

July 05, 2026 - 2 Thessalonians - "Viewing Hardship through the Gospel"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Please join me in reading 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 1 through verse 5.!

For your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Praise the Lord. We are entering into a little series before we get into another fall book in a couple months.

And so it's great to be back. I had a little bit of a break to go sweat down south. And that was good. I think I had more sun from the golf outing I was forced to play on Monday of my return than I actually did down south.

[1 : 43] But I usually am the guy on the beach hiding under the umbrella. You know, us Ohioans, we have fair skin. Some of us, like me.

And so I don't fit in down there. But it's great to be back. Thanks for holding my job as I came. There was some great preaching while I was gone. And it's an encouragement of God's word working through multiple different people.

It's not dependent on me being here and things like that. And I think that attests to the camaraderie of men that God raises up in this church. And the supporting network of deacons and everyone from hospitality, greeting, coffee, everything working together and functioning.

It's a blessing to step away and just jump in on the live stream and hear just everything continuing. Just as we never miss a beat. And praise the Lord for that.

[2 : 46] And so it's good to be back. And I've heard some kind of just feedback as I'm preparing to go into second Thessalonians. Long time ago in a galaxy far, far away in the year of 2021, I started a series in first Thessalonians.

Now, I know not everyone was here back in first Thessalonians, but you may remember that. And people were concerned that, well, I can't listen to the 20 messages in first Thessalonians.

Am I going to be able to kind of jump into second Thessalonians? It kind of feels weird. And I just want to kind of ease some of that pressure that you might have.

Like, well, what happened in the first letter? Well, don't worry about the first letter. Some of Paul's letters were written because a church needed to be corrected or informed.

Some letters that Paul wrote were to churches that needed to be strengthened and steadied. And second Thessalonians is one of those second sort of letters.

[3 : 57] They needed to be strengthened. They needed to be steadied. It's important to be reminded that just as we just finished a historical narrative, which is the genre of first and second Samuel, that these letters aren't part, this letter today is in part two of part one, necessarily.

There's a distinguishing factor between these two letters, regardless of what it's named. But first and second Samuel, it'd be really odd to jump into second Samuel without going into first because it's a historical narrative.

And so we have to consider genre in this and we can approach this letter confidently. And we have to remember that these letters are written for specific occasions, specific purposes.

There's burdens in it. And we're going to tease those specific burdens in his second letter to the Thessalonians. We're going to hear similar themes from first Thessalonians to second Thessalonians.

We'll hear again about faith, of love, of endurance, of suffering, of the Thessalonians, hope, and even the coming of the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 11] And he's pastoring them through these letters. It's pastoring a pressured church to see their lives through the gospel. And so we notice how Paul begins his introduction.

Look with me as we just read. Thanks, Esther, for reading. He says, To the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We remember that these three men, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, that's Paul's team. Paul always surrounded himself with people, and he's always raising other people up.

And these three men are writing, again, to this church, the same church, different letter, and it's to the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's amazing how Paul starts his letters out. And you might be like, okay, get on with it. What do we need to read here? But there's a reason why I only went through a couple verses, because I want you to realize what he's doing in his introductions here.

[6 : 28] It's important to remember that before he speaks about anything, he speaks about their identity. Before he gets into the weeds of it, we're kind of like, maybe it's just my problem, but there's small talk in conversations, and it's kind of like warming up to the reason and everything, and I just want to get to it.

You know, forget all this stuff. Okay, how was your day? How was the golf? Okay, let's get on to the purpose, right? How many of you are like that? Just get on with it. Well, yeah. So Paul is not.

He likes the small talk. He knows the importance of it. It warms the conversation, and he speaks about their identity, and this is so significant. In other words, this church is not defined by the purpose of the letter, regardless of what that purpose is, but they are Christians who belong to God, to the Thessalonians in God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we go through this series, we will understand the purpose of the letter is to encourage them, specifically in sound doctrine, amid suffering, amid false doctrine, especially regarding the Lord's return.

