

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

Call to Worship: Psalm 9:1-2

1st Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2

Hymn #13- *O Worship the King*

Hymn #579- *Be Still My Soul*

Hymn Insert- *Benediction Song*

Introduction:

When the Lord saves and converts sinners, and brings them into communion with Christ (by faith), their entire worldview has changed, and they are fixed on a new and sure foundation in Christ. And they live atop and build upon that new foundation. All of their hopes and desires going forward, proceed out of that foundation. They have been born again, and life as a whole, has taken on new meaning; the true meaning of what life ought to be, in keeping with the will and design of the Creator. Though they are yet imperfect, they are heading toward perfection, standing upon new hopes, ideals, dreams, desires, which are situated in Christ. Joy and fulfillment are now found in pleasing and glorifying God, and in growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. For, they have been given eyes to see, and a heart that understands the flimsy, temporal, deceptive, empty pleasures of this world, which leave the mouth dry and thirsty, no matter how much one drinks from such fountains. They rest their faith and hope; indeed their entire lives upon the Rock; a new and glorious foundation in Christ.

And so, no doubt, the enemy (the devil and his wicked minions; spiritual hosts of wickedness and darkness in the heavenly places), will do all on his part to shake that foundation, attempting to lead us to grow fearful and doubt, so as to cripple our effective use in advancing the kingdom of God. And it is during times of suffering and trials, especially ongoing sufferings and trials, that we are most vulnerable to such attacks, and in jeopardy of having our confidence shaken, concerning the foundation, upon which, we have rested all of our hope.

In 1st Thessalonians, Paul had taken pains to further secure the Thessalonian's faith in the foundation, upon which their faith rested, as they were being rocked with ongoing persecutions and trials. And so, he carried them to the place of remembering, invading their present circumstances with a fresh and glorious reminder of the Day of the Lord, and the return of Christ. Paul had hoped that this reminder would help thrust the brethren onward, providing them

with grace and strength to continue to endure, and to faithfully and vigorously serve Christ, in spite of any and all opposition.

Well, now we move into Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. And here, we find that the enemy has taken pains to attack the very foundation of the Thessalonian's hope, which Paul had reinforced in the first letter. And so, Paul addresses this attack, seeking to rebuild the walls of their hope, lest they grow weary and/or lazy in the battle, by embracing a heretical teaching concerning the return of Christ, which would indeed dissolve the foundation, upon which they have rested all of their hope. And once again, we will find that what you believe, always affects how you live, and that is why Paul is so fervent in his pursuit of influencing the Thessalonians with divine truth, lest they be carried away by the wicked doctrines of Satan and men.

This morning, we will attempt to consider a general outline of this Letter, in preparation for a more detailed study of the specific content found within it. May God be pleased to open our hearts to receive and act upon the precious truths found within this God-breathed Epistle.

I. A General Outline of 2 Thessalonians

Without being dogmatic, I would divide this letter into roughly six parts:

1) Opening Greeting (1:1-2)

This would include Paul's customary greeting, which he uses in all of his Epistles. Once again, here, we find Paul speaking on behalf of Timothy and Silas as well, who were his closest co-servants and traveling companions at this point in time. And then, he directs the letter "to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," designating the specific union they have with God and Christ, within which, Paul addresses them as a co-heir and an apostle of the same.

And finally, he gives his customary, opening blessing, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 2). We've addressed this statement more fully in 1 Thessalonians, so I will not do that again now. But suffice it to say, once again, that Paul here opens the letter, proclaiming the two-fold blessing, which God grants His children, so that they can persevere in doing all that He calls them to do. The grace of God and the peace of (and with)

God are more than sufficient to provide the Thessalonians with all that they need to give heed to the exhortations that Paul gives them in this letter.

And interestingly enough, brethren, all thirteen Epistles written by Paul, share this same opening blessing. With the exception of 1 and 2 Timothy, which has the addition of mercy, the statement of blessing, in fact, is identical in all cases.

2) Encouragement and Prayer (1:3-12)

Again, not uncommon for Paul, he opens his letter by encouraging the Thessalonians by expressing how he thanks God for them and for how they are growing and persevering...etc. And then, relevant to the main theme of the letter, he assures them of how God is with them and will continue to help them...etc. And he highlights his prayer for them to this end.

3) Primary Purpose of the Letter (2:1-17)

Here, Paul brings out his primary purpose for writing the letter. His concerns are brought out here, and his means of addressing those concerns comes out as well, here in the body of the letter. And, when we get to this section, we will find that Paul is addressing a matter that is directly related to the foundational hope, which he provided in his first letter to the Thessalonians, namely, the Day of the Lord.

We saw in 1 Thessalonians that Paul had sought to motivate the brethren to persevere in the face of great (ongoing) persecution and suffering, by reminding them of the coming Day of the Lord, when Christ would return to gather His people unto Himself, before destroying His enemies. And you'll recall that one of the great encouragements that also came with that reminder, involved the fact that their beloved brethren, who had died (fallen asleep) in the process of that persecution, would be joined again with those who are living, when Christ returns. Paul had laid a wonderful foundation of hope, for the church to rest upon, which would drive them forward in the battle. Well, here, we find that that foundation was under attack, as some began to influence the church with the dangerous heresy, which claimed that Christ had already returned! If this were the case, then everything that Paul had stated in the previous letter would be proven to be a lie, and the foundational hope, which the Thessalonians were resting upon, would be destroyed. And sinful actions would follow, and were already beginning to be exercised by some.

