

2Thessalonians 12-10-19a

This is Friday, the 19th of October, 2012. We're starting the third chapter of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. Tonight, we've completed studying the first two chapters and we resume tonight in chapter three, verse one.

We'll, of course, as is our custom, back up and get a good running start at it by looking at the last couple of verses in chapter two, because of course there were no chapter and verse divisions in the original letter. And when Paul says, finally, brethren, he's still aware that what he has just covered is fresh in their minds. And there is a segue, there's a connection between what we have just finished studying and what he is about to address.

But let's take a moment before we begin to go to the Lord in prayer, ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our study. Father, what a blessing it is to realize that we are not alone. We are not dependent solely on our own efforts.

When we recognize our frailties, our human weaknesses, our shortcomings, and our faults, it is a wonderful encouragement to know that your Holy Spirit indwells and fills and seals us, gives us enablement, reminds us of the truth that we've learned from your word, gives us an orientation to your plan and purpose. And through the Lord Jesus Christ, we have our feet set firmly on the rock. We have direction, we have a vision of where we need to go, and we're so grateful that the purpose and the definition for our lives has been granted to us through the wonderful atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf.

We thank you for this passage. We thank you for the things that we are learning from it, for the practical applications and the tools and resources that it gives us to genuinely redeem the time and lay hold of righteousness by faith so that our lives accomplish the purpose for which they were given to us. And we are prepared for that day when the Lord Jesus returns to promote us and move us into that future kingdom that has so much more potential and so much more opportunity for us to reflect his glory.

We pray your blessing on us as we study this passage together and we ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Paul has concluded what we know as the second chapter of the letter by a sort of a doxology or a prayer. It's an expressed hope in verse 16 when he says, now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and father who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

This reminds us of the scope of our spiritual life as saved, redeemed, reconciled, propitiated, gifted, Holy Spirit filled church age believers. This little training exercise that we're going through right now is very brief and at the end of it, there is a promotion. There is an onward movement.

Where will we go and what will we do? How interesting will it be? How meaningful will it be? How much of the glory of God will it reflect? Depends on how much attention we pay now, but it's easy

to get distracted. We get distracted all the time. We get immersed.

This is like an immersion video game. All of the inputs. So you've just got screens all the way around.

You've got five once around sound. You've got sensory inputs. You got smells, you got everything.

It's total immersion and we easily get caught up just as you go to the movies and get completely immersed in the plot and the story. Well, we've got to snap ourselves out of it. Don't get so enmeshed that we forget who we really are and why we are really here.

So Paul is talking to the Thessalonians and he says, look, you've got circumstances. You've got these people from the synagogue that have roused the rabble. They have got the city authorities coming after you.

They're harassing you. They're picketing you. They're outside with bullhorns and throwing eggs.

They're boycotting and blacklisting and doing everything they can to make you miserable. They're persecuting you. And he says, don't let that throw you.

And on top of it, you've got people saying, well, the reason all of this persecution is going on is that Jesus has already come and gone and you got left. You weren't Jewish enough. You weren't legalistic enough.

You didn't follow the law enough. And if you think the Messiah has come and gone, well, he certainly didn't take you. And so Paul wrote the material that we've just covered in chapter two to explain, no, you're this is a different kind of tribulation.

This is a different kind of suffering. God will deal with it. God will render back.

Remember, chapter one, God will repay these people. It's in God's hands. He's got the timing.

He's got the the suppression in place so that the man of lawlessness and the spirit of lawlessness cannot overflow its bounds. So calm yourself, focus, calm yourself and focus. That's the goal, right? So what does he say at the end of chapter two? Now, having covered all of that, that's a summary of chapter one and two.

Remembering who you are and why you're here now, may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and father who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope. Notice the everlasting there, everlasting confidence, everlasting good hope. And notice the word good there.

It's the Greek word agathos, because he's going to repeat it. Good is going to be in there twice. What is our purpose? What is our goal? I had a discussion earlier today.

I said, OK, you know, you've got a certain approach to this issue. I've got a slightly different approach. And you can argue the two approaches all day long.

This is kind of like Democrats and Republicans. Do you fix the economy by raising taxes or lowering taxes on the high income people? Republicans think you let the high income people keep more money. That makes more jobs because they're small businesses.

Democrats say, no, we need to get that money and pipe it back into the middle class and just hand it to them directly. Take from the rich, give to the poor. It's Robin Hood government.

And this will get the economy flowing again. It's two different approaches. And you can argue the merits.

And you hear people argue those merits all the time, right? Now, how did we start tonight? We are here for higher and grander purposes. So when we consider issues like this, what's most important? To decide that the blue argument is correct and the red argument is wrong or that the red argument is correct and the blue argument is wrong? That one side of this issue is more right than the other issue? What is it that we really want to go for as this minority cadre of people that God has on this earth, gifted with his word and with his spirit? What are we really here for? It's not really about the earthly issues. It's about the good.

