

Giving Thanks to God for You

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: ²Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; ⁴So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

Of all the things that are happening in the world at this moment, which ones are most significant in God's sight? Now we certainly have an interesting array of global events to choose from, do we not?

- North Korea is rattling its nuclear arms, adding more threats with each passing day
- People groups in Spain and Iraq are seeking to divide from their countries
- European elections are revealing significant concerns about the influx of immigrants
- The island of Puerto Rico is devastated, with many villages still inaccessible. They are facing more flash flooding from heavy rains today.
- The residents of Mexico City are digging out of the rubble caused by the recent earthquake
- Our U.S. Democrats and Republicans are wrangling over health care, income tax, the national debt and governmental corruption. (So what's new?)

So of all the things going on in the world right now, what is most important in the Lord's eyes? What should we be seeing? And in times of trouble, when we wrestle with Biblical prophecies and growing persecution, how should we respond?

Throughout the Scriptures, we have some wonderful clues about how the Lord looks upon people and world events. For instance, we learn in 2 Chronicles 16:9: **"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him."** In ancient Ur of the Chaldees, the Lord's attention was on Abraham. Surrounded by thousands of Egyptians, a young man named Joseph was the object of God's special focus. And among all the Israelites, Philistines and other nations, God's loyal love was set upon a little shepherd boy named David. In the midst of the enormous Roman Empire, a lowly carpenter in Nazareth was the most important Person on earth in God's sight. The world rushes on while the Lord is quietly carrying out His most important plan of redemption through His Son.

Where is God's attention centered today? Ephesians 3:20-21 declares, **"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Unto Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."** In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote about **"the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"** (1 Timothy 3:15). So in today's text, when we read, **"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:"**

Grace to the Church in God

From Corinth, Paul, Silas and Timothy sent their greetings to the church of the Thessalonians. (Note the word, "we" in verse 3.) This was the group of believers in Thessalonica. I still remember when I was a child, my father used his muscular hands to show me, "Here is the church and here is the steeple . . ." But to be sure that we put the emphasis in the right place, I would like to change that poem around a

little. So with our hands interlocked and opened, we should say, *“Here is the church, it’s made up of people, it’s not about programs, or buildings or steeples.”* It’s about believers.

There is special significance in the words, **“the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** In John 10:29-30, Jesus said, **“My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”**

In His “High Priestly Prayer,” Jesus prayed for believers, **“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”** (John 17:21). The church is **“in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** This why Paul would write in Colossians 3:3, **“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”**

Jesus, the Messiah, went to the cross of Calvary to die for the sins of His bride, the church, and He arose victorious from the dead. He did so in order that His people could enter into union with Him – into His dying and into His living. It is only because of Jesus that Paul could bless the believers with the words, **“Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The Father and the Son are the Source of the gracious favor and peace given to us. As adopted sons (John 1:12), now we can say that He is **“our Father!”** Paul devoutly believed that there is but one God (Ephesians 4:4-6). But he acknowledged each of the three Persons of the Trinity as God, in his worship of the one true God.

Acts 17 described the ministry of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. Paul proclaimed **“that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ”** (Acts 17:3). Many Jews and Gentiles placed their faith in Jesus, the Christ. Paul and Silas spent a few weeks there to build the disciples. But those who did not believe threw the city into an uproar, and the brethren sent Paul and Silas away to Berea (Acts 17:10). After Paul preached in Berea and Athens, he wrote to the church at Thessalonica from Corinth. Since the leaders had faced such intense persecution there, they knew the believers would also face great trouble. It was this concern that caused Paul to write his letters to the Thessalonian church.

Think of these New Testament epistles as if you were hearing one side of a conversation. The believers had sent some questions to Paul which he answered in these letters. Among these were questions about prophecies concerning the “last things” or end times. (Scholars refer to this as “eschatology: the study of last things.”) About this letter, one commentator wrote, “The emphasis is on how to maintain a healthy church with an effective testimony in proper response to sound eschatology and obedience to the truth.”ⁱ We worked together to understand how to practically apply Biblical prophecy in the “Wait for It” series.ⁱⁱ This emphasis will help us in our study of 2 Thessalonians as well. In times of trouble, when we wrestle with Biblical prophecies and growing persecution, how should we respond?

Giving Thanks to God Continually

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; ⁴So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:” (1 Thessalonians 1:3-4)

In these last days, what practical steps should we concentrate on? Prayer and praise!

- **Prayer: Give thanks for brothers and sisters in the church**
 - **Because their faith grows exceedingly**

If our eyes are fixed on national and international headlines, we will miss this. But in the sight of God (1 Peter 1:6; 2 Peter 1:1), this faith is precious. Faith grows, and it grows exceedingly. Faith is cultivated by the hearing of the Word (Romans 10:17). The “Word of faith” (Romans 10:8) which we preach is the message that gives us maturity. Give thanks to God for the growing faith of those who are right here in this room. Look around. Call their stories to mind. Think of how their faith in the Lord and His Word has grown, and grown exceedingly. Some say that “familiarity breeds contempt,” but those who see this kind of faith thank God continually. It never grows tiresome to see their faith grow to new heights.

- **Because their love for each other overflows abundantly**

In the midst of their trials and persecutions, their love spilled over into each other’s lives. As you look around, and as you walk over to Sunday school in a few minutes, play a version of the party game, “I spy.” Say to yourself, “I spy faith that has grown exceedingly and love that overflows abundantly.” You will see it. Then give thanks to God. And take a couple of minutes to share your personal appreciation to those in your class.

- **Praise: Express your rejoicing in the patience and faith of the church**

When Paul wrote, “**We ourselves glory in you . . .**” he emphatically expressed his personal pride and joy in the Thessalonians. They had taken a firm grasp on the way they had been taught and trained. These believers were steadfastly bearing up under their pressures and persecutions. They did so with the faith-filled expectation that God would give them an ultimate, eternal deliverance. They applied Biblical prophecies. From verse 4, we can see that Paul praised them with joy for two reasons:

- **In the way they endured persecutions**

The word translated “persecutions” refers to hostility toward believers for Christ’s sake. There are those in this room who have faced this in the workplace. They may have even encountered it in their families. Everything seemed fine until they mentioned the name of Jesus, and then they faced angry antagonism. In some cases, they were met with bitter hostility. But they endured! Praise God, they pressed on with patient faith.

- **In the way they endured troubles**

The word translated “tribulations” is a general term referring to such things as sickness, hunger and poverty. As you think about your fellow believers today, call to mind their bouts with sickness, accidents, disease and death. They have suffered financial reversals and deep debt that they did not cause. So take some time to do the right thing and praise God for their patience and faith. Even when all seemed lost, they kept trusting the Lord with steadfast faith.

So in these times of trouble, when we wrestle with Biblical prophecies and growing persecution, how should we respond? Do the right thing. Give thanks to God for faith and love that grows. Praise Him for steadfast faith that endures and makes progress, even in persecutions and troubles.

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ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, et. al., *The MacArthur Study Bible*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997 p. 1851

ⁱⁱ Calvary Baptist Church, “Wait for It” series available at sermonaudio.com/calvaryfindlay

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?sortby=added&sourceonly=true&currSection=sermonsource&keyword=calvaryfindlay&subsetcat=series&subsetitem=Wait+for+It>

