man or older lady. What is this? Not just any old faith.

Not just any old patience. This is under fire. This is in the heat of two kinds of pressure.

Now, what does it take to have persecution? What's the required element? If you're persecuted, what has to be there? Thinking about the areas of subjectivity. You know, eyes on self. Eyes on circumstances.

Eyes on people. Can't be persecuted without people, can you? It's not like pine cones are falling down on your head when you walk in the forest. Oh, look, a Christian dropped a pine cone on his head.

Persecution is people, right? You need faith and patience in your persecution. This is resistance, opposition, hostility, bad-mouthing, ill-treatment, misconstruing, unfair, hatefulness from people.

So, think about life as it is.

Think about the recent past. Think about current times, current events. Is there any adversity from the source of people? And by the way, this doesn't have to be men in hoods, you know, sticking burning crosses on the lawn or carrying weapons or breaking your windows with rocks.

This takes all different forms. When Christianity in general is attacked and bad-mouthed and vilified and persecuted for various reasons, this has happened just this past week, with current events, well, we're in that number and we get broad-brushed. One Christian speaks up, expresses a point of view, and, you know, the wrath of man comes down on anything having to do with Christians.

You're intolerant, you're bigoted, you're prejudiced, you're out of date, you're this, you're that, you're the other, oh, you're one of those, and so on. Testing from the source of people. It can be at the large group level, it can be at the individual level.

Somebody finds out about your faith, somebody knows of your faith. This happens a lot in college classrooms where sooner or later when there are discussions and questions asked and answered, people say, oh, so you're a Christian, you go to church, and then the persecution starts. You say, well, can't really call that persecution because I'm not in danger of life and limb, I'm not being torn apart by lions.

Well, isn't it an odd thing, though, that even when we're not in fear of our lives, even when we are not in any physical danger, this pressure affects us, changes the way we think. Does it make us hesitate? Does it make us tempted to act differently, to speak differently, to bear witness differently because now we've been outed as Christians, we're wearing the scarlet C, right? Does it change us? Does it intimidate us? Does it cow us? Does it make us reticent in ways that we should not be? We don't have to be an in-your-face Christian, we don't have to be a belligerent finger-in-your-eye Christian, but we shouldn't be a camouflaged Christian either. Well, I'm so well-hidden, they'll never know it's me.

I've got my lamp so far under the bushel, it can't even get oxygen. So this is what it's talking about, persecution, and it's interesting because in the course of paying a compliment, Paul is reminding these believers who are under all kinds of people pressure of the principle. What is required? You say, you know, I do have a situation or two, it's at work, it's in my family, it's in school, it's here, it's there, where there really is some tension.

I'm not real sure what to do in this antagonistic scenario. Well, here's a strong clue. Faith and patience.

Sometimes we feel like we need to vindicate ourselves. Hey, your accusations are unfair, unfounded, not right. You're accusing me of things I'm not guilty of.

You're tarring me with the brush that belongs to some really stupid, flaky fringe Christians who maybe have said and done things that are embarrassingly wrong, but I'm not one of those. Well, is it time for self-defense? Is it time for self-vindication? Is it time to give a big peroration about, oh, you don't have that right, let me straighten you out? Patience. There's all different kinds of patience.

One kind of patience is be patient. Don't leap to your own defense every time an unkind word is spoken. There is a time for explanation.

There is a time for clarification. And there is a time, if you will, to just turn the other cheek. Jesus knew when to stand up and rebuke the Pharisees or the money changers or the self-righteous that were in the crowd.

And there were other times he didn't say a word. And we pray for, we ask for, we look for that discernment because patience isn't just simple endurance. We have to know when to be patient, right? There's a time to be patient, and there's a time to not be patient.

Jesus wasn't patient with the money changers. Jesus wasn't patient on the day that he pronounced the seven woes on the scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites. Paul, the apostle, wasn't patient with the man committing incest with his stepmother in the Corinthian church.

There is a time for patience, and we want to know what that time is, and then we want to have the inner strength to have it. So this is an important thing to note, patience and faith in persecutions and in what else? Tribulations. This is more generic.

This is your thelipsis type of thing. This is the same word that's translated the great tribulation. What's the source of suffering in the great tribulation? Well, it's a combo plate.

