

2Thessalonians 12-08-24b

We pick up our study in first chapter of 2 Thessalonians. You thought I was going to mess that up, didn't you? What's going on in this chapter? What is Paul leading up to? What's the big idea? We've been through eight verses here. Introduction, greeting, grace to you in peace, we're thankful to God, and then he gets into this whole thing about retribution.

Why? We know that there is a lot of suffering and persecution going on in that city. Paul knows it. Timothy has been there and back and has given him a report.

Now, do you, do I encounter the same type of thing? Do we have the same kind of thing? Do people get into our business and do us wrong? Do we encounter just slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in the fallen world? Yes, we do. So what's the big idea? If it is such as is common to man, then why are we even talking about it? Because the key is our response. What are we supposed to think? What are we supposed to do when bad stuff hits, when bad people hit? It is going to happen to you.

Maybe it is happening to you or it has happened to you. It's going to happen to me, is happening to me, has happened to me. It is everywhere.

Why does Paul lead with this in his letter? And I'm writing a letter to somebody. I don't typically just jump right into the problems. Why is he doing this? Because there is a response different than the normal human response.

Our normal human response, our gut reaction is subjective. If things go against me, I am obsessing on the people responsible. I am obsessing on the problem, on the situation, on the circumstance.

Why is my job the way it is? Why is my relationship the way it is? Why is my body the way it is? Why is my health the way it is? Why can't I do what I did when I was younger? Why can't I do what people do that are older? Whatever your situation is, we look at it and we think there's a deficit. There's a shortfall. There's something wrong.

The universe isn't the way I want it to be. And I'm going to think about it. And it preys on my mind.

People are not doing what they're supposed to do. They're doing bad things, wrong things, insufficient things. They're disappointing.

They're causing problems. They're wrecking the peace and serenity of my life. People are a problem.

Circumstances are a problem. I've got problems in myself I can't get rid of. Why won't these problems go away? We call that subjectivity, eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, right? Well, there is nothing like tribulation and persecution to trigger our natural

inbred, inborn subjectivity.

We are built for subjectivity. What is Paul saying? He says, look, if you want to rise above this, you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You've got God, the Holy Spirit.

You're regenerate. You're sanctified. You've got an inheritance in heaven.

If you want to get out of this rut, if you want to be delivered out of this present evil age, if you want to be delivered out of the circularity and the redundancy and the entrapment of this kind of thinking, Jesus Christ has done it. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are spiritual and powerful in God for the pulling down of strongholds and for the taking captive of these thoughts.

Take them captive, stick them in prison, lock them up, and walk away. We, by God's grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ can be delivered from this. It is part of our birthright.

It is part of our gifts from God. You don't have to be miserable. You don't have to be circling in the lower portion of the drain of your soul.

Don't have to. No reason to. Paul is giving us the key right here.

What do you think that Thessalonians are thinking? They're trying to believe in the Lord Jesus, trying to be blessed by God, trying to do the right thing, trying to latch hold of eternal life and righteousness and peace and sanctification. And what are they getting for it? They're getting beat up. They're getting kicked out.

They're having their windows broken. They're having their teeth kicked in. They're being kicked out of the synagogue.

They're being ostracized. Their businesses are failing. Their kids are made fun of.

Their wives are spit on in the street, all because they're trying to believe in the Lord Jesus. They're trying to be delivered out of paganism and trying to be delivered from Judaism. And what are they getting in return? Grief.

You think, you know, some of them might be thinking, I kind of wish that Apostle Paul had just never, you know, if he'd kept right on going on the road, he went through, you know, Apollonia and Pamphylia. Why didn't he just keep on going past Thessalonica and go to the next town that had a synagogue? But he stopped here and gave us the information and we believed and look at what we're getting as a result. He says, look, God has got this.

God has it in his hands. God knows exactly what to allow through. It's just like a vaccination.

Let some of those weak, wiggly, 90% dead germs come on in and fortify your immune system, give you something to fight, give you something to strengthen you, because God is not going to lock down your soul in eternity. Part of what is going on in this life, we are being inoculated. There is nothing like living in a fallen world with a fallen nature, surrounded in a culture and a society and a civilization and a race of fallen people of whom I am chief.

We're all chief. Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Paul says back in Romans. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Once you have been exposed to a really evil thing, it is engendering in us a hatred, a knowledgeable hatred, a detailed, informed hatred of sin and of evil and of the consequences. Why do our bodies fall apart? Because of sin.

Why do we suffer physically? Because of sin. The whole creation dies and groans in bondage because of sin. We see deterioration.