But Paul doesn't define them as the suffering ones, the confused ones, the ones who need a little bit of help with Christianity 101. No.

[8 : 03] He didn't even do that with the Galatian church, who he had very sharp words for. He greeted them in the same way. How wonderful is this thought, that hardship may describe our season, but it doesn't describe or define our identity.

What a great thing we see this. Like suffering says, when we're in suffering, it says that you're forgotten, that your entire life, you were striving so great in your walk with God, and you were on fire, and now all of a sudden you're suffering, and you're struggling.

Suffering says that we're forgotten, that we're failures. Sin says you are condemned a lot. The world says that we're a bunch of fools.

We're foolish. But the gospel says that all who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus Christ are hidden in God, joined to Jesus, and sustained by His grace.

That is our identity within the context of anything in this life, whether good or bad. And still yet, there's nothing inherently worthy in them.

[9 : 20] It wasn't them that God chose them, said, yeah, you are worthy, and you will come into my kingdom. There's nothing inherently worthy in us either.

But yet, God made them His church. By grace, He brought them into the Father through the Son. That's why Paul can say here, look, grace to you and peace.

Grace is God's initiative towards the undeserving sinners, giving them the exact opposite of what they deserve. And peace.

It's the settled standing that Christ gives to His people. And in our text today, Paul wants this church to see that affliction that they're enduring here is not proof of God's absence at all.

But in Jesus Christ, hardship can become the very place where God reveals His persevering grace. this church is right where God desires to have them.

[10 : 25] And what I want us to see is, I'll just call it a main point or an argument for the text, is that comfort can make a church look healthy, but hardship reveals whether it truly is.

Comfort can make a church look healthy, but hardship reveals whether it truly is. The sermon title I have today is Viewing Hardship Through the Gospel.

I've forgotten how to do my job. I need to get my clicker. And as we go in and dive into this, I'm going to break it up into verse 3, verse 4, and then verse 5.

I just kind of crammed Paul's introduction into my own introduction. But I'd like to pray before we break this down a little bit and ask the Lord to speak to His church today.

Let's pray. Father, we come to You today knowing that each of us has various levels of burdens, some minor, some major, some health-related, some with sin attached to it that nobody knows about sitting next to us.

[11 : 53] We come with burdens of financial issues, relational issues, family issues. but we come as we are to Your Word and we are so thankful that You have inspired Paul to write this letter to the Thessalonians so that we in our day, thousands of years away from this church's letter, we are able to be encouraged and hear from You.

We pray that we do hear from You today by the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The first section that we have is faith and love reveal God's work and we see this very quickly in verse 3.

Paul says, we ought always to give thanks to you and to God for you. We ought always to give thanks to God for you. That word ought stuck with me this week.

It really does matter that we ought. You know what you ought to do, what you ought not to eat back in the snack area, right? You know what you ought to do and you know what you ought not to do, right?

This ought is very important. Paul is not giving this polite compliment, flattery or anything like that, but he feels obligated, ought, feels obligated to thank God because of God's work in them and that it's undeniable of what God is doing in their lives.

[13 : 46] He continues, their faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you. For one another is increasing.

See, Paul is measuring spiritual health by the appearance and the manifestation of gospel fruit. In other words, their faith is not just bare knowledge.

It's not just intellectual, cognitive. cognitive. And so this would obviously involve some sort of cognitive affirmation, right?

Jesus even said in John 17, 3, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Because we know saving faith begins when God opens blind eyes and sees Jesus Christ as true.

This is all cognitive and in the heart, working together, regenerating someone.

[14 : 50] They see Jesus as true, as necessary, as sufficient, as beautiful. And that faith that's planted in the heart of every Christian just blossoms as we learn to trust him more deeply.

And all of that, all of that faith is growing abundantly. This is clearly happening. in this church. What was occurring in this church seemed to really confront me.

I don't know about you, but consider it. Like, are we growing in our relationship with God or kind of just maintenance mode?

