

23] Incredible Calling and Abundant Grace (Sunday, May 16, 2021)

Scripture: Isaiah 43:15-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

INTRODUCTION

Think again of God's amazing work of power and grace in the gospel coming to the mostly pagan city of Thessalonica.

There was true conversion. "...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God..." (1 Thess. 1:9)

Your faith grows exceedingly. Your love is abounding. (2 Thess. 1:3)

This was a church that endured persecutions and tribulations with patience and faith.

We sometimes wonder about future generations.

Will our children and grandchildren remain faithful to God and the Word of God?

"For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel," we know.

How we desperately pray that our children will walk in God's truth.

God will preserve His truth and build His true church.

What is our great comfort?

God is sovereign. None of His purposes will be frustrated in the end.

The truth of the gospel does not change.

God's grace to His people never fails.

Lam. 3:22 *Through* the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.

Now we know that we are not always faithful and steadfast in our service as we should be.

We tend to overlook our own faults and failures.

We trust that God will continue His work in sanctifying us, keeping us humble and dependent on His grace and truth.

We must not ignore the calling that we have been given.

Never lost sight of the incredible calling of God and His abundant grace!

I will make a few more introductory comments and then we will look at verses 11 and 12.

1] A FEW MORE INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

There is a lot of similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Both books deal with persecution, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and warn against negligence and idleness.

Some scholars would say the style of the two letters is a little different.

1 Thessalonians is more focused on encouragement while 2 Thessalonians is more focused on the problems that the Thessalonian church was facing.¹

One commentator suggests that verses 11 and 12 give the give the central statement of the book of 2 Thessalonians.

He calls its **persuasion by a praying proposition**.²

This might a good suggestion, but I don't know that we must be dogmatic about it.

¹ Ben Witherington's analysis.

² Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 31.

We certainly can say this.

This was a church that was facing great challenge and yet they were by God's grace counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they were suffering.

There are always challenges that a true believer will face.

We don't ignore the issues we are facing, but we must **never lose sight of the incredible calling of God and His abundant grace!**

Let's focus now on this short but beautiful prayer in verses 11 and 12.

2] FOCUS ON 2 THESS. 1:11-12

One of the greatest things that we have in Paul's letters are examples of his prayers for other believers.

Listen to three examples:

Eph. 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, **16** do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: **17** that the God of

our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, **18** the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, **19** and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,

Col. 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; **10** that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; **11** strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

Phil. 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, **10** that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, **11** being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Each of these prayers is different.

Paul did not just cut and paste from other letters he wrote.

And yet there are points in common.

1] maturity and growth - sanctification

2] understanding of how great is the work of God's grace and calling -
justification

We can also make these two points about prayer.

1] Paul prayed persistently.

2] Paul prayed specifically.

Now we know the power of prayer is not our own brilliance or eloquence.

And yet I think part of the fellowship that we enjoy as believers is to pray as best we can for the specific needs of others.

Now look closely at the language of verse 11 – that our God would count you worthy of this calling.

This language connects back to verse 5 and then verses 6-10, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a passage in 1 Thess. 2 that is similar.

1Th. 2:19 For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? ***Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?***

20 For you are our glory and joy.

“Being counted worthy of this calling” is connected with the great day of judgment.³

Do you often think about the Day of judgment?

Many passages in the NT speak of this great Day.

We are to live in light of the great day of judgment.

Now, the goal is not that we make ourselves worthy!

How much would you have to do and how perfect would you have to be to found worthy based on your own effort?

³ F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 156.

This is why it is so foolish to think that although you might be justified now, you will have to face the test of final justification.

It is not in vain, though, to remember that there is a coming day of judgment.

And we pray that we will be found to be faithful servants by God's grace alone, covered in the righteousness of Christ alone.

This focus on the final day is to encourage you for the present day, which is the second half of verse 11.

... that God would fulfill all the good pleasure of goodness and the work of faith with power.

Versions differ in translating this second part because of translating the word **good pleasure**.

It can be understood as **God's kindness and goodwill** or the **desire** of the Thessalonians.

For example the NET version reads: and fulfill by **his power** your every desire for goodness and every work of faith,

This translation make sense considering other similar verses in the NT.

Rom. 15:14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

Eph. 5:9 (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

So, the second part of verse 11 is a prayer that God by His power will bring to completion their **desire to serve others and show the fruit of true faith.**

Isn't this such a beautiful description?

It is sickening to hear so much man-centered gobbly-gook and empty phrases that are used in so much of modern-day Christianity.

And yet the truth of God's Word is not boring or empty nor does it just end in contemplation.

No, we take seriously these things in order that we might serve our great God.

What a calling you have been given if you truly know the only true God!

You know very well the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

What is man's chief end?

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

This question is certainly not the only thing we need to know which is why the catechism goes on for another 106 questions and answers.

But it is an appropriate starting point that as God's people we confess **we have the greatest purpose for which to live.**

I have commented before on the massive expanse of the universe that God created.

According to Wolfram Alpha, there are **300 billion trillion stars.**

You can count about 3,000 stars with the unaided eye if you are in a truly dark place.

Also according to Wolfram Alpha the diameter of the observable universe is **93 billion light years.**

Who are we?

How insignificant we are!

Luther once rebuked Erasmus saying, "Your thoughts of God are too human."⁴

Is. 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these *things*,
Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name,
By the greatness of His might
And the strength of *His* power;
Not one is missing.

So, we must confess our total insignificance, unworthiness, our nothingness before God in terms of His power, glory, and holiness, and yet God has called us to bring glory to Him.

Aren't the words of verse 12 truly amazing?

⁴ *Your Father Loves You* by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, page for January 5.

That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him.

I mentioned last week that this word translated as **glorified** is used only one other time in the NT, which is verse 10.

Verse 10 speaks of a **future glorification**.

Here in verse 12, we have a **present glorification** of the name our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see here another testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ as in the OT it is the name of the LORD that is most often found.

Glorified in you – what an important and probably neglected duty if we are honest.

Each day God graciously gives us 24 hours.

We probably spend about 6-8 of those hours sleeping or in bed.

Think about all the time you spend getting ready for the day, travelling, eating, shopping, fixing things...

We have so many time-saving devices and yet so little time it seems.

Man's chief end today is to be happy, entertained, and comforted.

But you are to seek something so much greater – **show forth the glory of Jesus Christ in all aspects of our lives.**

This should be our consuming passion and motive.

1Cor. 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Rev. 1:6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look at the words in verse 12, **and you in Him.**

This is the only place where this phrase appears in the NT.

Paul is stating that our true glory is connected not in our own achievements or who we think we are but in Jesus Christ also.

John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, **that they may behold My glory** which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

All of this is according the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Think about how far you fall short of this great calling.

So we know even with the greatest calling we have been given, we so easily focus just on ourselves and our own pleasures.

We pray that the Lord will use us and that by His grace we will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God even if that means suffering for it!

You must trust in the total certainty and perfection of God’s justice.

Never lost sight of the incredible calling of God and His abundant grace!

Prayer

Hymn 127

BENEDICTION – 1 COR. 15:57-58

But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus
Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always
abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in
the Lord.