We lose our loved ones. We lose our pets. We watch ourselves disintegrate over the course of a relatively short life, and we all head into the grave and return to the dust from which we came.

Why? Because of sin. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. So does God have a purpose in our suffering? Does he have a purpose in allowing us to be persecuted? Yes.

You say, you know, I think I really got that lesson years ago. The first few times I suffered, the first few times I had a bad experience, I'm all over that sin. Listen, how many different kinds of shots do they give you when you're a child? You got a polio vaccine.

You got a smallpox vaccine. You get a measles thing. You get a, they shoot you for everything known to man, right? All different kinds of vaccinations.

Why? Because there's lots of different varieties of disease. There are many subtle varieties of sin and evil in the world. And we spend our three score and 10 or whatever it is we're allotted in this life, being exposed to various varieties, various kinds, and we become experts.

We become specialists in certain kinds of exposure to sin and human good and evil, the production of the flesh, the corruption, the fallibility, the human shortfall from the glory of God. Some of us have one kind of exposure. Others of us have another, but in glory with Christ, there will be somebody that's a personal specialist in anything that ever comes up.

A thousand years in the millennial kingdom, anything that comes up, you know what? We got Bob back here. He knows all about that. Bob, you adjudicate this case in the millennial kingdom.

You're reigning with Christ because you overcame, you faced that, you know it inside out backwards and forwards. You know that enemy, you know its pitfalls, you know its shortcomings.

You handle this case.

You're going to preside here. You're going to rule here. You're going to administer here.

You are going to supervise here. You are going to have responsibilities based on your expertise, based on your experience, based on your knowledge that came through faith and patience, faith and patience in tribulation and in persecution. We are qualifying.

We have an immunity. We have an expertise. We have an in-depth understanding of exactly why this is wrong, exactly how it feels when you're on the receiving end of that kind of sin or evil.

And it is useful. It is necessary. It is a part of God's program.

We don't understand all of the details. It's way beyond anything we can grasp, but God understands and we trust him. We know what he's doing.

The same way that a child recognizes that their parents take them places and do things and make them wait and we can't eat right now and you got to have this stranger hurt you for a little while because it's good for you in the long run. Why am I going into this room? Why are they strapping me into a chair? Why are there sharp pointy things? Why are you scaring me this way? Trust me, it'll be okay. The child didn't understand, but the child looks into the face of the parent and the parent says, I love you.

You've got to trust me. This is going to be okay. This is what God is doing with us.

This is what Paul is expressing right here. And he says, look, justice is on the way. You're not on the receiving end of this and it's never going to be set right.

It is a temporary imbalance. There is going to be disobedience running rife until your obedience is complete. Same thing he told the Corinthians.

He's telling the Thessalonians in a different way. It is a proper thing. It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation.

Those who are troubling you, they are troubling you. Now, God is going to trouble them later. Well, they're troubling me now.

I want him to trouble them now. No, you got to trust God's timing. You obey now under pressure.

God will deal with them later. Leave it to God. This is why, if you want to use the alternate translation for *ek dikeo*, retribution is mine.

I will recompense, saith the Lord. God says, I will balance the scales in my time and in my way. Your task is to not be subjective.

Don't be subjective. Now, you say, oh, great. Thanks a lot.

Here I am hurting. Here I am being abused and trodden down and walked over. And you're saying, oh, count it all joy, brother.

Just be patient. How am I supposed to do that? We need something for our minds to latch on. It reminds me of what they, even in the secular world, they say, if you want to break a bad habit, you want to smoke, well, you got to do like Kojak.

Instead of just saying, not going to smoke, not going to smoke, put that cigarette down, put away that lighter. I'm going to sit here and not smoke. I'm going to sit here.

I'm not going to think about chocolate cake. I'm on a diet. I'm not going to eat a piece of cake.

Here's a piece of cake in front of me, but I'm not going to eat it. What we have to do is turn our mind to something else. We turn away from one thing and occupy it with something else.

You're never going to succeed in overcoming sin or overcoming evil by sitting there saying, not going to sin, not going to sin, not going to do evil, not going to do evil, not going to sin, not going to sin. We have to turn our minds to something positive, an alternate. Kojak got Tootsie Pops.

Think about the Tootsie Pop. Don't think about the cigarette. You're not smoking, right? What is it we think about instead of subjectivity, instead of, oh, you rascal, I wish I could find a way to hurt your reputation the way you've hurt mine, to hurt me the way that hurt you, the way you've hurt me, to set you back the way you've set me back.