You know, got your to-do list, got your prayer list, do all the good things, help the old lady across the street, right? Do, you know, all the doing, right?

Are we growing in our relationship with God, growing closer to him, knowing him, reading that book of the Bible again to discover the things that we failed to see the first read through or the 99th read through?

[16 : 09] Are we growing in our need? or have we become sort of self-sufficient? We grab the first book we see off of Hobby Lobby's bookshelf. God help us all with some of those books.

But just running to these self-help things rather than running to the Word or running to your knees in prayer, pleading to a God who relationally wants to come and be with you in prayer.

Are we growing in our trust in God? Or are we just growing in this familiarity in our walks with Jesus?

After all, it's possible to sit here today under sermons. We could sing the truest songs. We could sing the songs. Inspired singing, right?

We can learn Christian vocabulary and still walk away still trusting ourselves, still loving the world, and still disconnected to the hand of God working actively in our lives.

[17 : 20] Church, that is sin at its root. It is sin. Refusing to rest in God as God.

Faith doesn't grow in cognitive isolation. It shows itself. It doesn't grow in cognitive affirmation or confession, no matter what your confession is.

But it changes. Faith changes everything in our lives. He says to them, your faith is growing abundantly. God is nothing merely cognitive about that.

There's something they believe. There's something they love. There's something they treasure above all things in this life. As we get into the letter, they're very confused. We're going to look back at this word here, growing abundantly, And say, Paul, are you sure?

They seem pretty confused about Jesus. But they know Him. They're growing towards Him. And one thing that we see with Paul's continuation here is the mention of love and love's role in regard to faith, of growing faith.

[18 : 44] Where faith grows, it seems, love will naturally increase. That's one of the things that you can, you should be able to pick up on in the life of the church.

That if somebody's growing in their faith, they love a lot. They love the unlovable. Paul says, the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Faith is growing abundantly and alongside of faith, love is growing increasingly as well. love. And that's exactly what the gospel produces.

The fruit of the gospel is love. And I praise the Lord for many comments of how the Lord has worked in this church specifically in love.

That a stranger walks through the door and they don't feel like a stranger. They're met with smiley faces, welcoming. It doesn't matter if you came here for 10 years or 10 minutes.

[19 : 52] You're part of the family. Welcome. And that is a fruit of gospel work. It's not a fruit of any competency in the pulpit or any singer on the stage.

It's evidence of God's working through His word by the power of the Holy Spirit in all of your lives. You should be encouraged. There are a lot of very, very positive comments within Steel Valley Church.

We're not perfect. We're not perfect. I make sure that we keep that level. You know me. But we are healthy. We strive towards health.

But think about it. What Paul is describing here. Now think about the ugly brother, the antonym of what Paul is describing.

Think about sin. Think about sin. Sin curves us inward. It makes us defensive. Sin makes us impatient.

[20 : 51] It makes us suspicious. It makes us selfish. Sin makes us cold. But the gospel bends us outward.

Because Christ moved towards us when we were unloving. Right? We were not lovely. in other words, he didn't wait for us to become easy to love.

He loved us first and his love now teaches us as a model of how we move towards one another with patience, with forgiveness, with service, and with sacrifice.

grace. I'm going to coin a word in this sermon. I think it hits exactly the heart of this passage. I would encourage us to realize the, what I'll call, ecosystem of the gospel.

Here. Growing faith must, must, not should or can, growing faith must become increasing in love.

[22 : 04] You can't detach the two. I'm calling this the ecosystem of the gospel. And this isn't to provide a guilt trip to anybody who might be struggling in that department, because I struggle in that department, right?

But it's a heart check for all of us, for me as well. This is the reality for every single Christian, from Thessalonica to today. That we uphold and apprehend in our lives the undistinguishable reality between faith and love working in the heart of a Christian.