Agathos. Romans 8, 28, all things work together for Agathos, the good. God works them together for good.

Good transcends the immediate. You say, well, here's an interesting issue. This is kind of a little side point that came up in one of my discussions.

Somebody is doing a bad thing in their business. They're running a sweatshop. They're getting their stuff from a sweatshop overseas.

All of these little people are working for a nickel an hour and sweating all day long. Making your flannel shirts, you buy these flannel shirts at Walmart, but then you find out, hey, these are coming from a sweatshop overseas and the people are making a nickel an hour. So you say, you know what? That's evil.

I'm not going to buy any of these flannel shirts. I'm going to tell all my friends, no flannel shirts. I'm going to get on the web, put it on my blog, take out ad space, boycott flannel shirts from Walmart.

You're supporting a sweatshop. And because you are so energetic and you get so many people on board and everybody is horrified, you go on Oprah and you say, no flannel shirts from Walmart. And they say, okay, fine.

Your little pamphlet gets on Oprah's book list. Everybody buys it. Suddenly the flannel shirt business at Walmart is devastated.

They can't move a shirt for love nor money. What happens? The orders to the company using the sweatshop are canceled. All the people in the sweatshop are fired.

Now, instead of a nickel an hour, they get nothing an hour. So here's my question. How do you decide whether or not you want to support this boycott? In the short term, you say, oh, I'm against sweatshops.

And look, I'm showing my economic muscle. But if you trace out the effect, you could actually be doing the opposite. You're trying to help these sweatshop people.

And what you've done is lose them the nickel an hour that they were earning. Was this the right approach? You think, well, instead of a boycott, maybe what I should have done is start my own flannel shirt business, go over to the sweatshop people, hire them all away and pay them a great wage, and then sell my flannel shirts at \$55 a piece, which nobody will buy. I'll go broke.

And then I and the sweatshop people will all be out of a job. But see, this is earthly thinking. What's more good? Is it more good to buy the shirt and keep the sweatshop open? Or don't buy the shirts, get all the sweatshop people fired? What's better? And we agonize and we conundrum.

And we wake up in the middle of the night sweating ourselves about the people in the sweatshop. Here's the thing. Here's the way to solve these.

Step back. Where is the agathos? Does the agathos of God rest on flannel shirts, sweatshops, or any of these other social issues? They're about to change the definition of marriage. Should I boycott? Should I write my senators? I mean, do these things if you want to.

But what does Paul say? Life for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ is directed toward and looks toward the agathos. Don't deplete your energy. Don't dilute your purpose.

Don't advance in every direction at once. Look for the agathos. Look for the good.

All things in God's plan work together for good. There's people that want to go green and well, I'm going to buy a hybrid. And even though it's cost three times as much and I've got to drive the car for 35 years before I break even, I just don't want to support big oil.

I hate big oil. Well, where is God's good? What are we putting our faith in? What are we promoting? What light is shining? Are we shining the light of green energy? Are we shining the light of hybrids? Are we shining the light of big oil? Shining the light of a political party? Shining the light of a candidate? Or are we shining the light of Jesus Christ and the hope that he talks about here? Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself. That's the focus.

Yes, we have to deal with issues. We have to work through problems and make decisions about mundane things, but it is subordinate. They are defined.

It's kind of like tactics. Your squad is pinned down. You're in the woods.

You're separated from the rest of your unit. You're trying to find your way back, trying to figure out what to do. Who do I shoot? Where do I go? Radio is out.

And you say, well, what tactics do I use? Do we dig in and produce a defensive position? Do we try to get a route of march and pick a direction and go? Do we get real quiet and listen for the sound of the guns and move toward that? Do we just look for some enemy and shoot them on sight? What do we do? Well, which tactics you employ? All of those might be good ideas. What do you do? What is the strategy? What is the larger thing going on in the battlefield? Got to know the strategy. Then you know which tactical moves to make.

Same thing. If you're playing chess, there can be a wonderful capture. Look, my pawn can take his queen.

It's a wonderful tactical move, and it's extremely gratifying when you take that little pawn and kill that big queen and smirk into the face of your opponent as you remove it and set it by the board until he moves his rook down to the end of the file and it's checkmate. You win the piece, you lose the game. Why? Because you were not thinking strategically.

These daily issues often will quickly resolve when we step back and look for the agathas. We are not here to simply play with earthly puzzle pieces. We are here to step back and see the big picture that those pieces reflect, and it's a key.