I wish there's got to be a way, you know, maybe if I write a letter to the editor, maybe if I slip a note under the door, maybe if I, you know, slash your tires or whatever, can't think that way. We've got to get our mind out of that whole arena onto something positive. Paul gives the Thessalonian believers who are tempted to be angry, tempted to be frustrated, tempted to be self-pitying, tempted to wallow in the muck of why me, Lord.

He says, look, here's what you put your mind on. You've got to actively make the decision to quit thinking about this suffering and persecution. Set your mind on this.

Didn't Jesus say that? Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth, where moth and rust corrupt, thieves break in and steal, treasure in heaven. God will repay with tribulation. He will do the retribution.

He will even the scales, and he will give you who are troubled rest. Instead of the trouble, think about the coming rest. Think about the Israelites.

Think about Caleb and Joshua having to wander around with all of the deadbeats for 40 years, patiently waiting, knowing that God was going to honor his promise and give them rest. And

what's great is even though everybody else in the nation died over that 40 years, Caleb and Joshua not only made it, but made it well past the 40-year mark. You think, oh, I just crossed the Jordan and dropped dead right on the other side.

Just outlasted the other guys by a couple of weeks. Caleb lives for years. Joshua lives for years afterward.

Hail and hearty and strong. God not only preserved them to go into the land, but preserved them in the land to enjoy the blessings and to see their descendants grow up and lay hold of their familial inheritance. Gave them health, gave them strength, gave them peace, gave them enjoyment, gave Caleb a challenge.

Caleb was ready to keep on fighting. So they said, fine, here's the hill. Go take it.

He will give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed. Instead of thinking about the present, think about the future. Won't it be great when the Lord Jesus is revealed in flaming fire? There is going to be a purge.

All of this nasty stuff is going to be eliminated. When you have the flu and your stomach won't let you eat anything and you feel like you've been poisoned, everything feels bad. You can sit there and examine every part of your body and think, boy, my stomach feels bad.

Man, my lungs are bad. My throat's bad. My eyes are bad.

My ears are bad. Bones are aching. My joints are hurting.

Or you can say, you know what's going to be great? When I'm over this, I'll be able to eat what I want. I'll be able to do what I want again. I'll be able to do the things that I've done before.

It's going to be great when I'm over this. I'm just going to move my mind into the future past this. What will I do when I get well? Well, I'm going to have to catch up on the work that I missed.

Got a few projects that got set back. Let me plan ahead. Let me put my mind in the future.

Let me get out of this present evil age. Let me deliver myself out of this and think ahead. I got some time here.

Can't do much right now. Well, let me use it profitably. Let me arrange my future.

Let me do what I can to build into the future since the present ain't too hot. So Paul gives them the future. He says, the Lord Jesus is coming back.

He is going to cleanse. He's going to purge. He's going to judge.

He's going to recompense, and he's going to give you rest. Won't that be great? Think about that

rest. And here's the other thing.

We think, you know, sometimes my enemy is my familiar friend who's eating my bread and lifting up his heel against me. Jesus, the one who betrays me, is dipping his hand with me in the dish. Sometimes it's unbelievers.

Sometimes it's somebody real close. It's the sense of betrayal. There's nothing that will make us subjective faster than feeling betrayed, feeling let down or someone whose loyalty and support we expected, and it isn't there.

Oh, that is the toughest thing to let go of. It's just so wrong. Nobody deserves loyalty more than me.

Nobody deserves support more than me. I can't believe you betrayed me. You said you would do a thing, and you didn't do it.

Oh, it just lights all of our cells on fire. Paul says, let God do the retribution, whether they are unbelievers or whether they are believers, whether they are those who do not know God. These are the pagans and the Gentiles in Thessalonica who are taking advantage of this squabble between the Jews and the Christians.

You know, they're like the Edomites. They're like these guys swooping in from the outside. Well, while you guys are fighting, we're going to run off with all the goods.

We're going to take advantage of your feud and stick it to both of you. Those who do not know God and those who do not obey. Obedience is a responsibility of believers.

It is disobedience that brings judgment on Israel. Israel is assumed to be the people of God. They are not destroyed out of the presence of the Lord for lack of knowledge.

It's what they do know and don't obey that gets them in trouble. These who do not know God and these who are disobedient shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Now, you can take this one of two ways.

Either the first group is everlastingly destroyed from the presence of the Lord, and the second group is destroyed away from his glory. Right. This would kind of make sense, but it's tough to justify the presence and the glory.

If our iniquities as God's people can separate between us and God and our sins can hide his face from us. How present is God? He's not. That's why when Jesus came the first time, it says God has visited his people.

