

2Thessalonians 12-11-02a

This is Friday, the 2nd of November, 2012. We're in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and we resume tonight in verse 6. Let's go to the Lord in prayer and we'll begin. Father, whenever we gather to spend this time in fellowship and gleaning truth from your word, we are so grateful for the provision you make for us and the plan and purpose that you have created and included us in for your glory and for the teaching purpose through the Lord Jesus Christ of helping us to understand things that are so far beyond us and so far beyond this world.

We thank you for this refreshment and comfort and encouragement that reminds us that the things of this life are ephemeral and temporary and through Christ we have the opportunity to enter into permanent and eternal things. We pray that as we study this passage together that God the Holy Spirit will teach us and that we will be impressionable and teachable and able to comprehend and make application of the things that we learn this evening. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's take a look at our passage here in 2 Thessalonians. You remember that Paul has written this second letter to the people in Thessalonica who are under some pressure. They in their day and in their way are facing the pressures that are actually common to believers in every generation.

They may vary in the specific face that they wear or form of pressure that they take but all of us are subject to challenge and life wouldn't be any fun if it wasn't a challenge. We would not learn and we would not have the ability to enter into appreciation for God if we didn't have reasons to rely on Him. So first and foremost and it seems like a truism but it is something to remember.

Our pressures, our challenges are the means by which we come to appreciate God. If there was no trouble, what would we need God for? God's work would all be in the past. He had already created a garden of Eden for us.

He had already eliminated sin. He would have already perfected us and already shielded us from any harm and any incursion of evil or sin of any kind. And God would be a historical fact.

He'd be like George Washington, the father of our country, just an icon, a statue, a memory of accomplishments in the past. It's not always something we turn to by way of practical truth but it is nevertheless a fact that without our pain, without our pressure, without our challenges, we would have no occasion for faith. And faith is our entrance into eternal things.

We seize righteousness by faith. We lay hold of God's grace by faith. We enter into inheritance by faith and by endurance.

We demonstrate our love for God in obedience and in perseverance under pressure. There is no pressure, there's no perseverance. It's not necessarily a comfort but it is certainly helpful to

remember that this is the reason God allows challenge into our lives.

Now, Paul has written the entire letter of 1 Thessalonians and the first two chapters that we have studied of 2 Thessalonians reminding these people of God's presence, of His watch care, of His grace, of His purpose, that this challenge and this problem, if you will, is of limited duration. It's only going to last for a time. And this is comforting that it's not endless.

There are some things that are endless. Lake of fire, endless. And whether people are consciously endlessly aware of the lake of fire is a question in my own mind but the lake of fire burns forever and ever.

There are forms of loss even for believers that are permanent, that will not change, that cannot be overcome. If we're slack and apathetic and lazy or distracted and uncaring in this life, you can't make that ground up. Once the Lord Jesus comes back, there is a gulf fixed between us and what we could have achieved and the potential we could have attained.

So it is a wonderful blessing to look into each other's eyes tonight and realize that we are all still here. There is still some time left for us to reduce the gap between what was potential and what was possible and what we actually receive through the grace of God. We determine that.

You remember our memory verse, it's not that the Lord's arm is short or that His ear is heavy, it's us that creates that gap. God's grace is ample. His provision is excess.

You look at these people in New York and the great tropical storm hit and they're flooded and they're without power and they're, of course, being New Yorkers. It's not like they planned very far ahead. They don't live in Florida or the Gulf Coast.

They're not used to this sort of thing. And so I don't mean to seem unsympathetic, but I have to wonder when you have a week's warning that there's this big storm coming and, yes, they didn't know exactly where it was going to hit, but if I knew some big incursion was going to hit, I'd lay in some chow. I'd get some pork and beans and some crackers and some staples, and I'd get me some batteries.

I'd go out there and make sure my can of Coleman fuel hasn't leaked and that I've got a mantle for my Coleman lantern, and I would just make a few preparations in case the power goes out, in case travel becomes difficult, in case the stores are closed. We generally have three to five days' worth of food in the house at all times anyway. Well, these people, some of whom, of course, were flooded out and can't even be in their homes, but there's great need.

And so they're looking around, and they're getting very frustrated and saying, where is the government that ought to be coming in here and bringing generators and giving me a place to stay and giving me food and giving me gasoline and giving me all of these things? When you look at our challenges in the spiritual realm, it's not a matter of the government and it's not a matter of

us. God himself has made provision for us. We have the Holy Spirit.

We've got the truth of God's Word. And we think, well, yeah, but that's kind of like theology and stuff. I've got actual problems.

I've got actual challenges here. This is hard, solid surfaces in my life. These things are real.

Well, knock, knock, knock. Knock, knock, knock. The Word of God is real.

The Spirit of God is real. God in heaven is real. More real than our problems.

More real than these little holographic molecules and stuff around us. This stuff is spoken into existence by the real ruling God of the universe. And if we're facing it, it is by his permission or by his direction.

And he knows about it, and it is designed to be input for our souls. This is what Paul is emphasizing. He uses different words.

He uses different illustrations. But this is the message of first and second Thessalonians, writing to people facing tests and facing challenges. God is in his heaven.

