A Persecuted But Faithful Church
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 (NKJV)

- Today we start Paul’s second letter to the church of Thessalonica.
- Paul had founded this church on his second missionary journey, and it didn’t take long for an uproar in the community to force him out.
- So Paul, wanting to help establish this church in the truth, writes these two letters: First and Second Thessalonians. Back in November, we finished up the first letter, and now here in the New Year, January 2016, we are looking at the second.
- Let’s read verses 1 through 12 and get a foundation for what we will be looking at today.

Vs. 1-2—“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Grace and peace, they’re always in that order. It’s the grace of God that brings us the peace of God. There is no lasting peace without the grace of God.
- And that grace is found in a relationship with God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paul here reminds the church…

Vs. 3—“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you abounds toward each other…”

- Paul starts his letter with what was good. Later in Chapter 3, he warns them, but here in Chapter 1, he points out the good that he sees in them.
- It’s a great example to us on how to deal with each other in the body. If you’re going to challenge someone, or warn someone, or even confront someone, you might want to make sure you start out with the good things that you see in him or her before you point out the bad.
- Lay the groundwork of grace before you confront the issue so that they know you’re committed to them, and not just critical of them.
Paul could say, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, for it is fitting. It’s a fitting thing to do and it’s the right thing to do—to boast in what the Lord is doing in you.”

And notice what that was: “Your faith grows exceedingly…”

Grows exceedingly: to increase above ordinary degree or beyond measure

- Why exceedingly? What was different about this church that Paul would add exceedingly? It probably has something to do with the persecution they were dealing with.
- When you’re a persecuted church, you’re either in or out; there is no lukewarm place in a church that is being fired on.
- Historically, the church persecuted is often a healthier, stronger, and more powerful church.
- You can go all the way back to the early church in Jerusalem.
- No matter what the world threw at them, they just got stronger.
- When the religious took out Stephen, a great outpouring of persecution followed it up, but notice what the believers did…

“Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” Acts 8:1-5 (NKJV)

- What the enemy threw at them for bad, God used for good.
- The church scattered everywhere preaching the word. The seed of the gospel moved out of Jerusalem, not because they had a vision to take the gospel to the surrounding cities, but instead it was persecution that did it.
- Don’t fear persecution—it might be the very thing that God uses to get His church moving in power.
- The church of Thessalonica was known for their extraordinary faith in the midst of their persecution and trial.
- The next thing Paul points out is their great love for one another.
Vs. 3—“...and the love of everyone of you abounds towards each other.”

- They had an extraordinary faith and they also were growing in grace, loving each other again probably because of the persecution.
- When you are being attacked and picked on by the world, the church becomes a refuge, a safe place where people can be loved on and built up.
- Notice here Paul speaks of what they’re going through.

Vs. 4—“...so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure...”

- Did you notice Paul added another attribute here?
- It’s the word “patience,” it was being developed through persecution and tribulation.
- I know it’s not what you want to hear, but it’s true. Trials are the very things that bring about the work of patience in our life.
- Listen to that familiar verse written by James...

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” James 1:2-4 (NKJV)

- We count it all joy because we know there is the gift of patience that is being deposited into our lives through the trial.
- I absolutely believe that one of the reasons that some of us are going through more trials than others is because we have not embraced the gift of patience in our trial.
- We are still very impatient with one another, with our family, with our neighbors, with projects at work, with ministry and trials keep coming our way, but we have not embraced the gift of patience.
- We are not growing in patience and so life is one big fat trial or drama. Their lives are full of drama because they have not grown in patience.
- When trials and tribulations come our way, we must step back and find what we need in the Lord so that the fruit of patience flows in our lives.
Every time a trial comes, tell yourself, “I am going to embrace the gift of patience. I am going to embrace the gift of maturity in this one.”

- Notice here Paul will speak to this persecution—he speaks both to the persecuted and to those who are persecuting.

Vs. 5—“…which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer…”

- What an amazing way to see suffering!
- Notice the statement, “…that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also suffer.”
- Like they entered a new dimension in the kingdom of God.
- It’s evidence that we are in the kingdom.

