

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

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Paul greets the Thessalonians, telling them how much thanks he gives to God for their growing faith and love. They are persevering so well against persecution that Paul boasts of their example to other churches. He points to God's approval of their faithfulness, that they are suffering for the coming Kingdom and will be found worthy due to their endurance.

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy write to the church of the Thessalonians again. Silvanus is another name for Silas, just as Paul is also known as Saul. Both Silas and Timothy helped Paul in the first missionary journey to Thessalonica. As with many of the New Testament epistles, it is thought that Paul is the main author, that he dictated to various scribes such as Timothy, and then signed the letter with his own hand (2 Thessalonians 3:17, Galatians 6:11, Romans 16:22). However, the Thessalonians knew Silas and Timothy personally too.

During Paul's second missionary journey, he and Timothy and Silas arrived in Thessalonica after a brief imprisonment in the city of Philippi. Paul went to the local Jewish synagogue to share Christ. For three sabbaths, he taught how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women" (Acts 17:3-4).

Thus the church of the Thessalonians was founded. The word translated church is "ekklesia" in Greek which means "assembly." The church of the Thessalonians consisted of the believers in Thessalonica who assembled together, likely in the homes of the believers (Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). This church was composed of some Jews, but mostly of Greeks who feared God and sought truth. But Paul, Silas, and Timothy were not able to remain in Thessalonica for very long to help train the new believers in the church, because many of the unbelieving Jews there were angry at them for preaching the Gospel of Jesus. These men gathered together a mob and attacked the home of a man named Jason, one of the new believers, where Paul and company were staying, causing them to whisk Paul away from the city (Acts 17:5, 10).

Paul probably wrote 1 Thessalonians from the Greek city of Corinth, when Timothy came to him with news that the Thessalonians were withstanding persecution and continuing in the faith. Corinth is in southern Greece, about 350 miles south of Thessalonica, which was in Macedonia. The first letter to the Thessalonians communicated Paul's anxiety for their spiritual wellbeing prior to hearing Timothy's report, his joy to learn from Timothy that they were doing well, his encouragement that they increase all the more in their love for one another, some ways in which they could mature in their faith, as well as clearing up a question about Christ's second coming. The Thessalonians were concerned that if any of them died physically before Jesus came back, they would miss out on being with Jesus. Paul answered that concern, and explicitly

tells them that believers who have died will be raised back to life and will join Jesus when He returns in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

This second letter to the Thessalonians was likely written soon after the first, and it proceeds to further clarify questions the Thessalonians had about the end times, and about Jesus's return. In it, Paul also underscores the importance of working hard and not being a burden on other people, because it seems that some of the Thessalonians weren't earning their own way. They probably reasoned that since Jesus was coming back soon, they should sit around and wait for His return. Paul condemns this and urges the Thessalonians to live a disciplined life and continue to work diligently as preparation; to be ready for Jesus to come back any day, and be living a life that pleases Him upon His return.

Up front, Paul extends *Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

He writes that it is *only fitting* for him to *always give thanks to God* for the Thessalonian *brethren*. That Paul calls them *brethren* makes clear that this letter is written to those who have believed on Jesus, and been born again. The reason why Paul *always gives thanks* is *because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater*.

Apparently Paul has heard more news after his first letter about the Thessalonians' noble, godly behavior toward one another. In his first letter, Paul exhorted them to excel in faith and love (1 Thessalonians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10), and it seems they have fulfilled Paul's hope: *their faith is greatly enlarged, their love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater*. That is the mark of sanctification and maturation; the good things that are begun in a believer's life become stronger and more constant, rather than existing only in random moments. The Thessalonians are living a constant life of faithful obedience, conforming to the image of Christ, embracing their identity as children of God.

Paul looks on them as a proud spiritual father, *therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure*. He boasts of their endurance *proudly* to the other *churches of God*. This means that in his personal interactions and in his letter writing from Corinth, he is passing word back to Macedonia and Asia Minor and probably even Jerusalem about how faithful the Thessalonian believers are, and how well they are withstanding the attacks on their faith. They show *perseverance and faith in the midst of all their persecutions and afflictions which they endure*. Things have not settled down since Paul departed Thessalonica. It is probably the same Jewish enemies and the city leaders who chased Paul out of town who are in open opposition to believers in Jesus, and bestowing *persecutions and afflictions* upon the Thessalonian church (Acts 17:5,10).

Paul declares that their *perseverance and faith* is a *plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that they will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed they are suffering*. Their suffering is not the common suffering that all men and women face in life, it is a particular *suffering* that is a *plain indication* that they are following God's will, because they are suffering for Christ's sake, as Christ suffered.

Paul writes about this suffering for Christ in Romans, indicating that it leads to the immense reward of being glorified with Him:

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”
(Romans 8:16-17)

In the last part of this passage from Romans 8, being “glorified” with Jesus is sharing a reward as a “fellow heir” for suffering with Him, enduring rejection from the world even as Jesus endured rejection from the world. Jesus states this Himself in Revelation, saying,

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
(Revelation 3:21)

As the first part of the Romans 8 passage shows, God is the inheritance of all believers, no matter their behavior. But Jesus will share His great rewards only with those who share in His sufferings, being rejected by the world because of the testimony of Jesus.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that this suffering allows them to be *considered worthy of the kingdom of God*, and receive this great reward, the greatest reward that can be gained in this life. To enter the *kingdom of God* is to walk in the ways of God. This is a privilege any believer in Jesus can choose, but requires faithful obedience to God, and rejection of the ways of the world.

It initially seems odd to think that enduring persecution with *perseverance and faith* is a *plain indication of God’s righteous judgment*. But this is because it is natural for us to prefer comfort to pain. Paul advocates choosing a different perspective, a perspective rooted in eternity. It seems that Paul is saying that God is faithful to allow His people the opportunity to demonstrate their faithfulness in the face of persecution, that He might bestow upon them the greatest rewards of life. In doing this, Paul presents persecution as a blessing.

James says something similar, asserting that believers should:

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
(James 1:2-4)

The idea that our greatest reward in life as believers comes through suffering for Christ is found throughout Paul’s writings. In Philippians 1:29, Paul says “for to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,” making clear that it is a privilege to suffer for Christ.

Later in Philippians 3:8, Paul states “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”

Paul speaks here of the great rewards that can be gained from living faithfully in spite of difficulties. Part of that is the amazing opportunity of coming to know Christ intimately by faith, through enduring in faith, believing that God’s ways will be for our best, no matter the cost. It is this kind of faith that God rewards.

Entering the Kingdom of God requires obedience to God’s ways. It produces a reward that comes through obedience. The reward is both now as well as in the future (Mark 10:29-31). The reward now comes through relationships with other believers, forged in enduring faithfully. It comes through the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). The future reward includes sharing Christ’s inheritance (Romans 8:17b; Revelation 3:21). It is an inheritance won through enduring difficulty, and suffering as Jesus suffered. That means suffering by serving, loving, forgiving, hosting, teaching what is true, and standing for what is true. It means serving our roles as members of the Body of Christ, serving one another in love (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Following the ways of Christ often brings us trouble in this world, but will ultimately be rewarded by God.

The constant theme of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians was that they would be found worthy on the day of Jesus’s return (1 Thessalonians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23). He echoes that here, using their *perseverance and faith* in the face of *suffering* as evidence that they *will be considered worthy* of entering God’s *kingdom*.

Biblical Text

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: ² Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; ⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. ⁵ This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.