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A1120 – May 15, 2011 – 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5
Persevering In Preparation For The Kingdom

If you'd turn in your Bible to 2 Thessalonians. We've introduced 2 Thessalonians by reviewing Paul's writings. Paul wrote 13 epistles, 2 Thessalonians is the third in sequence of the 13. It follows Galatians and 1 Thessalonians. The theme is the day of the Lord, central to everything in the letter is a proper understanding of the day of the Lord and you'll see that as we go into the outline of the letter.

The outline is how we will remember the letter. If we were the Thessalonians we wouldn't have a problem because they lived it, they had to face the pressures the letters address. We don't, right now at least. So we need some way to remember. With 1 Thessalonians we had 5 S' and I got those from Dr Walvoord. Chapter 1 was Salvation, chapter 2 was Service, chapter 3 was Sanctification, chapter 4 was Surety and chapter 5 was Safety. 5 S'. Now we're going to have the 3 E's with 2 Thessalonians and I'm not following any one author's outline with this scheme. I just looked at ten or eleven of them and read the letter and looked at the outlines and read the letter and asked, now what would have been the impact of each chapter on the Thessalonians. That's how I came up with this.

So chapter 1 let's say is Encouragement. If I was a Thessalonian and I read chapter 1 I would be encouraged. Look at verse 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 even greater; 4therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you, churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you and your. 5This 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." Now would it not encourage you that Paul

was so impressed with your faith and love and perseverance even in the midst of persecution? Of course it would. And then he goes on in verse 6 with more encouragement, encouragement to continue to persevere under the persecution because God is just and God is going to judge the persecutors. He says, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels flaming fire, 8dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, 10when he comes to be glorified in his Saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed – for our testimony to you was believed." And then in verse 11 Paul prays for them. And so the first E stands for encouragement and it's an Encouragement Of Their Faith, Love And Perseverance Under Persecution.

The second E stands for Error. Since Paul's last letter some error had crept into the Thessalonian congregation to the effect that the day of the Lord had already come and they were in it. This Paul seeks to correct in chapter 2. So let's read, verse 1, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, 2that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3Let no one in any way deceive you," so clearly error had crept in regarding the day of the Lord and while Paul had taught them that they would not enter the day of the Lord the deceivers had told them that they were already in it! So Paul begins to sketch in verse 3 why they could not possibly be in the day of the Lord. 3Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the Temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?" And so you can see that Paul taught them these things when he was first with them but now that deceivers have come in and challenged Paul's teaching, Paul is correcting their error regarding the events which signal that the day of the Lord has come, namely the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness. Since those things had not occurred it was impossible for them to be in the day of

the Lord. So the second E stands for Error of the Claim that the Day of the Lord had Come is Corrected.

So the first E stands for Encouragement, the second he stands for Error, and third he stands for Exhortation. At this point Paul begins to exhort, specifically for three things, namely prayer and discipline and labor. Paul exhorts them to pray in verse one, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith. And he exhorts them in verse six to lead a disciplined life. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you receive from us. 7For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in a disciplined manner among you," and then he begins to give an example of living in a disciplined life. And probably because of the context what was going on was there was a certain subset of the believers at Thessalonica, that because of the teaching that Christ was coming soon that they just quit working altogether, so we'll just bum off of everybody else, there's no use doing any work because when Christ comes back we're going to go into the kingdom and He's going to redistribute everything anyway so why bother working? See, that's why it's dangerous to misunderstand or neglect doctrine. Doctrine teaches you how to live; it shapes your life, no matter what doctrine you believe. It's like the David Koresh group in Waco - they believed false doctrine, they thought they were in the day of the Lord, they were historicists and the reason they guarded that compound to the death was because they thought they were the Jews and that the world outside was the Gentiles and it was Armageddon. That's how these false doctrines work out into people doing these crazy things. It does matter what you believe. Here's some believers, no reason to work, Jesus is coming tomorrow, He'll usher in the kingdom and He'll redistribute everything so why work? Lazy believers. Took a truth and distorted it. And I'm not so sure Peter didn't have these characters in mind when he wrote about Paul's writings being hard to understand and how the untaught and unstable distort what he wrote. I think he had this group of believers in mind at Thessalonica when he wrote that. And the reason I think that is because it's the same context, it's about the day of the Lord and how that ushers in the kingdom. So here we are once more with believers distorting truth and it leads to spiritual disaster. And so he says some have distorted this truth and

turned it into an excuse for laziness. Verse 7, "for you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in a disciplined manner, you, 8nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 10For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, and he is not to eat, either. 11For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies." That's what lazy people do, get in other people's business and distract them for awhile. And so chapter 3 is a series of Exhortations that relate to three things, the Exhortation to Prayer, Discipline and Labor. These are things which are a proper response to the any moment return of Christ.