He was away, and now he has made his presence known. What happened to the Shekinah when Israel continued to disobey for generation after generation, evil king after evil king? What

happened to the presence? Were there still believers in Israel? Yes, but where did the presence go? Ezekiel traces it out of the Holy of Holies to the threshold, out through the courtyard, out through the gate, up to the top of the Mount of Olives, last wistful look at the people, and out to the nations, and it is not going to return. The presence is not going to return until the Lord Jesus returns as the fullness of deity in bodily form.

You can be a believer and not have the presence of God. There are people in the eternal future who are going to be destroyed away from in the sense that they had the potential. They had the spiritual capital.

They had the opportunity. They had all of the provision necessary to be property owners, to have an inheritance in the New Jerusalem, in the kingdom of the Father, and they frittered it away, sold it for a mess of pottage, and they are outside. Where does Esau go? He's a believer.

He's got an inheritance, but he inherits the wind. He's a wanderer. He's a wild ass of a man.

He's got flocks and herds, but he's roaming. He's over. He's in Edom.

He doesn't have the land of promise. He doesn't have that relationship with God that Jacob inherits. Destroyed with everlasting destruction, and this word for destruction in verse 9 is really interesting because it is *olethros*, O-L-E-T-H-R-O-S.

It is not *apolia*. It is *olethros*, and this is a different kind of destruction, and it is everlasting. This is *ionion*, *ionion olethron*, *ionios* and *olethros*.

Now, what does *olethros* mean? I touched on this a little bit last time. Let me give you what the lexicon says. It's not a very common word in the New Testament.

It says a state of destruction, ruin, or death. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 3. Flip back. It's on my same page here.

5-3, concerning the times and seasons, brethren. Once again, looking forward, I have no need that I should write you. You know, the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

When they say, peace and safety, sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they shall not escape. Sudden *olethros*. Now, what is the picture here? A thief in the night.

What happens when the thief comes in the night? Doesn't say a murderer in the night. Doesn't say an army in the night that comes in and slays everyone. It's a thief.

What does a thief do? Takes everything you have. This destruction is the loss of all things. You're homeless.

You're on the curb with a can of, don't even have pencils. You're just, don't even have a can.

You're just on the curb.

You've got nothing. Sudden loss. This is like people that, you know, the wildfires in California sweep through, burns everything to the ground.

People just barely get away. They, they're just standing there in their clothes. They got the shirt on their back and that's it.

Flooding, hurricane, tornado. You're alive and that's it. Olethros.

It's also found in first Timothy chapter six and verse nine. That's, that's a couple of pages forward. First Timothy six, nine.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. We brought nothing into this world, verse seven, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Possessions are in view here, right? Having food and clothing with these, we shall be content.

But those who desire to be rich, fall into temptation and a snare and to any, many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in Olethros and Apolia. Destruction and perdition. Olethros and Apolia.

They're together. Drowned in loss. It's kind of a oxymoron, isn't it? You're drowning in lack.

For what? The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Love of possessions. So that's Olethros.

It is a material loss. This is used in first Corinthians five, five. When the guy that was hanging out with his stepmother and Paul says, I have delivered such a one to for the Olethros of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved.

He's going to lose. This is turning him over to the sin of death. Basically, he's going to lose his fleshly existence.

Olethros. But he's not utterly destroyed. He's his spirit will be saved in the day of Christ.

So what is it saying here in our passage? These will be punished. The justice that is coming to them, the sentence they will have passed and executed on them is utter and total loss. And the loss from the presence and the glory of God for some of them is because they will be in the lake of fire, which I believe heretically so in some view is they're annihilated.

They're gone. They're not presence of glory of anything. And then there are believers who are so far from the royal city, so far from the lamb who is the light, so far from the throne of God, so far from the river of life and the trees that line the banks.

That they're not a whole lot better off. They are both spoken of in the same breath. It's very sobering.

People have no concept of how severe this discipline is going to be. Of how much sorer punishment do you think he should be thought worthy? Hebrews chapter 10, who has trodden the son of God underfoot, treated the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified as a common thing and done despite to the spirit of grace. What do you think God's at? He is not going to destroy them in the lake of fire because they are saved.

But of how much punishment if you trample the son of God underfoot, if you treat the blood of Christ as a profane thing, as garbage to be thrown out, and you blaspheme God's Holy Spirit, where do you think you're going to end up in God's kingdom? The edge. How can you have these rascals that do all kinds of evil and then they go to glory and walk the golden streets and eat manna and all that? Well, guess what? They don't. That's what scripture teaches.

They don't. Do you want to be weeping and wailing and gnashing your teeth? That's what it says believers will be doing. And notice it says, I own us.

It's everlasting. I do not see room for sort of a purgatory. Serve your time and now you're out for good behavior.

