

2Thessalonians 12-08-03b

We pick up our study in 2 Thessalonians and we've been looking at this idea that Paul has addressed at some length in the introduction, talking about persecution, tribulation and suffering. And he says this is for the Kingdom of God. You think, well, that's an interesting thought there in Thessalonians, but maybe that's just for the Thessalonians.

Maybe that's not so much of a universal idea. I mean, I didn't sign up with Christ to suffer. I thought it would be a blessed life and a happy life, and of course it is.

But we will all endure tribulation. Jesus made the promise to his disciples before he left. In this world you shall have tribulation.

It's a given. Do not be surprised at the fiery trial that will you encounter, and so on. Well, we find that this is a consistent reminder that Paul gives his addressees in the letters that he writes.

For example, in 2 Corinthians 1, verses 3 and following, he says, Bless me the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Why do you need comfort? Something's amiss, right? Who comforts us in all our affliction. This is 1 Corinthians 1, the opening of the letter to the Corinthian church.

God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that there's a purpose in God comforting us, so that we can be happy and nurtured and feel good about ourselves? No. So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. In tribulation, in persecution, in suffering, there is a comfort that comes to us that is unique, and it is from God.

And once we have received it, once we have understood it and been blessed by it and benefited from it, we are able to pass along that comfort to others. You cannot comfort people with a comfort that you yourself have never received. So don't be handing books full of aphorisms to bereaved people when you don't know what it's like to be bereaved.

Don't be blithely quoting some piece of happy scripture at somebody when you are not in a position to empathize. What does this say? God is a God of comfort. God comforts us directly in our affliction, and God brings to us others who have been similarly comforted by God in their affliction.

There is a fellowship of comfort that really transcends the fellowship of suffering. Unbelievers can have a fellowship of suffering. Oh, I'm a cancer survivor.

Oh, I'm an abuse survivor. Oh, I'm such and such an operation or such and such a chemo or such and such a problem in life. I'm there with you.

We're all fill-in-the-blank anonymous. We're all in this together. Any group of people can have a

fellowship of suffering.

Only believers can have a fellowship of comfort. We're not here to simply commiserate. We are here to share the comfort with which we ourselves were comforted by God.

That's 1 Corinthians 1. So when you think about persecution, when you think about tribulation, when you think about suffering, it is the God of all comfort. It traces directly back to God. We don't make an issue out of ourselves.

I'm the best cancer survivor, comforter. There is. No, you're not.

God is. God will comfort directly and God will bring others who have been similarly comforted to share that comfort. It is a fellowship of comfort.

If we are afflicted, he says in verse 6, well actually let's go to verse 5, for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort also. That last half is what the world lacks, cannot enter into. No capacity, no spirit.

It's all fleshly, carnal. This is something of the spirit. If we are afflicted, verse 6, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you what? Patiently endure the sufferings that we suffer.

In order to be in the fellowship of comfort, you have to have undergone the challenge, right? You can't enter into the comfort when you're not afflicted. This reminds me of this guy that got a blanket party for walking around base wearing a seal pin. Oh, I've got the badge.

I want people to look up to me. I'm walking around with a seal pin. Well, he woke up with a lot of extra physical trauma one day because the seals caught up with him, and he'd never been to seal school.

You don't wear the pin if you haven't been through the school, and I mean through the school, not at the school. Through the school, in one side and successfully out the other. Well, in one side and successfully out the other of suffering, you have that badge of comfort.

Our hope, verse 7, for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. Constantly linked. It's not just the suffering, it's the comfort.

For we do not want you to be ignorant brethren of the affliction we experienced in Asia. Where is Thessalonica? It's in Asia. The whole Asian Macedonian trip that he took and all the persecution he suffered in those places.

We were utterly unbearably crushed. We despaired of life itself. Why? We felt that we had received the sentence of death, but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God.

That's the faith side. Rely not on ourselves, but on God. How can you be forced beyond your own resources when you consistently find that your own resources are completely sufficient? I've got this.

I've got this covered. I've got it handled. Why would you rely on God when it's like the old headache commercial, I'd rather do it myself.

Most of you are too young to know that there used to be, it was an Anison commercial or something. I was thinking about Anison because there's a Greek word in our passage that's Anison. It's the word coming up for rest or respite.

It's Anison. I was thinking about Anison. There used to be this woman and she's trying to get the ironing done or something.

Somebody tries to come up and help her and she yanks it away. I'd rather do it myself. She's cranky because she's suffering.

She has a headache. We've got to watch. We've got to have the appropriate response to tribulation, persecution, whatever it may be.

It is patience, not impatience. It is faith, not pills. Anison I mean.