So we have three E's, chapter 1 is the E that stands for Encouragement, that's an important element of the Christian life, we need encouragement, and Paul Encourages them for their Faith, Love and Perseverance Under Persecution. In chapter 2 the E stands for Error and Paul is here correcting the Claim that the Day of the Lord Had Come. It had not and believing that it had would lead to spiritual disaster. And finally chapter 3 the E stands for Exhortation, Paul concludes with Exhortation to Pray, to be Disciplined and to Labor and not be a mooch.

Now, in 2 Thess 1:1 and 2 we have words almost identical to the greeting in 1 Thess 1:1-2. Again we see the same three men, **Paul and Silvanus and Timothy**. The Thessalonians knew all of them because they had all traveled to Thessalonica on the 2nd Missionary Journey. Let's quickly review the 2nd Journey. **Paul** had set out from Antioch of Syria on the 2nd journey with **Silvanus**, who Luke refers to in Acts as **Silas**, the purpose of this journey was to follow up with the churches Paul had established on the 1st journey in southern Galatia. Silas was a Jewish believer, well-respected by those at Jerusalem and Antioch. As they accomplished their mission of strengthening these churches and filling them in on the decision of the Jerusalem Council they met a disciple named **Timothy** whose mother was a Jewish believer but whose father was Greek. He had been trained in the OT Scriptures since childhood and when Paul preached the message of Christ Jesus he recognized the OT Scriptures were pointing to this person as the Christ and he believed

in Him. Now upon Paul's return he had become more than just a believer, he had become a disciple, a student of Christ, and Paul wanted him to go with him. Evidently he recognized in Timothy a strong zeal for the word and a pastor's heart and so he took him to train him for the ministry. At first Timothy is something of a helper to Paul and Silvanus as they minister in Philippi and Thessalonica. But when Paul and Silas are kicked out of Thessalonica Timothy steps into the ministry when Paul and Silas send him back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage them through the teaching of sound doctrine. So these three men ministered to the Thessalonians but it's through Timothy that the correspondence occurs because he's the only one who had safe access to Thessalonica.

Verse 2, **To the church of the Thessalonians.** Some news, presumably reaching the ears of Paul and Silvanus through Timothy, now merits a second correspondence. It has only been a few months since the first letter was written. But there are at least three new developments that have alarmed Paul and so he's going to address these three concerns in this letter. We'll just look at the first one today.

The first concern is an increase in persecution. Persecution had begun when Paul and Silvanus preached the gospel in the synagogue at Thessalonica, reasoning from the OT Scriptures and showing that the OT Scriptures taught that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead and that Jesus had fulfilled these OT Scriptures. Therefore Jesus was the Messiah. Now, some of the Jews were persuaded, meaning they believed, and a large number of God-fearing Gentiles believed and further, a number of the leading women in the city believed. So you had a tremendous response to the gospel in Thessalonica from all quarters: Jew, Gentile, male, female, and this is what caused the situation at hand because obviously this was a threat to Satan. And so the Jews became jealous of Paul and Silvanus' success, Satan always uses embedded sin patterns and the Jewish leadership had the embedded sin pattern of jealousy, so Satan picks that up and amplifies it to block evangelism. Satan doesn't like it when large numbers of people respond to the gospel because everyone that responds to the gospel is defecting from his kingdom into Christ's kingdom. So to block any further evangelism he centers on the two problem makers, Paul and Silvanus. And to do this he inspires the leading Jews, through their sin pattern of jealousy, to hire some wicked men from the marketplace, some of the local criminal element. They

stir up a mob like Satan always does; he's the author of confusion, never does Satan want to clarify issues. Satan is in the business of confusing the issues so people can't see what the real issues are. So he stirs up a mob and got the whole city in an uproar. Nobody knew what the real issues were. All the city authorities could figure out was we've got two guys who are disturbing the peace around here, we got to shut this down, get law and order around here, and all they keep hearing are the names Paul and Silvanus. Somehow these two characters are the problem and they're staying over at Jason's house and so this is how the persecution got started. It was a tremendous advance of the gospel. And it resulted in Paul and Silvanus getting kicked out of town.