It says everlasting. So one of two things is true. Either these are all unbelievers and well, they were disobedient to the gospel.

You can find a passage or two that looks like unbelievers are spoken of as disobeying the gospel. But who's this written to? Thessalonians. Who's persecuting the Thessalonians? Believers.

Why would he be talking about unbelievers going to judgment when it's believers that are their problem? Does not track with what we know from Acts. When he comes in that day to be glorified in his sanctified ones. This is what we want.

We want to be a saint. We want to be a sanctified one and Christ will be admired among all those who believe those who are trusters, who are faithful ones who said, you know, I'm going to fix my mind on things in heaven, not things on earth. I am going to lay hold of God's deliverance.

I'm not going to be subjective. I'm not going to be focused on people or circumstances or suffering. And that will qualify me.

That will prepare me. That will give me the ability to appreciate. Did you know there's going to be believers that will not appreciate Jesus when he comes back? They're going to see him and run in the other direction.

Like the Israelites did at Sinai. They will be ashamed at his coming. They will look and say, who is that? And run the other way.

Scripture says it. I want to be someone who admires the Lord Jesus, who welcomes him, who is running toward him when he comes to be glorified in his saints, to be admired among those who

believe why? Because our testimony among you was believed. He says, you all are going to be those who are going to be rejoicing.

You will know the song of the lamb to sing. You will be one of those white robed saints because you have learned that song in suffering and persecution. You'll know the words by heart when they strike it up.

You'll know it intuitively, just like you're going to know the language of God. You're not going to have to take a class in Hebrew or whatever our heavenly language will be. You'll know it by heart.

We will know these things by heart because we have come to know the Lord Jesus. We have come to know God through Christ in suffering, in persecution, because we set our minds on things above. This is what Paul sets as the object.

This is the answer. What do you do when you're put upon? What do you do when suffering hits? This is it. This is our challenge.

This is our command. This is a cohortative. This is what we're encouraged to do.

And Paul says, therefore, we pray always for you, that God will count you worthy, that God will be able to count you worthy. Who decides whether or not we're going to be worthy? Is it some arbitrary, inscrutable decision of God? No, we determine it in our response to these circumstances. We pray.

How can we pray for each other? Somebody's in suffering. You say, oh, God, please heal so and so. Oh, God, please help so and so get over this.

Oh, God, please fix that situation. Oh, God, please take that persecution off so and so. You know what Paul prayed? You notice Paul does not pray that God will take flaming vengeance on the city of Thessalonica and burn down the synagogue and, you know, slay and flay all of these Judaizers.

What does Paul pray? He doesn't pray against the persecutors and against the suffering. He prays for the people that they will convert this into worthiness, convert it into worthiness, take this negative situation and make it an occasion for worth. I pray, we pray always for you, that our God will count you worthy of this calling.

Some of these saints were chosen to be in the diaspora. Peter wrote to them. Paul is writing to these people who are positioned in Thessalonica.

They're called to be there. They're called to face this. I pray for you that you'll be up to this challenge, that you'll meet it, that you'll excel.

We send you to the Olympics and you come back with a medal. Paul says, I pray for you. We

pray for you always that you will be counted worthy by God of this calling and fulfill his good pleasure, his good will.

God's will for us is good in this. He wants us to succeed. He's our father.

He's pulling for us. He says you can do this. The work of faith with power.

The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly. It's the power of God. It's the might of God for the pulling down of strongholds and taking thoughts captive.

Don't forget that Corinthians passage, 2 Corinthians 10. Put it with this. These two passages tell us exactly what to do for the remainder of our lives.

We've been called to this. We've got all of what we need to succeed. It's up to us.

Fulfill the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power. Why? So that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified. That's why we're here.

And Jesus Christ will be glorified when we pull this off, when we succeed, when we figure out why we're here and we do it. Glorified in you and you in him. Can you imagine anything better? Is there some other goal that's more worth attaining than this? That Jesus Christ has glorified us and we are glorified in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's it. That's everything. Well, that concludes chapter one.

We'll pick up in chapter two next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the privilege of being called to this challenge, to live in this life, to be conceived in iniquity and born in sin, to wrestle with our fallen nature, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to work against the proclivities of our nature, to avail ourselves of your grace and your power to win these victories and reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will remind us of our challenge, of our opportunities, of our resources, and will make these things real to us so that as we set our minds on them, they completely take the place of the destructive thoughts and the circular and negative reasoning that so often characterizes our minds and souls. We pray that in so doing, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ will be reflected both now and in the ages to come. We pray these things in his name.

Amen.