This is of God, and it is for a purpose. If we align ourselves with the purpose of God, if we remember his objectives, then we learn, we grow, we are prepared. We seize and lay hold of eternal life and inheritance.

And when this temporary falls away and we enter into the permanent, which is where God dwells, where the angels dwell, the third heaven and the place that Jesus has gone to prepare for us, this will be like the end of a movie. And for some of us, you know, you might want to argue that it was kind of a bad movie. I didn't like that movie.

It was too scary. It didn't have enough lighthearted humor in it. It was kind of a downer.

You know, for some of us, this life quickly starts not being entertaining and becomes just something we want to get up and walk out and ask for our money back. But God has a purpose in it. And this, when we look back on it from the perspective of eternity, we will understand what Paul meant when he said this is a momentary light affliction.

And we hit periods in our life. God blesses us and we have so many wonderful things in this life. But there are times when just the hard reality of it is we just say, you know, let me go to sleep, wake me up when this is over, you know, transport me to the future and let me be looking back.

Well, someday we will be in the future and we will be looking back. So when we get to Chapter 3 here in 2 Thessalonians and Paul says, Finally, brethren, he has sketched out our place in history. Look at Chapter 2. Don't think that the day of the Lord has come.

This is where you are in history. The day will not come until other things happen first. There is a man of lawlessness.

The spirit of lawlessness is already at work. Now you know what's going on. You know where you are.

You are the repository of the presence of God that suppresses and holds back lawlessness. And when we leave, lawlessness will rule. So if you think things are bad now, be thankful you are not one of the people who will be on this earth when we are removed and that which suppresses is taken out of the way.

And now you know what it is, he says. I remember when I was with you, I told you these things. You know what it is that is keeping things as nice as they are.

And someday that will be gone. Then he says, Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified just as it is with you, that it will propagate, that it will move out, and it will benefit other people just as it has benefited you, that it will be received, that it will be appreciated. This is what glorified really means, appreciated, that people, they look at the Jews in Thessalonica and say they didn't appreciate the message of Paul.

They didn't appreciate the good news of Jesus Christ. And the word was not glorified. But these people did.

They recognized it for what it was. Well, we as believers have a different fabric, a different foundation. And this is what Paul is pointing out.

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord, this is our standard. This is what we are measured by. People in the world today, whether it's your journalists or your politicians or anybody that isn't in a persuasion of Christian faith, it's what's most popular.

There's no depth. There's no real rationale. But it's popular.

It's popular to be in support of gay marriage. Homosexual marriage is going to be widely accepted. And then it's going to go to polygamy.

And then it is going to go to any two people who want to declare themselves married because what's to stop it? There's no reasonable objective once you accept the premise that is currently being put forward. There is no objection that you can advance. So what if you're biologically related? There are benefits from being married, tax benefits, and going to the hospital and deciding whether to pull the plug or not and all this.

These arguments that they're making. So we are different. We have the blessing of God's word.

This is why Paul says, Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may travel out. The

word of the Lord, this is a precious, precious possession for us. Our young people are growing up in a world where how do you know what's right? I remember this when I was a teenager.

I thought, you know, I've heard what my parents have said all my life, but I'm growing up and being an adult, I'll be voting age soon. I don't want to just vote because that's what my parents have taught me, and that's what I've heard all my life. What if these other people have a point? And you know me, I'm the first one to go out and read the other side to see if they've got any valid points.

And a lot of times they do. You know, the truth is often somewhere in the gray area of the middle. And it's not that people we disagree with are utterly and totally wrong and don't have a single valid point.

They often have a valid point. And we've got valid points. And so, well, now what's right? Isn't there some truth in this? Well, yes.

And isn't there some truth in this? And what about this third and fourth and fifth position? There's truth in all of them. So how do we find what to support, what to believe, what to invest ourselves in, what to vote for, what to speak out in favor of? How do we figure it out? Well, in the world, it's all relative. And it's all a matter of, well, what is your priority? What do you think is important? But for us as believers, we're spared the nebulousness and the, well, yes, you have a point, but, and all of this lack of clarity because we have a sure and firm foundation.

And that's what Paul brings the Thessalonians back to. These are people who are challenged. People are making what sound like good points from the synagogue and from the Greek perspective and the cultural perspective and the governmental perspective and the practical perspective.

Why put ourselves at risk? Why put our children at risk? Why be blackballed and excoriated and ostracized over some theological point? Let's just go along to get along. Why make an issue? Why suffer? The word of the Lord. This is our anchor.

This is our measure. This is what tells us in absolute terms what's right and wrong. Pray that that word will go forth and be appreciated.

You want to pray for the election next week? A lot of people praying, oh, Lord, please let my candidate win. Oh, Lord, please let the platform of my favorite party win. We as believers need to pray that the word of the Lord will win.

If you want to pray for the health and future of this nation, pray for its pastors. Pray for the gospel to be clearly presented and clearly understood. Get these dingbats off the airwaves that are obfuscating it and denigrating it and making it a shameful thing and impossible for people to find the truth because it's associated with get rich quick and God is the genie of the lamp to give me

my three wishes and ecstasies and emotionalism and the truth of the gospel, the truth of the eternal future, the truth of God in His heaven is being fogged up.