Now Satan may have thought he won a tactical victory but it didn't stop there because these believers in Thessalonica were a tremendous testimony. It kept on going. They turned to God from idols and that testimony went forth from Thessalonica all over Macedonia and Achaia and all over the ancient world and everyone was hearing word of this and so what did Satan do? He continued to stir up persecution; I've got to shut these people up, I can't have these defections from my kingdom. So one of the tactics Satan uses is blocking evangelism, he hates evangelism because when people come to Christ they're defecting from him. So that's a threat. He'll try to confuse the issues, he'll blind the minds of the unbelieving with deceptive doctrines. He has clever techniques he uses. A second tactic Satan starts using, when the first one isn't working too well, is the one he's using here, persecuting believers. And he can do this a number of ways, sometimes all that is needed is intimidation. It can be social intimidation, it can be intellectual intimidation and this one has been pretty effective in America. You can't even talk about biblical creationism without immediately being thrown in with the flat earth society and all the other nutcases. So what do Christians do? They just keep it to themselves. I see this all the time. That's one of the most effective tactics Satan has used in our country, oh, we can't talk about that, that's not the politically correct view. So people get intimidated, they're embarrassed and they just keep it to themselves. But if intimidation doesn't work, which it wasn't at Thessalonica, these people were hardcore advocates of the gospel, then Satan says, alright, fine, let's get physical. If he can't get you to shut your big mouth then he'll just start torturing and killing you. And this goes on in many places in the world - North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, mostly Islamic countries but also in other places where the gospel is really making inroads. They don't fool around; they set

car bombs in front of your church, gun you down, kidnap you and chop your head off. That kind of thing does go on in the world today, it's going on right now, your brothers and sisters in Christ are being executed on a daily basis because they won't shut their big mouth about Jesus Christ. So that's a second tactic of Satan, physical persecution. And this was going on at Thessalonica. It started with Paul and Silas, it continued with the Thessalonians and now it's increased and so Paul writes.

So here you have the second letter and if you look at verse 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**, now part of this is an answer to one of Paul's prayers in the first letter. So let's go back to 1 Thess 3:12 so you can see this. Paul prayed, he prayed without ceasing, he was a constant prayer warrior; this was an area of strength early on in Paul's ministry and Lord knows what would happen if we were prayer warriors. I don't mean people who tiptoe into the presence of the Lord. I mean prayer warriors who know they have access, people who will march right up to the Lord and say, Lord, do you see what's going on down here, open your eyeballs, like Hezekiah in Isa 37 or arguing with God in prayer, citing Scripture, like Moses in Exod 32. Those are the kinds of prayers that got God's attention and He answered. And here we find one of those prayers offered by Paul in verse 12, "and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you..." etc, etc...this is the kind of prayer that Paul offers because they were under persecution. And you ask, why offer a prayer for increased love for people facing persecution? Why such an emphasis on the importance of love when Christians are being persecuted? Answer: because we need encouragement when we're persecuted. It's not a time for everyone to go hide out in their little corner of the world until the persecution lifts. That's what the believers in the book of Hebrews were doing. They were forsaking assembling together. They said if we gather together we'll be killed. But if you forsake assembling with one another in times like that how can you encourage one another through love for one another? You can't, but that's one of the tendencies when persecution comes, let's stop assembling. Why? Because the persecutors aren't stupid - they find out where you assemble and that location becomes the prime target. So if I want to avoid persecution I just avoid assembling. It's that easy. Paul says no, "may the Lord cause you

to increase and abound in love for one another...” keep assembling, keep loving, keep encouraging one another. And now look at the answer to Paul’s prayer in 2 Thess 1:3. Here’s the answer that Paul obviously heard report back from Timothy, “...your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;” and Paul says, aha, God answered my prayer, you’ve increased in your love for one another and so therefore verse 3, **We ought always to give thanks to God for you**, it’s **only fitting**, He’s answered our prayer, He’s caused your love to abound for one another in the midst of persecution. You have not abandoned one another, you have loved one another. Thank you God.