You've got weather and climate. You've got angelic infiltration and messing with the laws of physics and the laws of a third of the earth being scorched. And you've got people.

You've got all kinds of incursions. You've got circumstances. You have the wrath of God and the wrath of man at various cases, various times.

So this is the general time of trouble. Persecution is people testing. Tribulation is circumstance testing.

Many times our circumstances come from and through people, but it's really the circumstance. Some body of impolitic politicians passes a law that creates a hardship for me. Well, I could rail at the people, but the hardship is my tribulation, having to come up with extra money for tax and so on.

It can be disasters of an unknown nature, sudden financial crisis because something broke, something went out, whatever it may be. So what's the upshot of this? It is helpful when we know

that something is wrong. And typically we're not sitting there thinking big theological thoughts.

You're having a day. All of a sudden it's like Job. The messengers start coming.

Fire came down from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants. Sabaeans came and stole the camels. A great wind came and blew down thy son's house.

It just happens. And we're not sitting there thinking, okay, I'm ready for this test of circumstances. I won't be subjective.

I'm going to have faith and patience. We're in it. We're caught up in it.

It's like people that jump and startle in the middle of a movie. You're really wrapped up in that thing when somebody slams the door and everybody in the audience jumps. There's nothing in the theater that is a threat, but we're engaged.

We're transported. We're so caught up in the story. Even reading, if you read a really well-written book, people listening get emotional, have a feeling of dread or whatever.

Well, this is our life. Our life is a story, and we are safe in the hands of God, but we get so caught up in it that we'll startle and jump and tremble and emote when ideally we would be sitting there calmly parsing and dividing and applying and say, well, this principle applies here. Time for me to be patient.

Time for me to be faithful. Okay, got it. No problem.

Walk calmly out. Well, that never happens. It never happens.

We're emotional. We're caught up. So what does this passage tell us? Slow down and analyze a little bit.

Paul breaks down the trouble that the Thessalonians have been experiencing, that he himself has been experiencing. He's going to unite the two of them down in verse 7. He's going to say, you and we are going to get relief. He says, we're suffering, you're suffering.

This is one of the things we have in common. But here's the coping mechanism. When things are starting to get out of hand and it's not a nice smooth lake with a barely moving sailboat, the water's choppy and there's a leak and you're looking for a can to bail with, here's the thing to do.

Slow down and say, well, let me just break this down. What is the nature of my trouble? Is this a persecution issue? Is this a tribulation issue? Is this possibly a divine intervention? A lot of times it's helpful to say, is this something God is allowing or is this something God has pretty much introduced? And that's a question worth meditating on. And sometimes the purpose may be the same, whether he allows it or causes it.

God may remove his fence of blessing around Israel and enemies come in, steal the crops, burn the villages and so on. Other times God puts it into the hearts of the Assyrians. They are the rod of mine anger and the staff of mine indignation and I'm motivating them to come.

So it can either be past or active, but why would God do this? If we stop and think, all right, persecution, God isn't typically going to instigate persecution for us. God's not going to put it in the heart of somebody to hate us and come make our life miserable. If you look in the Bible, you don't see divine testing in the form of, I'm going to rile these people up and they're going to persecute you for what you're doing right.

Did you ever notice that? Most of the time, divine discipline comes in the form of tribulation. Suddenly the wall of protection is removed. Sometimes suddenly enemies are actively impelled toward us, toward the people of God.

This is the way God rebukes and corrects and instructs. This is when we persist in being dense. We persist in not judging ourselves.

God says, well, I'll send judgment. But that judgment is never in the form of persecution. Persecution is bad reaction to what we're doing right.

So almost by definition, you can't get persecuted as divine judgment. Persecution is when we're doing right. So it's helpful to sit down and sort this out and say, well, all right, if it's persecution, God is on my side.

This is happening because of my faith, because of who I am. I want to be careful that I'm being who I am and exhibiting my faith in a legitimate way. I'm not accosting people in the airport.

I'm not walking up and banging on their door at suppertime, trying to hand them a tract and they slam the door. Oh, I'm being persecuted. What a great Christian I am.

Look at that. They slam the door right in my face. I'm going to go tell some other people how the door got slammed in my face.

I mean, not that kind of thing. But it helps. We break it down and we say, all right, this falls into tribulation.

What should my response be? I don't know what to do about this. It takes money. I haven't got the money.