Why we felt that we had received the sentence of death. He delivered us, verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 1. He delivered us from so deadly a peril and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

An important element of comfort is deliverance. We know when we are bereaved that it's not going to hurt this bad every day for the rest of our lives. In the immediate aftermath of a loss of a loved one, it is unbearably painful.

Most of us know what that's like. But we have the anticipation of the deliverance. We are not going to be this heartsick and this beset and overcome from now on.

Time will pass. We will find ways to cope, hopefully using our spiritual resources as well as our practical considerations. You've got to pick up and move on.

God still has a plan for your life. You're still here. You're still in the game.

You're still on the field. You still have a mission. You still have a purpose.

There are other people besides the one you just lost. We have commitments and responsibilities to them. We can't be a liquid pool of grief every day for the rest of our lives.

We've got to pick up and carry on. We are delivered. We are comforted.

We have a transcendent life. This is what Paul is talking about. He says, look, when we do undergo these slings and arrows, this is the answer.

It's not abstract. It's not pie in the sky, by and by. It's not fold your hands like the Lord's Prayer statue.

There are practical, necessary steps we must take. Figure out what's going on and get into the faith and patience drill. It is a procedure.

It is something to do. It is an active commitment we make when we find ourselves in suffering, in tribulation, in persecution. This is what I must do.

Don't sit there and be blown by the wind. Don't be the ship without a rudder. Don't be like any godless unbeliever who doesn't have the Holy Spirit and who doesn't have the Word of God.

The earth is filled and has been filled since Cain and Abel with people who can go that route. God doesn't need any more people demonstrating that point. He needs us to be patient and to be faithful, to do this very clear thing.

Paul talks about it in almost all of his letters, not only 2 Corinthians, but also Philippians. Philippians 1, beginning at verse 27, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Oxiass, be a fit, be an appropriate match for the gospel of Christ.

They should be, remember the old English word, meet. He had a help, meet, matched, fitting, appropriate. Adam looked at the animals, nothing appropriate as a mate for me.

God made a help, meet, oxias, appropriate, worthy, deserving, fitting, proper for him. Same thing here, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that, Paul says, whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I will hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of that gospel. Side by side, sharing comfort, speaking the truth to one another, a brotherhood of comfort in time of trouble.

Standing side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents. Persecution is the specific trouble in Philippi. Not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign, a clear omen, a clear telltale to them. When you stand side by side and you're not frightened by their opposition, you're not intimidated would be a good word. Don't be intimidated, stand together, don't let yourselves be shouted down, don't let yourselves be sidelined, pushed into an insignificant role.

Stand, stand. This is a clear sign, an omen to them of their destruction. Their stuff's on the way out.

They have no power over committed, united believers who are operating in faith and patience.

They see the handwriting on the wall and their knees begin to smite one against the other. Hopefully, with the result that they will rethink their rejection of God, that they will rethink their unrepentant heart and attitude.

This is the light that shines in the darkness and the crooked and perverse generation. Hopefully, they will see us and say, maybe I need to give that another look. This isn't the dumb thing that I've been cartooning it to be, that I've been caricaturing and mocking and vilifying.

There is something admirable and there is something compelling about this standing united without fear and without intimidation in the faith. It's a clear sign to them of their destruction, but it is a clear sign of your deliverance, your salvation, and that from the source of God. The source is God.

This becomes clear. This isn't of human manufacture. This isn't just brass on the part of these people.

They've got some sort of divine presence in their midst. They are united by something above and beyond themselves. He goes on in verse 29, it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.

Suffer. It's a gift to you. It is a grant that you suffer.

It is a privilege to suffer for his sake. It's a privilege engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine. Paul says, you're entering into the things that you've seen and heard of in the apostles.

The same thing he's going to be saying in 2 Thessalonians in another verse or two. Philippians chapter 3, verse 17 and following, brethren join in imitating me and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. Oh, judge not lest you be judged.

Paul says, pay attention. And when you see people living the faithful life that he's describing, a faithful life similar to the life that they have seen him live, he says mark them, take note, pay attention. That's a good example.

Many of whom I've often told you and now tell you even with tears live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Many believers are enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction.

Their God is their belly, their emotion, their feel good sense. That's their God. Well, what do I serve? I serve my sense of well-being.

I serve my sense of self-worth. I serve my sense of self-fulfillment. And whatever fulfills me, that's my, that's my 10 commandments.

Thou shalt do whatever makes me feel good. Thou shalt not do whatever does not make me feel

good. Thou shalt hang around with people that make me feel good.

Thou shalt not hang around with people that don't make me feel good. Their God is their belly. This is my satisfaction.

This is my satisfaction. Their glory is in their shame. And I don't even have to give you examples of this.

You look around in the Christian world today and there is celebration of shameful things. Oh, this is what we do in our church. This is who we freely and joyfully accept into our church, people living a manifest lifestyle of perversion and evil.