And another thing he thanks God for in this prayer is also in verse 3, **because your faith is greatly enlarged**. Their faith had grown. When does our faith grow? It grows as we face trials and tribulations in life and we keep trusting the Lord. We’d like to say it grows even in the times of peace and stability but in reality it doesn’t. We have to be kicked in the rear to grow. And we all know this. Ask any Christian when their faith grew the most and they’ll list this trial and that trial. You won’t hear any of them saying, well, when I was sitting on the beach with a martini. And so God sends us trials so that our faith will be tested so that we’ll develop endurance, the ability to withstand greater pressures of life and grow up spiritually. That’s what it did for the Thessalonians. They were facing persecutions and they were abounding in love for one another through it all and trusting the Lord. They were suffering with Christ and therefore there is going to be some neat conclusions in verse 5 that relate to the kingdom.

Now, let me remind you that we are very sheltered in the United States from the kind of physical persecution they were facing. We have what is called soft Christianity in the United States. Most of the world doesn’t have a clue what soft Christianity is. And what happens, because we’re so sheltered, is we get the idea that, well, there are Christians out there in third world countries, poor, uneducated souls and they need us, they really need what we have here in America, and it’s true in one sense, we all need one another, but it’s us that are in much greater need of them. These are the Christians who live the normal Christian life; the normal Christian life is suffering persecution. To not suffer persecution is rare and abnormal. Hardly any nation in the world has ever had the relaxed atmosphere we have had. So it’s us who need them to show us what the normal Christian experience is, which is persecution.

This gives rise to an enlarged faith. And that's what Paul is thanking God for in verse 3.

Verse 4. This increase in love and faith among the Thessalonians in the last 3-6 months led Paul to do more than just thank God, it led Paul to relay the testimony of the Thessalonians to other believers as an encouragement. This is one of the reasons we suffer. Remember there are at least 11 reasons for suffering that we've covered in various classes. Some are direct, they're easily traced to something you did, others are indirect and these are harder to see because they're not traceable to anything you did. One of the indirect reasons we suffer is to edify other believers. And Paul knew that and so Paul was using the story of the Thessalonians perseverance and faith under persecution to edify believers in other churches. Verse 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.** Paul says we're proud of you, we speak proudly. Paul was at Corinth at the time and he told them what the Thessalonians were facing and how they were handling the pressure and the reason he did is to edify them, to encourage them of the sufficiency of the gospel. Because their time of persecution may be coming and when it does then they can remember the Thessalonians and be encouraged. This is one thing we can all be thankful for. God puts other believers through certain sufferings, certain persecutions, certain intimidations so that when we face them we can look at these other believers and be encouraged. And they can come alongside of us and encourage us through the trials. They have the credentials to be our counselors. And so Paul says we speak of you proudly among the churches of God, we pass on your credentials of how you persevered under great physical persecution and you remained faithful.

Now verse 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.** Now this brings things to a head so far as why we suffer but we don't know what it's about if we don't understand what the **kingdom of God** is for which we **are suffering**. The average person who reads the NT reads kingdom of God and thinks heaven. Oh, that's when we all go to heaven, the kingdom of God. And yet the Bible does not teach that the kingdom of God is heaven. The kingdom of God is defined not in the NT but in the OT. But like so many quote "NT Christians" they haven't read the