It takes discipline. It takes wooing and cultivating and pursuing the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, meditating on the Word of God and thinking now, why would God let a situation like this into my life? What aspect of my life might be getting pointed up by this? Am I starting to trust too much in things so God has removed a few things to remind me that I shouldn't be trusting them? Am I getting too caught up in people so I'm starting to have a few little people issues to remind me that this ought to be a little more water off the duck's back? I ought to have a little bit more focus on being who I am in Christ and letting the chips fall where they may. Am I fighting some blind subjectivity and God is trying to show it to me? There's an angel standing in my path and my burrow keeps going to the right and to the left, and I keep trying to force him through.

Maybe I should stop and ask a question about where I'm going, which is right for Balaam, but why I am going for Balaam was wrong. God told him to go, but he's going for the wrong reason. Why did Moses get stopped at the border of Egypt? He's been to Mount Sinai.

Here's the sign. Stick your hand in. It'll come out leprous, water to blood, staff to a snake, and back again.

Here's your signs. Here's your commission. Aaron, your brother will be your mouth.

Go ye to Egypt, confront Pharaoh, let my people go. Moses says, aye, aye, sir. Three bags full.

Leave Sinai, says goodbye to Jethro, grabs Zipporah and heads for Egypt, and at the border, God starts trying to kill him. He's going to the right place, but he's not right. He's not right with God.

His firstborn son is not circumcised. How are you going to lead the covenant people of God in the name of Abraham, where you've only got one ritual? They haven't been to Mount Sinai for the law yet. What's their main ritual? They've got two main rituals, circumcision and sacrifice.

It's the only rituals they have. And Moses is busted on the first and most important one. How can he be a leader when his own house is not in order? You see this in the New Testament as well.

So what are we saying here? Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and father who has loved us and given us, you can stop right there. The Lord Jesus Christ and God, our father. Look at the events of the day.

Look at the circumstances and situations of the day. We stop and say the Lord Jesus Christ and our God and father have a purpose of good, have a purpose of Agathos. Am I in line with it? Am I qualified? Have I done the Romans 12, one and two present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your reasonable service.

This is what everything ought to be. Dishes, lawn care, laundry, work, conferences, school, free time, conversations, birthday parties, waiting room time, reading some magazine, waiting for somebody to finish something. You know, if I had all that time back, I could take a vacation, sitting in waiting rooms, waiting for my oil to be changed, waiting for my air filter that, well, we don't have that model, sir.

Your car's too old, but it'll be here in 15 or 20 minutes if you want to wait. So then what do you do? You've got all this bubble gum for the brain out here on the table and you pick one up and here's, you know, Michael Jackson's still alive in this issue. And you read away.

And I think here's an opportunity. God has stopped me cold in my tracks. I have to sit here and wait for something.

Can I not meditate? Can I not redeem that time? Can I not remember the Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and father? Can I not do a little bit of a reset? You know, do a warm boot, clear the ram out, get flush the cash, start fresh, try to dedicate the rest of the day to God. Remember who I am and why I'm here. This is not an idle doxology.

This isn't just filler. It's not just a transitional element. It is a summary.

It is a condensation of everything Paul is telling the Thessalonians. Now, having confided in you, having comforted you, having encouraged you about God's control over these people that are

afflicting and persecuting God's control over circumstances, God's control over history, and even the man of lawlessness and the spirit that works his principles. Even now, God's got it all in hand.

So now with your heart, not troubled in your mind, not disturbed, may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and our God and father who has loved us and given to us everlasting consolation and Agathos hope, hope of Agathos, Agathos hope. It is hope of good. It is hope of the good, for the good, about the good, the good of Romans 8, 28.

It's not just, well, you know, there's kind of lousy hopes and kind of deflated, uh, you know, kind of, kind of flabby hopes. There's some hopes where the paint's worn off on one side. Now there's some scratched up hope that I found next to the curb.

No, this, it doesn't mean, well, this is a really good hope. This is a nice, fresh hope. That's only got a few miles on it.

And it's, it's nearly new. And it was, this hope was driven by a grandma to church every Sunday. And other than that, it's pristine.

No, that isn't what it means. It's not just a good hope compared to some not so good hopes. This is hope of Agathos, about Agathos.

This is its content. This is its focus. Our God and father and the Lord Jesus Christ have loved us and given us everlasting consolation.

We've got momentary tribulation. We've got momentary problems. Momentary light affliction, but we've got everlasting comfort.

Which would you want? People that take drugs, people that, you know, smoke a crack pipe or do whatever they do. You know what they have? They've got everlasting problems and momentary comfort. And every time they hit those drugs, the comfort is less and the problems are greater.

It's just the opposite. We have momentary issues, momentary afflictions. Can you remember the stresses and the problems and the issues that were facing you two years ago, tonight, October the 19th of 2010, what, what were the stressors? What was, what was broken that needed fixing? What was flooding and needed stopping? What, who was mad and who was upset? We don't know.

