



Standing Strong under Pressure

Sunday October 14, 2020

2 Thessalonians 1 (ESV) Paul, 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 our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. ⁴ Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. ¹¹ To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction: We all, from time to time, face pressure, problems, and pain. Normally we face the stress of life and just keep plowing through, day after day. Occasionally the pressure can get to us and it's in these times that we are prone to crack, crumble, and crash. It's in times like this that many people are left hurting and even hopeless. For many people, hopelessness has become their existence.

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians probably less than six months after writing the first letter to them. He wrote again so quickly to clear up a few items in the first letter, but also to encourage this young church because they were under so much pressure. He wrote to infuse them with hope so that they would not break under the weight and pressure of persecution and personal hardship.

Listen to what Paul had prayed for in his first letter to them...

1 Thessalonians 3:10-13 (NLT) Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith. ¹¹ May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon. ¹² And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. ¹³ May he, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.

Now in His second letter he thanks God for answered prayer...

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing. ⁴ We proudly tell God's other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering.

Pressures create opportunities for greater faith and love

Their endurance under pressure and their faithfulness to Christ in all the persecution and hardship they faced was a breeding ground for flourishing faith and love.

- (NLT) your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing
- (ESV) Your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.
- (CEV) your faith in God and your love for each other keep growing all the time.
- (GW) your faith is showing remarkable growth and your love for each other is increasing.
- (AMP) your faith is growing ever greater, and the [unselfish] love of each one of you toward one another is continually increasing.

Pressure didn't tear them down it built them up. It made them stronger in their faith in God and love for each other. Pressure caused them to dig deeper into the truth of the word and grow deeper in their faith. This was a practice that they had developed early in their walk with God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJV) For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

I have found that God, many times, does some of His greatest work in times of pressure.

James 1:2-4 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

1 Peter 1:6-9 (ESV) In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. An easy life can lead to a shallow faith. Faith shines best under pressure.

Hebrews 11 is filled with examples of men and women whose faith in God grew most under times of trials and tremendous pressure.

The Thessalonians believers were facing persecution and hardship because of their belief in Christ. Many were being mistreated and marginalized by friends, family and leaders in their communities simply because they chose to follow Christ and His word.

But it's in times like these that we must turn to the word and stand for what the scriptures teach concerning the ways of Christ and allow our faith in God and love for one another to grow deeper and stronger.

Pressure brings the promise of the kingdom into focus

2 Thessalonians 1:5 (NLT) And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering.

So many times, when we go through severe trials, we tend to think that God has forsaken us and is not working out His plan for us.

Paul is saying, “quite the contrary!”.

He wants us to understand that suffering for the sake of the gospel is often God’s means to work out His eternal purpose and prepare us for His kingdom.

He had already taught them that we are destined to suffer for the truth of the gospel.

1 Thessalonians 3:2-3 (NLT) We sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.

Listen to what he wrote to Timothy in his second letter to him...

2 Timothy 3:10-12 (NLT) You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

When he and Barnabas revisited the new churches that they had founded in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Luke summarizes their mission in this way in...

Acts 14:22 they were “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’”

This was a common theme for Paul. Persecution and hardship will come but God will use it for His glory...

2 Thessalonians 1:5 (NLT) And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering.

The idea in verse 5 is not that suffering somehow qualifies us for being worthy of God’s kingdom. That would make salvation a matter of human works or merit.

Rather, persevering in suffering and persecution is an evidence that God is working in us, preparing us for His eternal kingdom.

Although we have been blessed and shown mercy of living in a country where we are not currently suffering persecution, it is important that we persevere through whatever trials we may be facing.

We must keep our eyes in the coming full manifestation of the kingdom of God, when He will reward all who have suffered for the sake of Christ and His righteousness and will judge all the wicked. Those have refused to place their faith in Christ.

Conclusion

Often in our lives, we find ourselves in situations where we do not know what to do. The circumstances of life have swirled out of control and the pressure is overwhelming. But the promise of God is that in that moment, He does what needs to be done. He will not leave us alone; He will not forget we need Him.