OT. What was the kingdom of God in the OT? It was the time of the monarchy. It was the times of King David and King Solomon. Was it a physical kingdom? Yes. Was it earthly? Yes. Did it have spirituality to it? Absolutely. And this Kingdom went into a Division, it fell into Decay and finally disappeared when the Jews went into Exile to Babylon. That was the kingdom of God in the OT. So when we come to the NT period what is the kingdom of God? It's never re-defined so we must get the meaning from the OT. So the kingdom of God is very clearly the same kingdom, it's a political kingdom, it's to be ruled by a physical king who sits on a physical throne in a physical city of Jerusalem. And the OT predicted that it would one day be restored to Israel under the Messiah; that He was the ultimate king who would come forth from the seed of David and He would restore the kingdom to Israel and reign in the city of Jerusalem. So that's very clearly what's going on in the early part of the Gospels. When Jesus was born we have the angel Gabriel announce that He would sit on the throne of His father David and reign in the kingdom. What does that mean? He would sit on a physical throne and reign in Jerusalem. John the Baptist's message was "Repent for the Kingdom is at hand." What does that mean? It wasn't there yet, it was at hand, meaning it was imminent, the Kingdom could come at any moment. But what happened? Did it come? No. The King came, the King offered the kingdom but then something strange happened...the King went to the cross and was crucified. So how can you have a Kingdom without a King? What happened to the kingdom program? The Church has always struggled with this. And how you answer this largely determines the nature of the Church and its function in the world today. Because think about it, let's say the Church is the Kingdom of God. What did we say the Kingdom of God is in the OT? A political entity. So if the Church is the Kingdom of God then what is the Church? A political entity and what's the function of a political entity? To enforce law, since it's the Church its divine law. And that's been done by the Roman Catholic Church but it's not limited to them. It was taken over into Protestantism by the Reformed and Lutheran Churches. And they all dominated their countries. Why? Why did they put the Church and the State together? Because they believe the Church is the Kingdom of God on earth, that's why. And woe to you if you cross them, you get in trouble real fast.

But if the Church is not the Kingdom then it's not a political entity, it's a voluntary organization and therefore it doesn't take on this political role but something else is going on. If that's the case and we have this new thing

called the Church happening, then what happened to the Kingdom? Well, the long of the short of it is that Jesus offered the kingdom to Israel and they rejected it. The kingdom is contingent, from a human perspective, on Israel receiving her King. Did they receive Him? No, they rejected Him. They had him nailed to the cross. So now we have a situation. He rises from the dead and after 40 days He ascends to the right hand of the Father. What has happened to the kingdom program? It's still contingent on Israel receiving her King. It hasn't been cancelled. Nothing has changed so far as the contingency of the Kingdom. What did Jesus say in Matt 23:39, Israel, you will not see me until you say what? "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." That is, Israel, I'm not coming back until you receive Me as your King. And when you do receive Me then I'll come back and restore the Kingdom. So what becomes apparent is that we are going to have two comings of the Messiah. This was not clearly seen in the OT. We look at it in hindsight, yeah, two comings, that's hindsight, hindsight is 20-20, but the prophets didn't see two comings. They were confused because they had Messianic passages that said the Messiah would suffer and be killed and on the other hand they had passages that said the Messiah would reign in glory over all the nations and so they said, now wait a minute, how do we get this together? How can you have a King both suffering and reigning? By definition if you're reigning you're not suffering. And they could never figure out how these two could come together in one Messiah so some of them speculated that you had two Messiah's, one that suffered and one that reigned. But the way it worked out in the NT is that you're not going to have two Messiah's, you're going to have two comings of one Messiah. First He comes to suffer and die on the cross for sin and second to reign in glory in the kingdom. And in between these two comings you have this new thing called the Church in this parenthetical age and so the Church is not the Kingdom but the Church has a relationship to the Kingdom and that's what our verse is indicating. We have a relationship to this kingdom but what we're in right now is not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is still future, the kingdom is still waiting on Israel to receive her King, then her King will come in His Kingdom, then He will sit on the physical throne of David, then He will reign from the physical city of Jerusalem. Will there be spirituality to it? Absolutely.

So Paul says these persecutions and afflictions you are enduring are **a plain indication of God's righteous judgment**. How are their sufferings a plain indication, an obvious proof of God's righteous judgment? See, what happens