Those problems are gone. They're momentary, but the comfort and the consolation and the encouragement we have in Christ is everlasting. It never goes away.

It's always present. It's founded on the immutability of God, the unchangeability and the faithfulness of God. So he reminds them, he says, look, I know, and these, this wasn't, you know, whiteboard diagrams.

I remember we didn't have whiteboards, but when I played football in high school, the coach would go up to the blackboard with a piece of chalk and he would make little X's and O's and say, this is the play. Sam, you're defensive end, this little X is you. Now, when this guy over here, hikes the ball, the center hikes the ball to the quarterback.

And let's say he turns around and hands it to one of these backs and he starts running to your side. Then he would draw a little line from my X and say, you're going to hook around here. You've got to get past.

Uh, you know, the offensive end is going to bump and run. He's going to try to go out for a pass. But as soon as you see it's a running play, you let him go and you start running toward the ball carrier and you try to stop him behind the line.

If you can, you, you've got to make a judgment real quick. If it's a running player or passing one, well, you would draw this line on the chalkboard. Well, Hey, that's great.

I love that. Well, come game night. And one of the things they don't tell you if you've ever played football is when you put the helmet on, you can only see a minuscule portion of what you used to be able to see.

And I don't know if my head was too small or my helmet was too big, but the thing kept moving around. Anytime I got up and started running, my helmet was just jiggling around like this. And my effective vision is about like, so, and they said, well, watch and determine if it's a running player or passing play.

Well, guess what? Unlike the chalkboard, all of those X's and O's stand up and start blocking and banging into you and so on, and your helmet's jiggling and runner pass runner pass runner pass. Do I, do I stay with the offensive, you know, the, the receiver here or the guy on the opposite of me, or do I try to run and tackle somebody? Well, it's just all jiggling and there's lights and people are yelling and guys are trying to knock you down and it's completely different than the blackboard, right? Look, Paul knows when he writes this letter to the Thessalonians, this is not just blackboard persecution. These people are genuinely suffering.

They've got real problems. And so this is not just blackboard hope. This isn't just, just, you know, saccharine platitudes.

Paul himself has been through persecution. You remember the list of, of hardships that he has been through. So when he tells you that there is everlasting consolation and hope of good, if anybody ever knew what he was talking about, it's this writer.

He knows what he's saying and he's not shining anybody on. He's not just given sort of a preachification and a nice little, you know, a refrigerator magnet saying that, Oh, isn't that, I'll put that on a greeting card and send it to, to my, my friends. This is, is grist.

This is cleats into the ground. This is something that actually helps you move and operate in the real world. What do you and I need to accomplish our purpose in the real world tomorrow when we're back in the mix and we're, we're back trying to make everything happen as it should do what we're supposed to do, be what we're supposed to be, say what we're supposed to say, think what we're supposed to think, get to the end of the day and look back on it and feel like we redeemed the time.

How do we do that? Paul says, God will comfort our hearts and establish us in every good word and work. Notice what kind of word, what kind of work, what's the adjective there that modifies both Agathos. We have hope of good.

That's the potential for good. That's the expectation in the future of God's good, right? All things working together for God's purpose, his definition of good, my definition of good, little people in the sweatshop don't sweat so much. His definition of good, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is manifest.

The gospel is spread. Who cares if they make nothing or a nickel if they're lost? What about the evangelization of people overseas? What about missionary activity? What about instead of giving them a nickel, we give them the opportunity for eternal life? We can pray for those people. We can investigate to see if there's any sort of missionary.

If we're really concerned about the people in the sweatshop, you find out where the sweatshop is, look into Christian ministry there, see if you can get involved, see if you can send some support. Do you really want to help those people quit worrying about how much they make and start worrying about eternity? Look at things in the light of God's good. Does God care what their wage is? God cares about their immortal souls, doesn't he? And believe me, if they are his children, I have never seen the righteous go hungry or his seed begging bread.

You want to fix their economic situation, get them saved, get them into God's fold. God will take care of them. God takes care of his own, right? So we've got to step back.

We've got to think in terms of the good. It is hope of good, expectation of good. And look how God supplies.

He will comfort our hearts, which means he'll stabilize us where we are with our situations, and he will establish us. This is a word that means rooted and grounded and founded on bedrock in every good word and work. Our words, both what we take in, God's good word, and the words that surround us, the words that constitute our communication in and out will be good, agathos, contributing toward God's purpose and the work we do.

When we come back from the break, we're going to look at what the Bible has to say about good works. It's been a while since we covered this. What is a good work? How do you know if your work you're doing is good? We'll look at that from the word of God when we come back.