This last week the Vikings played Green Bay at Green Bay, and by the way they won, not sure about Seattle, but Green Bay won! Now when the Packers came out onto the field, everyone erupted with their yellow and green jerseys on, faces painted, and there was some crazy guy with his shirt off in 20 degree weather with a cheese head! However, when the Vikings came out onto the field with their purple and white jerseys, everyone with a cheese head let them know how much they disapproved. Why? They are on two different teams, working for two different bosses and representing two different states, two different kingdoms.

- So it is with you and I—we are no longer citizens of this world, but citizens of the kingdom, and the world we live in is opposed to our King. Listen to what Jesus said in John’s gospel…

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.” John 15:18-21 (NKJV)
• So if we suffer a bit, don’t freak out. If someone on the baseball team mocks you because you’re seeking the Lord before each game, don’t freak out. If your boss is riding you because you have to take Sundays off, don’t quit on him.

• Just remember, while we are here on earth, it’s an “away game.” Persecution is going to happen as long as we are here on this turf.

• One day we will be home!

• Until that day, we keep suiting up. Remember, we are on the winning team!

• And our King is going to have the last say. Notice verse 6…

Vs. 6—“…since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you…”

• Did you get that? It’s a righteous thing with God to repay tribulations to those who trouble you.

• Notice it does not say, “It’s a righteous thing for you to repay those who trouble you.”

• There is nothing righteous about that. It only proves that we’re still not embracing our new identity; that we’re still living like citizens of the old kingdom and not the new one.

In my first few years of ministry, my biggest struggle was my younger brother. I don’t think he really believed that I was the real deal. He had seen me in high school when I was not following the Lord. It was just a few years into my walk with the Lord, when I was serving in the youth ministry. I don’t think he saw me as a legit believer, especially teaching the Word to a bunch of high school students who had no desire for it, so he made it hard on me. When I was teaching, he would be a distraction. I remember one of our first retreats we stopped at McDonald’s to get everyone some lunch and he kept bucking my authority, undermining my leadership, and something he said just pushed me too far and the flesh button was pushed. I reverted back to older brother and as he was going into the restroom, I followed him. I was going to take him out in the bathroom—he was going to feel the wrath. As I got to the door, my dad stopped me, stood in front of me, and said, “Don’t do it. Just love him, that’s what he needs the most. Don’t fix him with your fist. Love him with your heart.” He then said, “Let the Lord deal with him. We love them and let God deal with them.” Eventually, my brother got in gear with the Lord and
even later, became a part of our youth staff. Why? It’s because his big brother loved him. The one that punished him in life did not love him into eternal life.

- Notice what Paul promises here for the believer…

Vs. 7—“...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels…”

- Those of us who are troubled can find rest—that’s the promise we have as believers.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

- Notice, He gives us rest when we come to Him. In times of trouble make your way to Jesus and He will give you rest.
- And it’s not a fading rest unlike the world gives, but that rest will continue to grow all the way into eternity.
- Notice, when Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.
- What a day that will be! Those that might have made life hard on you for loving and serving the Lord, there is a day of reckoning coming.
- Paul will describe this day…

Vs. 8-9—“...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power…”

- Don’t be fooled; all roads lead to Jesus, but not all will lead to heaven.
- Everyone will see Him, and those who knew Him and served Him will find a rest like never before, a perfect rest.
- But those who rejected the forgiveness of God, those who stayed in their sin, those who said you’re a fool for following Jesus…
- Hey, for those who are in ISIS and taking the lives of believers in the Middle East…
• Well, there is a day coming when every eye will see, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord!
• He will have the last word; there is a punishment coming.
• But for the believer, notice the hope we have…

**Vs. 10**—“…when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”

• “…admired among those who believed.”
• Have you ever been somewhere that just takes your breath away? Maybe Yosemite or this last week when the snow hit our valley? The mountains were incredible. I drove up into Oak Glen. Wow!
• As beautiful as all that is, you haven’t seen nothing yet!
• When we stand before the God who created it all, I believe our mouths will drop.
• To see Him, to gaze upon Him, to embrace Him, it will be a day of admiration that will never end.
• Isaiah got a glimpse and this is what he wrote…

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.” Isaiah 6:1-4 (NKJV)

• Better than any star wars movie.
• That’s why he ends the chapter with this…

**Vs. 11-12**—“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
That’s it! That’s the very reason that we exist—to bring glory to God, to be a trophy of His grace.