We celebrate. I was telling Ken the other day, I think the bumper sticker should say instead of celebrate diversity, it should say celebrate perversity. Because that's what we're celebrating now.

Celebrate perversity. And there are churches that pride themselves on welcoming with open arms perversion. Love the sinner, hate the sin, all of that is true.

But, mindset on earthly things. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our Palatuma.

That's where our patriotism should lie. Do you want to be patriotic? Do you want to be dedicated to your country? Your country is in heaven. Your citizenship is in heaven.

Your patriotic duty is to the kingdom of God. That's true Christian patriotism. Nothing wrong with waving the grand old flag here.

But our genuine, enduring, committed patriotism is to God's government, God's country, God's kingdom. Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a savior, a deliverer. We're not voting in a savior.

We're not electing a savior. We're not blogging a savior. We're not commenting an article to defend a savior.

We're awaiting a savior from heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ who will change us, transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself. Anybody on the ballot got power to transform people? Anybody in the next upcoming election got power to subject all things to right principles? No, they don't.

They don't. Don't waste your time on an earthly agenda. Even if you succeed, it's all going to go up in smoke.

It's going to melt with a fervent heat. It won't last. You can build a great society, build a great civilization, build a God-fearing, you know, put up a palisade, let only the Puritans in, do whatever you want, elect Jesus and the apostles to be the executive and legislative branches, let John the Baptist be the judicial branch.

It wouldn't matter who you put in government. People will not follow when their hearts aren't right. They would impeach Jesus and crucify him.

They would behead and persecute and hound out of town the apostles, and they'd put John the Baptist right back in the prison that he came out of, chop his head right back off again, because it's the hearts of people that need change. There's only one deliverer that has power to change hearts, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ. He's got power to subject all things to himself, and that's what he's in the process of doing.

We've got to line up with that program, be patriotic about that government. Philippians chapter 4, verse 10 and following, I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now you have revived your concern for me. You were concerned for me, but you didn't have opportunity to express it.

Not that I complain of lack or of need or of want. I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.

Wouldn't it be great if we could truly say this about ourselves? I know how to live on short rations. I know how to do the bread and water thing. I know how to make it in a pup tent.

I also know how to abound. I know table manners at a state dinner. I know how to conduct myself in a mansion and with royalty.

I can be in the receiving line for the queen, or I can be in the soup line with the bums. I am at home. I am comfortable.

I know how to behave and conduct myself in the whole range of human experience. That's what Paul is saying, and pray God that's what we could say. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of facing plenty or hunger, abundance or want.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me in Christ, through Christ, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. All of these messages from Paul address suffering. The Thessalonians are being persecuted.

They are in tribulation. I don't have time to really illustrate it, but you can look at the Corinthians, and Paul talks a little bit about his own suffering and briefly mentions that some of them might enter into his suffering, but he doesn't really talk about that. He basically tells them, you know, you all need to quit fighting and sparring amongst yourselves.

You need to get your basic truths down. To the more mature congregations like the Philippians and the Thessalonians, he spends much more time talking about the kingdom, talking about the future, because it takes some time to grow to the point where you can lift your eyes up. It reminds me of when I was learning to drive a car.

I was younger than 16. I won't say how young, but I was younger than 16, learning how to drive. When you first get behind the wheel, all you can think about is, I don't want to get out of the lines.

I'm looking at the road right in front of me. I'm just trying not to run off the road. I do turn this wheel a little bit, and the thing just lurches.

The car just lurches. I try to speed up a little, and I'm lurching forward. I try to slow down a little bit, and I'm slamming to a stop.

I have no finesse. I have no anticipating powers at all. It's all I can do.

I'm just trying to stay between the lines. You remember, I think nearly all of you are driving or soon will be. There's a few shorter people in the back that aren't yet, but it'll come before you know it.

But you think about it. As you gain confidence, as you get the basic skills, and you know how to do the brakes and the gas, you know how far the car turns with a touch of the wheel, and you've got the signals and the rest of the controls figured out, what happens? You begin to raise your gaze. You begin to be more aware further down the road.

You can take your eyes off the road carefully from time to time in the beginning, and pretty soon you can go for miles and not even have any memory of the road. You're yakking with your spouse, or you're listening to something on the radio, and you kind of wake up and say, wow, I'm 16 miles down the road. I don't remember any of that back there because you're just completely on autopilot.

But you're able to lift your gaze and think about other things besides driving. You're not sweating profusely and fearing every car that gets close. You've got it down and learned it.

Listen to me now. It's the same with hope. It takes us some time just to get to where we can manage the daily exigencies of life, to apply faith to the immediate task at hand.

Remember to pray. Remember to confess our sins. Remember to remember.