is here you are a human being and God calls out to you through the gospel message and as the Holy Spirit effectually convicts you, you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are declared righteous. This is God's righteous judgment. We call this justification by faith. There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are declared righteous. Where are we declared righteous? In heaven. That's the declaration that occurs in the High Court of heaven. God has already passed judgment on all who believe. Now Satan doesn't like this so much because he is, by nature, an accuser. He accuses the brethren. He says God, why are you declaring them righteous and not me. Look at him, did you just see what so-and-so just did. That's no worse than anything I've done. And yet you declare them righteous not me. Why won't you let me off the hook God? This kind of accusation goes on day and night, day and night, day and night, it's like a never-ending court trial. Satan is there, he's the prosecuting attorney; he's prosecuting you every time you sin and the father is seated on the judgment seat and Satan is accusing and the Lord Jesus Christ stands up and says, righteous - I have declared him righteous, I stood in his stead. And Satan says why didn't you stand in my stead? This is the kind of court scene that goes on continually. Satan doesn't like it that God has declared us righteous. And so what does he do? He persecutes those on earth who are declared righteous. And so Paul says, the fact you're being persecuted is a plain indication that in the high court of heaven you've been judged to be righteous. And Satan doesn't like that one bit and that's why he's persecuting you. That's why he's getting physical with you. He doesn't like it that you are declared righteous by God's judgment.

So be encouraged. Be encouraged because one, this demonstrates plainly that you are justified in the high court of heaven. Otherwise Satan wouldn't be persecuting you. And two, something else is occurring in verse 5; this has a purpose, namely that you be **considered worthy of the kingdom of God**. Now entrance into the kingdom is a free gift, it's not something that you are worthy of. It's not something that is merited. It's something that is freely received as a part of the salvation package at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone at which moment we are declared righteous and therefore we are sons of the kingdom by virtue of faith alone in Christ alone. However you read passages to discuss our worthiness the kingdom it refers to rewards that will be dispensed at the judgment seat of Christ and used for his glory and the future kingdom of God. As Jody Dillow says, "Page after page of Scripture

speaks of this glorious future and the possibility that those who are Christ's servants now can achieve positions of honor in that future glory then." These positions of honor are important aspects of the believer's future rewards. How are these positions of honor in the kingdom attained? The Scriptures teach three basic conditions. First, faithfulness using the gifts He's given us. You have certain spiritual gifts, every believer has been given certain spiritual gifts and when opportunities arise to utilize our spiritual gifts and we do so, then that results in a dispensing of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. Second, faithfulness as servants now. If we learn in this world what it is to serve the Lord by serving one another in the capacities which he has given us we train ourselves to be servants today, then we will ascend future positions of honorable service in the kingdom and in the King's administration. And third, faithfulness when suffering. If, when we are under trial and we are suffering persecution in this world and yet we did not shrink back and stop declaring the truth, but rather we stand tall and we suffer for our faithfulness, then we are rewarded with these positions of honor in the future kingdom. It's this third basic condition, faithfulness when suffering, that Paul cites of the Thessalonians. And he says, because you are justified by faith in the High Court of heaven, Satan doesn't like this and he is persecuting you and afflicting, yet you are enduring and therefore you are being prepared to be considered worthy of the kingdom of God. Our faithfulness now prepares us for positions of honor in the future kingdom.

So what's going on in the present age called the church and what is our relationship to the future Kingdom? Professor Alva McClain puts it well: "The present age, viewed from the standpoint of the Kingdom, is a time of *preparation*. During this period the Son of Man is sowing seed, generating and developing a spiritual nucleus for the future Kingdom, a group called 'sons of the kingdom'. At the same time He is permitting a parallel development of evil in the world under the leadership of Satan. It is the purpose of God to bring both to a 'harvest,' when the good and the bad will be separated, and then to establish the Kingdom in power and righteousness." So we have been called out of Satan's kingdom and we have a new citizenship in God's kingdom, we are sons of the kingdom, we're part of the spiritual nucleus that God is forming to populate the future Kingdom. And our faithfulness in using our spiritual gifts, in learning to serve now and in suffering is building up reward status to be dispensed at the judgment seat of Christ so that when we enter the kingdom we are prepared to serve in

positions of honor in the King's administration. On the other hand Satan is waging a war to build his kingdom and so there is a growth of the sons of God alongside of the sons of Satan in this world and it's all going to come to a head in the day of the Lord when the Son of Man begins to afflict those who have afflicted us, who turns the persecution against the persecutors and that's the subject of the following verses. Right now it's a day of grace and an opportunity to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and defect from Satan's Kingdom into God's. But the day of grace will come to an end and the day of judgment will fall and that's what the following verses will deal with as we move forward next week.

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