

ENCOURAGEMENT DURING PERSECUTION

TEXT: II THESS. 1:1-12

Introduction:

1. Second Thessalonians was written shortly after the first epistle (cf. *Scofield Study Bible*).
2. Charles C Ryrie says, "Whoever delivered the first letter to the church had evidently brought back word concerning conditions, and this second letter was written in light of this report" (*First and Second Thessalonians*; cf. Scofield introduction).
3. This second epistle to the Thessalonians was written in order to bring comfort and encouragement during a time of persecution.
4. Warren Wiersbe divided his exposition of chapter 1 into three parts --

I. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PRAISE

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PROMISE

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PRAYER

I. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PRAISE

1. After his customary greetings, Paul praised God for their good Christian testimony (1:1-4).
2. The church in Thessalonica was born in persecution (1:3, 4; cf. Acts 17:1-9; I Thess. 1:6; 2:14-16; 3:1-3), but they patiently endured (1:4).
3. Despite the persecution (or perhaps because of it) their faith and charity continued to grow (1:3; cf. I Thess. 3:10-12).
4. Missionaries say there is revival in Myanmar and in China and other countries because of persecution. We see that in the book of Acts and throughout church history.
5. Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PROMISE

1. The promise comes in the way of reward, retribution, and rest (1:5-7).
2. The promise is blessing for God's people (the "kingdom of God" -- 1:5, and the glory of the saints -- 1:10).
3. The promise also contains the judgment of the wicked (vengeance and punishment -- 1:8, 9).

4. "Worthy" (1:5) refers to our place of service in the kingdom of God. John Phillips says, "This world is our sphere of probation. The Lord uses all of the things that come into our lives to prepare us for high office in the kingdom...(Being worthy) has nothing to do with an entrance exam; rather it has to do with a final exam, an exam to determine where we will fit in the kingdom" (*Exploring I & II Thessalonians*).
5. The Bible does not teach we are worthy of salvation. We enter "the kingdom of God" by being born again by the grace of God.
6. Our Lord told Nicodemus that except a man be born again, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-7).
7. The Thessalonian believers were urged to view their endurance under trial as a proof ("token") of God's working in them, and a guarantee that He will keep His promises concerning their future place in the millennial kingdom (1:5b).
8. Their being persecuted was a token (evidence) "that there would be a future judgment, when the righteous who were persecuted would be rewarded, and the wicked who persecuted them would be punished" (*Barnes' Notes*).
9. Sometimes when Christians suffer they question the righteousness of God. Twice Paul reminds them that God is righteous (1:5, 6).
10. God is righteous, and God is just. And God will certainly judge the wicked (1:5-10). These Scriptures teach the doctrine of divine retribution.
11. The great theme of I & II Thessalonians is the second coming of Christ (1:7-10).
12. Vengeance on those who have not obeyed the Gospel will be meted out at the second coming of Christ (1:8, 9).
13. These Scriptures teach "everlasting destruction" (1:9).
14. Our Lord said in Matthew 25:46, "And these (unsaved) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."
15. Revelation 14:11 says, "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night..."
16. Verse 10 says Christ will "be glorified in His saints" (cf. 1:12). But in verse 9, the wicked will be banished "from the glory of His power."
17. Ryrie said, "Paul is making the astounding claim that the glory of the Lord will be mirrored in believers (cf. John 17:1; Eph. 2:7)."

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PRAYER (1:11, 12).

1. The chapter concludes with Paul's prayer (1:11, 12).
2. Paul prayed that God would count them worthy (1:11; cf. 1:5). Paul prayed that their trials and troubles would make them stronger in the faith.
3. Paul prayed that God would fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness (1:11).
4. Albert Barnes said that Paul "desired that there might be in them everything which would be pleasing to God, and which His benevolence was fitted to secure."
5. "And the work of faith with power (1:11b). The true work of faith is always accompanied with power.

CONCLUSION:

1. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified" (1:12). In Scripture, the name represents the person. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).
2. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
3. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him" (1:12). This is the end we should aim at in every thing we do, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in all things.
4. The Westminster Catechism (1647) begins with this statement: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever."
5. Matthew Henry said, "Our own happiness and that of others should be subordinate to this ultimate end. Our good works should so shine before men that others may glorify God, that Christ may be glorified in and by us, and then we shall be glorified in and with him."