And so, Paul goes to great lengths to affirm that Christ had not yet returned, and in fact, certain things had to take place, which have not yet taken place, before He would return. Paul had to rebuild and reinforce the foundation, which he knew, must be the source of the church's hope, if they were to persevere and press forward, advancing the kingdom of God, in the midst of ongoing persecution and opposition. Needless to say, we will face some challenging texts, when we seek to open this up in the times ahead.

4) Plea for Prayer and Encouragement of God's Faithfulness (3:1-5)

Once again, Paul inserts another plea for prayer (which we've looked at last time, when we examined a like plea in our conclusion of 1 Thessalonians), and he bridges that into an additional assertion of God's faithfulness, who will strengthen and enable the Thessalonians to give heed to all that Paul is commanding them.

5) Practical Warning and Exhortation (3:6-15)

Here, Paul addresses one specific fruit of believing the heresy that Christ had already come, namely, an unwillingness to work and a nosy meddling in the affairs of others. We saw him address this more briefly in 1 Thessalonians. Well here, he opens it up further and more sternly, as the problem not only continues to exist, but seems to have worsened in light of the false teaching that was being embraced by some. And so, he issues a stern warning against idleness and being a busybody, followed by an exhortation to discipline those who refuse to obey Paul's charges, given in this Epistle.

6) Closing Benediction (3:16-18)

Finally, Paul ends with a customary benediction, which is relevant to the specific content of the overall letter.

And so, I would divide this letter into these six sections, which Lord willing, we will seek to work through, beginning next time (moving into verses 3-12).

II. Conclusive Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through the general outline, brethren, let us then conclude our time by considering a few, relevant, closing thoughts and applications:

1) Brethren, like the Thessalonians, the very foundation of our hope rests in a risen, victorious, ascended, reigning and returning Christ. And like the Thessalonians, we must protect that foundation, because the enemy will do all that he can to shake it, and to convince us that we have been resting our hope on a mirage. [Ex: Every year, the world comes up with some absolute nonsense-- Jesus's tomb was found and he was married to Mary Magdalene...etc]

If you could somehow convince me that all of this was a sham; that everything which I have experienced and seen in the last twenty years; that all that has watered my soul in the Scriptures, was somehow a mere triggering of emotions (and nothing more), then you may as well take away my sanity. To state that I would become absolutely ineffective for the work of the kingdom is an understatement. But, in times of weakness, and in times of ongoing suffering, with no end in view, and in times of trial, those types of thoughts can begin to intrude upon our hearts and minds.

And so, brethren, let me exhort you to daily invest in maintaining, securing and strengthening that foundation, which will prepare you for the long run, and enable you to withstand in the day of temptation and trial. And the only way to do this is to daily drink from the fountain of God's Word. If you are neglecting to water your soul, daily, brethren, your spiritual life will wither, and at a time when you least expect it, when hard trials hit, you will be shaken at the core and in danger of looking for hope in other places. Some form of idolatry will wrap its arms around you (offering you temporal relief), and you will be useless for the work of the kingdom. In fact, you will be a reproach to it. We must be good stewards of God's Word, brethren. [Ill. The spiritual life being like a floating raft, out on the ocean]

Paul gave the Thessalonians a sure foundation in 1 Corinthians, when they were being tested with ongoing trials and persecutions. And when that foundation began to be attacked, he gave them 2 Thessalonians. And in the entirety of the Scriptures, we have everything we need to continually maintain and strengthen the foundation, upon which our soul's hope rests! In our first Scripture reading, we saw that one of the critical pieces of the Christian's armor is the Sword of the Spirit, which, we are told, is the Word of God. The Word of God is our primary offensive and defensive weapon, which is used to protect us from the enemy's attacks. Let us make good

use of it. Imagine going to war, in a pre-gun society, without a sword? Your realized hope will crumble if you do not continually guard, maintain, secure, strengthen and protect it.

2) Let us embrace Paul's method of exhortation, as we would exercise our duty in graciously exhorting and rebuking one another. Like our Lord's addressing of the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3, you'll notice that Paul begins by commending the brethren for their strong points, before addressing his concerns. And in this way, he shows that he loves the brethren, and is not simply determined to correct them. Perhaps, one of the reasons the rebuke has fallen on hard times in our day, is because the rebuke is so often given in a self-righteous manner, without any delicate sense of seeking to affirm our love for the one whom we are rebuking.

Here, Paul has an important issue to address. He has fervent exhortations to bring forth, but he does not immediately rush into them. He first affirms his love for them, commending their faithfulness and perseverance, while assuring them of his constant prayer on their behalf. He is like a loving father, seeking to correct his needy child. Let us embrace such a heart, brethren, so that we might be useful in exhorting and rebuking one another, as the need arises. And because we are all yet imperfect, the need will arise for each and every one of us. In a well functioning church, we will all fill the shoes of the rebuke and the rebukee, at various times.

3) In closing, let me ask you, "What foundation are you building your short life upon?" And where is that foundation leading you? What will you have to show for it all, when your end, which is quickly approaching, meets you? Will that foundation enable you to stand on the Day of Judgment, when all the world must stand before God and give an account for what we have done with this life? Will you present a structure that has been built on material things, lusts, idols, and all that is contrary to the very nature of the Creator, who created you (and all things) for His glory? Don't fool yourself. Whatever a man sows, that he will reap. If you sow this life to the flesh, you will reap destruction, and you will have no one to blame but yourself.

Let me exhort you, this morning. Build your house upon the Rock. Stand upon the foundation of the risen and ascended Christ, and you will stand at the final judgment. There is hope in this life, a certain expectation of victory, if your foundation is Christ. He alone, is the

solid Rock, upon which, redeemed sinners can stand! All other ground is sinking sand. [The Gospel].

Amen!!!