Just remember to remember. Remember to remember that I'm a Christian. Remember to remember that God's in His heaven, that I've got the option of prayer, that I've got some promises I can claim.

And we've got our hands full with that. But once we get to where we can do that walking, we can put one foot in front of the other, do you really concentrate now on walking? Do you think about lifting up a foot? Unless you've had a severe injury, it's autopilot. You're not even conscious of it.

You get up out of your chair. Everybody's going to get up and leave tonight. You're not going to be thinking, well, now let's see.

I'm standing. I'm going to shift my weight. We don't do that.

Same thing with hope in the spiritual life. Once we get these basic skills down and there is a necessary growth period, we can lift our gaze. And it is the mature congregations like the Philippians and the Thessalonians that Paul spends so much time talking about the future, talking about the kingdom.

He says, you know, I hear the reports. You all have got the faith and love and hope thing going. And I pray that you'll abound in it and grow in it more and more.

Keep getting better and better at it, more adept, more elastic, more quick, more effective. But now that you can raise your gaze, here's where we're going. Here's why we're walking.

Here's why we're doing what we're doing. And he puts that goal out before them. It's citizenship.

It's Palatuma. It's inheritance. It's opportunity.

It's service. It's the return of the Lord Jesus Christ with his angels. It is retribution.

For all of this, it seems so unjust and unfair. There is justice coming. Didn't really have time to talk about it when you were just trying to figure out how to get through the day.

But now let me tell you about the bigger strategy. Had to teach you how to fire your weapon and how to defend yourself in a foxhole before I could teach you tactics and strategy and warfare on a grand scale. But now that you know the intimate details, here it is.

This is where we're going in 2 Thessalonians. Look ahead just a little bit as you turn back to the last half of chapter 1. It's a righteous thing, verse 6, with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you. The Corinthians, he says, you know, just hang in there.

And some of the Ephesians and others, which are the latest, he's saying, look, just here's how to cope. Here's how to keep yourself stable and walking. Timothy, you know, guard yourself.

He doesn't give Timothy a lot of strategy. Timothy's struggling with his personal walk in some ways. But he says, look, God is going to repay.

If you're worried about the long-term justice of this, God's going to make it right. And he will give you who are troubled rest with us. This is relief.

This is anesin, A-N-E-S-I-N. I think it is in Greek, but it just reminds me of anison. Relief.

The pain will go away. To give you who are troubled rest with us. We're all suffering here.

It's our fellowship of comfort. It's our fellowship of relief and rest. Not only rest in the here and now, not only comfort in the here and now, but the comfort of the anticipated reality of the future.

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his angels of power, there's some speculation that we'll talk about next time, that this is an actual class of angels. You've got Cherubim, you've got Seraphim, and some people think this is a little bit more technical. Not just, wow, look at the powerful angels.

These are the power angels. There is a cadre of angels that are specifically equipped and tasked with the exercise, the implementation of divine power, and the fulfillment of the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the angels of power on the earth.

It is those angels, these are like the ranger angels, these are the recon marine angels, who are specifically accompanying Jesus at his return. He's not coming with a bunch of messenger angels. He's not coming with an angel choir.

He's coming with the angels of power. But we'll talk about that more next time. In flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two separate and distinct categories. And the word know there, the sense of it is acknowledge. This is the Romans 1, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, so they flushed him out. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They know him as God.

They don't glorify him as God. They're not thankful. They empty their minds, and their foolish heart is darkened.

So now they don't know God, because they don't want to know God. Well, there is flaming fire, vengeance on that category, and those who do not obey the gospel. Obedience is a different thing from flushing the knowledge.

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction. Everlasting destruction. This is not Apolia.

This is Olethras. O-L-E-T-H-R-O-S. O-L-E-T-H-R-O-S.

Or Olethrea. And for that, we need the big book. I brought the big canon this week, but I didn't get to fire it at you, so I'll bring it back next time to find out what this means.

Is this everlasting destruction? Is it separation? Is it temporary? Is it permanent? What exactly is it? Well, we've got the authorities here to help us figure it out. We're going to look at that. We'll also look at apostasia from the lexical standpoint.

What does it mean? Does it mean to rebel or does it mean to stand away? Both, neither, what does it mean? Those are the words we'll need to look at, but we'll save that for next time and we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the

clear instructions, the clear guidance, and the provision that you have made for us to fulfill and execute that guidance as we find it in your word, as we find it in the resident Holy Spirit in our midst and in our souls.

We pray that as we meditate on these truths that you will give us insight into our own hearts, enable us to see the ways that we can improve, that we can develop and cultivate our faith and our patience and invest ourselves in those things that are pertinent not only for this life but also for the kingdom to come. We know that this will enable us to be counted worthy of that kingdom and it will reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ even as it reflects your own glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.