Pray earnestly. If you want our nation to survive, pray that the word of God will go forth and be appreciated. That's what Paul says here.

It's just as true in our day as it was in his. Don't worry. There's no candidate.

Jesus and the apostles could be our government next week and we would still sink out of sight. I like what somebody said. They were talking about the economic dangers that we face and that we're going the way of Greece and these countries over in Europe and someone said, well, but look, you know, we're making sort of a slow progress here.

The deficit isn't growing quite as fast as it was before and some wag said, well, that's great. So we're sinking less. We're sinking a bit more slowly than the nations in Europe.

They're sinking fast. We're sinking a bit more slowly. So is this good news that, you know, it's going to take us longer to go beneath the surface of the waves? Pray that the word of the Lord will go swiftly and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.

Don't worry so much about all of the yapping going on with the talking heads on every channel and in every part of the Internet. Go to the word of God. This is a light that will accurately reveal the truth and the falsehood of everything you look at, everything you hear, trying to weigh it on its own terms.

You'll never figure it out. Approach it from the foundation of God's word and God's word will illuminate what is good, what is valid, what is right and true, and it will reveal what is dark and what is coming from the enemy and what is false. What is it's amazing.

God's word has I don't know what you would call it. It's almost like an x-ray reveals what's at the core of things. And the best way to identify the truth, support the truth, enter into the truth is to concentrate on the word of the Lord.

And this is what Paul tells the Thessalonians. The Lord is faithful, verse 3. He will establish you and guard you from the evil one. He doesn't say lots and lots of information will establish you and guard you.

He doesn't say really, really good reporting or really, really good editorials or really, really good analysis on the part of experts. Really, really good scientific research. Really, really good lab results.

What is it? The Lord is faithful. He will establish us. And when all of these things burn up and melt with the fervent heat, the Lord is still there.

And what we have learned from Him and about Him and through Him is what's going to abide. So look to the Lord. He's faithful.

He will establish us. He will guide us. He will guard us.

We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now this is an important turning point in this chapter. You are doing and will do, Paul says.

We have confidence that you'll continue this pattern and that you'll move forward in it related to those things that must be done. We have commands. They're not options.

They're not suggestions. I love that thing, you know, the ten suggestions from the Old Testament. It's not suggestions.

They're commands. May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. When you look at those two phrases, this is what we looked at last time.

Love of God, is it subjective or objective? Is it love for God or love that is from God that we exercise? Well, look at the second one, patience of Christ. Hupomone, to remain under, to endure. Well, this is the example set by the Lord Jesus of endurance, right? He came to this earth.

He endured all kinds of injustice and evil speaking and accusation and insult up to, through, and beyond the cross. And that is our example. So the love that God has for us is our example.

The patience that the Lord Jesus Christ had with us is our example. And we are to love and be patient in the way that God has loved and been patient with us. That brings us to verse 6 where we pick up tonight.

We command you, brethren. He said, we know that you are doing and will do these commands. Well, here's one of the commands.

We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the authorization for the command. Somebody can come up and say, cut your lawn.

Well, says who? Who says I've got, what's the matter with my lawn? I don't think my grass is too long. Well, this is the city of Plano. I'm the city of Plano inspector.

I'm saying cut your lawn or redo your fence. Your fence does not meet city code. I'm from the city.

I have the authority of the city behind me to tell you to cut your grass or fix your fence or move this junk car off the curbside. If a neighbor comes up, you say, well, you know, sorry that you're unhappy, but you're not the boss of me, right? Well, if you live in the city, the city is the boss of

you when it comes to things where they have authority. So, Paul invokes the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This isn't Paul saying, you know, as an apostle, I really think you ought to do this. He says, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. What does it mean to walk disorderly? Ask yourself this question.

Am I a disorderly walker? If I examine, if I come along as the city inspector and I say, hmm, I'm watching your walk and I pronounce it disorderly, on what basis could I do that? If God the Holy Spirit is looking at us, if God the Father in heaven, if the Lord Jesus Christ looks at us, on what basis could we be judged orderly or disorderly in our walk? What is a disorderly walk, in other words? We're going to pause and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see what scripture has to say about walking in this life. What is an orderly walk? Because we've got a command here.

This is, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I are commanded to withdraw from anybody that walks disorderly. You know what's interesting is the command is not stop walking disorderly. If this was a group of disorderly people, the command would probably be stop that disorderly walking.

But what is it? The command is withdraw from those who are walking disorderly, which means we should be able to identify disorderly walk and not only not be disordered ourselves, but be able to identify and separate from disorderly believers. Well, are we associating with somebody in here disorderly? Should we expunge them, send them hints? You, out you go. We're not associating with you.

What is this all about? Well, when we come back from the break, we're going to take a look at this whole notion and see what scripture tells us about disorder and disorderly walking. And if you withdraw from it, what does that mean? What is withdraw? Does it mean don't sit down to the table? Does it mean don't talk on the phone? Don't send any texts? Don't email? Don't look at? How big of a shunning is this if we say withdraw? What does withdraw mean? All of that when we come back.