

I had planned this message for two weeks ago, but apparently God wanted it preached for this Sunday.

Today we remember and pray for the persecuted church.

2 Thessalonians 1 is the perfect part of the Bible for this day.

The church in Thessalonica 2,000 years ago was a persecuted church.

You might say, “Well and good, Pastor John, but why should I be concerned about persecution?”

“I am not persecuted. I don’t know anyone who is persecuted. I just want to be comfortable and rich.”

Even if we would not say that we might come dangerously close to thinking that.

There are several problems with that attitude. I am only going to go after two.

To think that way is to misunderstand the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church.

You are a part of His flock, His family, His people all over the world.

If you are a parent, how important is it to you that your kids care about one another?

How important is it that they think about the well being of their siblings and not just themselves?

You are part of a family that stretches all over the world.

The Lord wants you to care about His children everywhere. They are your siblings, your kin.

These people, and there are far fewer than polling suggests, will be with you forever.

We need to learn to care about one another as brothers and sisters near and far.

Moreover, I want you to think about where these Thessalonian believers lived.

Of course, they lived in Thessalonica, a Roman town that was in what is now Greece.

Then it was a thriving city filled with people who worshipped the emperor and the Greek gods.

The population and government of Thessalonica did not like people who rejected their beliefs.

It put the whole community at risk.

These Christians were atheists. They did not make offerings to the gods who watched over the city.

They did not teach their children to do so. In fact, they tried to convince people not to.

Secondly, the local Jewish Synagogue was threatened by these troublemaking Christians.

They distorted the Jewish faith and were about to upset the delicate political balance in town.

Third, justice was hard to come by in Thessalonica. You can read about it in Acts 17.

Some of the Greeks and Jews had become believers in Jesus Christ. They are our brothers and sisters.

But they had been threatened by mobs, led by professional agitators, and beaten for their faith.

People felt justified in doing such violence. After all, they were just defending their society.

No legal action was taken against those who harmed Christians.

I want to point out to you that where we live now might not be so far away from such things.

You might say, “No, this is America!”

But I say... People are people. If people get scared that you threaten their comfort, livelihood, money...

They will attack you too.

Christians are vulnerable. We have always been so, because we serve a different God, not of this world.

We live for another kingdom. People in the world are not going to understand.

### **Live worthy of the Kingdom of God in a world destined for destruction.**

This is the unquestionable message of this passage before us this morning.

You are going to be persecuted, in small ways and big ways maybe. You cannot avoid it or hide from it.

Jesus said, “In this world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.”

2 Timothy 3:12, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

So, you are going to be persecuted together with others in this world who are already being persecuted.

The question before us is not how to vote so that persecution does not happen.

It is not how I can live so that I do not have to suffer... despite what some false teachers say.

Come tonight and learn about false gospel teachers in our country right now.

The question is not how to defend ourselves from people who would harm us.

The question is this: How should I live amidst persecution so that I am worthy of my Lord, Jesus Christ.

## I. Thankfulness in suffering

1:1-5

We find in verses 3 and 4 that Paul is constantly giving thanks for these Christians and bragging about them.

“In all the churches we speak proudly about you”

Why?

The reasons for his thanksgiving and pride are found all over verses 3 and 4. There are three:

1. Faith (vs. 3, 4) From Hebrews 11 we know that faith means believing something that you don't see. Faith is important for lots of things in life and science and even shopping. But it is especially important for following Jesus Christ, because we cannot see Him. We must trust others who have. Everything in the Christian life is about trusting Jesus and learning to trust Him more. Why? Listen. This is important. It is because He is trustworthy.
2. Love (vs. 3) John makes it clear in his letters that if you do not have love you are not a Christian. Life with Christ is all about learning to live in His love. As we understand the love He has for us, His own children we begin to love others in a new way. Loving others is not just about feeling nice feelings, but living out that love in action. The follower of Jesus realizes that He puts people in our lives so that we can love them.
3. Perseverance (vs. 4) We might have expected “hope” as in other parts of the NT. But what is perseverance? It is hope tested and sustained through all kinds of hardship. In the Bible we find perseverance is an essential element of following Jesus. You cannot be a Christian without it. If you do not persevere; you will not be saved.  
**Colossians 1:22-24** Suffering is essential for perseverance.

In verses 4 and 5 we find three different words used for what these faithful Christians are going through.

Persecution = comes from other people who are opposed to Jesus Christ.

Sometimes it even comes from Christians who think they are doing good but are not.

Afflictions = KJV “tribulations” = NIV “trials” = This is the New Testament word for testing from God.

The point of “tribulation” is that God is doing something in us... perfecting, refining, teaching.

Sometimes others are causing tribulation. The point is that it is coming from someone.

This might include persecution or other hardships, sickness, poverty, pain.

Suffering = The word now emphasizes our experience in the hardship, that it is hard.