It takes time. I haven't got the time. It takes an answer that I don't have.

It takes resources I don't have. It takes wisdom I don't have. It takes time I don't have, whatever it may be.

What do I do? Well, the answer to tribulation is faith and patience. All right, let's be more specific. If it takes faith, how does faith work in a situation of tribulation? How can I do this faith thing in tribulation? Well, what kind of tribulation is it? If I'm going to exercise faith, I need a promise, a principle, or a doctrine that I can have confidence is taught in the Word of God.

I know it. I understand it. And I make application.

I trust what God says about this situation. So I start thinking, well, what possible promises, principles, and doctrines would pertain, even generally? All right, all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Well, am I a Christian living in the light of my calling? Or have I been sloughing it off? Maybe this is a wake-up call for me.

Maybe God has allowed a few things through the fence to remind me that if I love Him, I need to have His Word and keep it. I need to be more active in pursuing my spiritual priorities. If I have gotten distracted, if I've gotten apathetic, if I've become somewhat indifferent or complacent or self-satisfied, maybe this is a wake-up call.

So rather than addressing the tribulation directly and figure out how can I stop this tribulation, maybe I need to address myself, get back to my spiritual priorities, and I've got a feeling that if I get myself squared away, this situation will have accomplished its purpose and God will remove it. So there's a productive line of thought. You say, you know, I really do feel like I've been keeping up.

I've been meditating on the Word of God. I've got an active prayer life. I feel like I'm walking with the Lord.

I've been trying to analyze myself and judge myself so that I'm not in line for judgment. And I know that God is in His heaven, and I've been appreciative, and I've been prayerful, and I've been doing what I'm supposed to do. I've been pretty much staying on the straight road, and yet here's this thing.

All right, what's next? I can dismiss the idea that it might be for correction and rebuke, but the faith thing still applies, right? So what other promises and principles and doctrines would pertain in this situation? What time I'm afraid, I will trust in Thee, that will keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee. Christ has been made my righteousness and my wisdom and my peace and my sanctification and my light and my life. Let me try to keep the Lord Jesus Christ in my thoughts as I think about this situation.

If I let my mind run to purely human, earthly analysis, cause and effect, and I forget that I'm part of a larger struggle, because I'm not wrestling against flesh and blood, physical things. It's principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this age. Let me step back from this and try to put it in a larger context.

Maybe this is something that God has allowed into my life to show me how dark and black evil really is. Sin and failure really are, because this is a part of my vaccination process, my inoculation process for the eternal future. I will look back and say, that's 40 miles of bad road I don't want to ever traverse again.

Why would anybody choose against God and go in that direction? Does it partake of human good? Is there some sort of human effort that has been substituted? Has there been some substitution for the glory of God? Have I been standing in the way? Have I set a bad priority? Have I set an improper goal? Faith, faith and patience. By the way, to go through this process while there is a flaming tribulation underway, what quality of soul does it take to sit down and force ourselves to go through this drill? Patience. It takes patience to sit down and think it through.

It takes self-control. It takes long suffering. It takes humility.

But this is why we're here. We're not here to be instant flame snuffers and instant fire dowsers. We're here to learn and to grow, to be taught what God wants us to know.

And He is going to use both tribulation of a negative kind and tribulation of a positive kind to give us weight to push against, to give us resistance to help us get strong and grow. It also helps us find our weak areas. God will allow these things in to show us something that we didn't really admit to ourselves or didn't realize we were weak in.

And here's the thing, wow, I didn't realize how much this could get under my skin. I didn't realize that I'm really not prepared for testing in this area. Well, what's the answer to that? Faith and patience.

And not in the abstract, but in the specific. We know how faith works. It is processing truths of substance, substantial things that God says.

They mean something. They're not aphorisms. They're not trite sayings.

They're not by words. They're not refrigerator magnets. It's truth.

It's reality. Faith and patience in the face of persecution, which is trouble for what we're doing right, and tribulation, which can be all over the map. This endurance, notice it says they are enduring.

They haven't collapsed under it. They haven't been defeated by it. They haven't given up, thrown up their hands and quit and gone back home.

And he says in verse 5, this is manifest evidence of God's judgment being right. God was right in His judgment. What kind of judgment? Is this retribution and penalizing? This is God's judgment in assessing, in evaluating, in accounting the Thessalonian believers worthy of the kingdom.