And this can be any kind of suffering that might have to be endured.

Because of what we endure, it helps others to see the value of what we suffer for, the Kingdom of God.

In verse 5 we can see that this suffering, these trials, the persecution, has an important result in our lives.

They are evidence of God's right judgment SO THAT we be worthy of the Kingdom.

Really? That seems odd. How does this work? **Acts 5:27-42**

There is something else that God is up to when you suffer for Christ in faith, love, and perseverance.

## II. Glory in the coming judgment

1:6-10

In verses 6 and 7 the word “affliction” or “tribulation” is used three times over. It is the focus.

This is all about God's justice. You should read this,

“It is right for God to afflict those who afflict you and to relieve you who are afflicted and us too.”

This is a huge theme throughout the Bible. The Lord is coming in judgment and vindication for His own.

This truth is the refuge and comfort of God's persecuted people through the ages.

You can see it in ancient Egypt. God came for Pharaoh and rescued His people.

David prays for this in the Psalms over and over, “Save me and destroy the wicked.”

The prophets speak often about the coming Day of the Lord when God will destroy all who oppose Him.

And He will bring rescue, justice, and comfort for all His children who were oppressed.

You might look out at this world and see the atrocities committed against Christians in Iran, India, Africa.

You might hear about the pastors in China sitting in prison for preaching about Jesus.

You might consider the Christians in America tormented for not baking a gay cake or praying in public.

But God is watching even now. These and much more do not go unnoticed.

Government officials, judges, lawyers, activists, protesters and rioters, abortionists, criminals and murderers...  
They might all think that they are getting their way, and getting away with murder.  
But they are not. God is watching. He will set it all right.

Even now judgment is falling upon those who oppose God and His people. Romans 1 tells us of this.

The lives of these people who hurt God's people are not going very well.

But there is a judgment coming, fearsome, terrible. These people will have to face God in His hot anger.  
vs. 7 "The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire."

God will not go easy on these people. (vss. 8-9)

"retribution" means people get paid back what they have done.

It is the ultimate "what goes around comes around." Retribution means that God gets even.

Therefore, I do not need to worry about vengeance or working out justice for me.

I do not need to get anyone back for what has been done to me or to any of my dear friends.

God is going to do that and a whole lot better than I ever could and He will be perfectly fair.

This comes to every person who "does not know God and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

And they will "pay the penalty of eternal destruction." This means that they suffer forever.

Some teachers today are teaching against the doctrine of eternal suffering.

They don't like the idea that God would be that cruel. But God is not cruel. God is perfectly just.

If you do not like God's idea of justice then that is a problem for you, not for God.

These people teach that God just destroys people, gone forever, no ore suffering.

But the Bible does not teach this. The Bible teaches that hell is a place of eternal suffering forever.

This is why you do not want to get on the wrong side of God and His people.

This is why you do not want to sign up with the world and its programs and plans.

**Revelation 14:1-12** A vision of the end as it draws near and the judgment of God.

Finally, in that day, you and I will be revealed in the truth... and even those who hated us will see.

But especially those who have loved the Lord Jesus will see... the glory of those who believed. (vs. 10)

Remember **Daniel 12:1-3**. There is a revealing that is coming.

People who are trying to save the planet miss what is really going on. **Romans 8:18-19, 20-21**

Why live for Christ? There are many reasons, but what a reason this is! **Colossians 3:1-4**

So, considering all this Paul prays for them.

Interestingly, he does not pray that God would rescue them out of tribulation.

Rarely do we actually find that sort of prayer in the Bible.

Paul prays that they would be faithful amid tribulation.

### III. Prayer to live for Jesus

1:11-12

In this prayer are three requests. What do you and I need in a society that increasingly hates the things of God?

These three things that Paul prays for this persecuted church are a perfect summary.

1. That God would count us worthy of our calling.

To be worthy of the Kingdom of God is a reason for perseverance in verse 5.

Now it is the first request in Paul's prayer, that these Christians would be counted worthy of Christ.

What does this mean? **Matthew 10:28, 32-33, 37-39**

To take up your cross means to embrace suffering because Jesus is worth it. Then you are worthy.

2. That God would fulfill every desire for good and every work motivated by powerful faith.

God has work for you to do, young or old, and He lets you know... by your desires, by others asking

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that He has planned out good works for you to walk in. Do them.

You know when you think, "Maybe I could help with that, teach that, serve there..."

And then, the next second you say to yourself, "That would be hard and complicate things." No!

3. That the name of Jesus would be glorified in you and you in Him.

Paul is praying that these persecuted Christians would show people what Jesus is like.

That, when people see people who bear the name of Christ that we would also reflect Christ.

It takes prayer to live this way because it is not easy, and people do not want to be reminded of...

This is what it is like to live worthy of the Kingdom of God in a world that hates God.