God in heaven looked at people in Thessalonica and said, you know what? There are people here who, if they get the information, will take it and make it the object of their faith. They will endure patiently whatever comes their way. That's the kind of people I'm looking for.

God made that judgment. That's why He sent Paul and Silas and Timothy to Thessalonica. And He says, look, He was right.

He was right in sending us to you. He was right in having us deliver the gospel of the grace of God to you and the testimony of the truth because look at you. You are faithful.

You are patient. You are enduring. You didn't wither under fire.

You didn't fall back again to perdition. You're hanging in there, and it's proof that God's judgment was right. God's analysis was accurate.

You are the people He's looking for, and you are in keeping with. This is our friend axios, which means it actually in many places in Greek means deserve. You deserve.

You rate. You are worthy in the sense you have the worth. The original idea of axios was a balance.

Here's a kingdom that is fitting for certain people, and here's people that have the worth of the kingdom. So these people are going to get the kingdom because they have the same worth as the kingdom. There's a balance.

There's an appropriate link between the two. You say, well, a crown is for a king. Here's a king, and here's a crown.

It's axios that the king should have the crown. See what I mean? There's an equivalence. It's appropriate.

It is right and fitting. It matches. They are like things, and that's what he says here.

God was right when He looked at you and figured you for the kingdom. You are worth the kingdom, and the kingdom is worth you. You're worthy of the kingdom.

The kingdom is worthy of you. You're like things. It's an appropriate match.

Not that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. This sounds like, well, maybe you will, maybe you won't, but from the standpoint of God looking, this is Paul sort of transporting to the past and saying when God looked at the Thessalonians, it was all potential. This is God in the past looking at the Thessalonians and saying, you know, there are kingdom people here.

There are people who are going to grab this opportunity. They're going to be faithful. They are going to fulfill, so I'm going to send Paul.

But it was a future potential at the time that God made the judgment. And this, again, is a blow to the sovereign decree in eternity past. It was still potential.

He didn't say you're kingdom people before they ever got the gospel. You are people that you may be counted worthy. God was looking and saying, I'm going to send Paul, and I can see that you are going to be those people.

So that's really the thrust of the subjunctive idea there. Then we get to verse 6, and this is really interesting because he says, Worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also suffer at the end of verse 5 You say well, wait a minute You just said it's persecution and tribulation people are giving me a hard time Circumstances and events beyond my control or making life difficult and this is for the kingdom How is that? Does this make sense? We say well there's give me a hard time because I tried to eat a sandwich a chick-fil-a and they're heckling me or I tried to You know stand up and make a comment in my in my college class or somebody asked me a question and I answered it Now I'm getting all kinds of abuse for my Christian beliefs or I Tried to do things the right way. I didn't cut a corner.

I didn't cheat Everybody else around me cheated now. I'm paying a penalty. It's a it's a tribulation It's just it's in the system that if you really do it the way you're supposed to You you're penalized They expect you to cheat they invite you to cheat and if you don't cheat and maintain your integrity you suffer for it It's a tribulation.

It's a hardship to do things the right way because nobody's doing that way They look at you like you're stupid for maintaining your integrity Well, that's not practical he says This suffering is for the kingdom now, there's a thought It isn't Aimed at outcome in this life Well, God's probably teaching me something now so that later on a few years from now It'll all make sense. And I'll this may not make sense or have any Any traction any real Seeming benefit until the kingdom we're suffering for the kingdom. We are being prepared for the kingdom We are being schooled and trained and toughened up and strengthened for the kingdom The suffering we endure in this present life is for the kingdom.

That's what it's for Paul says it just plain as day here, doesn't he? God's judgment was right when he when he said, you know what there's one that's going to be worthy of the kingdom and That's why you're suffering Because you're a kingdom person and you're being fitted and trained and prepared For service and function and reflecting the glory of God in the kingdom No doubt no equivocation. No ifs ands but or maybes it is The reason we endure hardship in this life is preparation for God's future kingdom Absolute fact another great thing to bring to mind when we're analyzing What kind of a suffering is this? So how can I best exercise faith? Well that brings us to verse 6. It's a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you Now here's a nice a nice thought we'll we'll stop on that and take our break and when we come back we'll We'll see how self-satisfied we ought to feel about this after the break