And it's increasingly so. That doesn't say that we will struggle from time to time. We will, right? But His mercies are new every day to renew us and to re-engage us in what the gospel is and to hear the gospel over and over again and be reminded of the grace that we have received in Christ.

But church, if our doctrine is getting sharper, we learn all these things, all these isms in doctrine. If our doctrine is getting sharper while our hearts are getting harder, we are not growing more mature, you're not growing more mature, you're actually becoming more dangerous.

To the testimony of the gospel, to the work of the gospel, you're contradicting the gospel. If we claim to love God but refuse to bear with each other, we're failing to forgive one another, we're failing to serve one another, hiding on a live stream from one another, right?

[23 : 58] We are not seeing the gospel clearly. You're contradicting it. Faith grows upward and love grows outward.

This is the ecosystem of the gospel. It's the natural cycle and fruit. And here Paul gives thanks because this church is not stagnant at all, even under pressure as we'll see in the coming weeks. Their faith is not withering and their love is not cooling. And I don't think that it's too much to expect for us in our day-to-day to be striving towards that.

And whatever missing elements within each of our lives may be, we have to be working towards whatever they had. And what they definitely had was salvation.

And they were grateful every day for it. The second thing that we see in this passage is in verse 4. Paul moves from his thanksgiving section to a boasting section.

[25 : 05] He says, therefore, because of all of that, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God. Now, what does he boast about?

Not that they escaped trouble, they barely got out of that one, or their works or performance or anything like that. Not that life had become easy, that they got a church building or anything like that or whatever, but he boasts in their steadfastness and faith in all their afflictions that they are enduring.

This is important. Paul doesn't celebrate their suffering in and of itself. Like, praise the Lord, you're suffering. Now you're part of the crowd. Well done. Run towards the bullets, right?

Good job. Now you're really Christian. No, Paul doesn't celebrate their suffering by itself as if suffering alone is spiritually impressive. That's not, that's just not true.

Unbelievers suffer, right? Unbelievers suffer, they're bitter. Bitter people suffer, right?

[26 : 18] Proud people suffer. Suffering is not unique to the Christian church. Everyone suffers.

And so we can't go down that line of thought. But the mark of grace is not merely that they are afflicted, but they are enduring affliction with faith.

That they are growing in faith, growing in love, and all the while, life sucks. Like, this is spectacular, right, Les?

Amen. We have a brother, Les, he, spectacular is his word in the church. That's why steadfastness matters. The context of their growth is difficulty, right?

Steadfastness matters. The word carries the idea of remaining under pressure, not trying to escape pressure, but remaining under pressure without abandoning Jesus Christ, without abandoning their faith, without abandoning their love for one another.

In other words, steadfastness is sort of like, I'm thinking training, like personal training, like it's faith with weight on it, right? It's hope with bruises attached to it.

[27 : 33] It's the church saying, we may be pressed, but we will not let go of our Lord. No way, no how. I want us to recall the parable of the sower of Matthew 13, and Jesus warns us that hardship naturally will expose roots.

We have a sermon review group in this church that meet on Mondays at 8 o'clock p.m. virtually. I'm going to actually turn there or else I will get critiqued with my biblical context.

But Matthew 13, I'd like to go to verse 36 where Jesus explains the parable of the sower. He mentions the sower throwing seed into multiple different soils and everything.

This isn't to deviate to a new sermon in Matthew, but so you can see the role of suffering related to this seed, the word being spread. Let's go into verse 36 where Jesus explains the parable.

He answered in verse 37, the one who sows the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.

[28 : 49] The weeds are the sons of the evil one. And the enemy who sowed them, the enemy who sowed them, where am I at here, is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of all his kingdom and sin, causes of sin and lawbreakers and throw them in the fiery furnace in that place.

And when Jesus explains these parables, that's the end of the parable, he said to them in verse 10, go back with me a little bit, the end is destruction, but verse 10, then the disciples came to him, why do you speak about these parables?

And then in verse 18, he says, hear the parable, when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

this is what was sown along the path. As for the one sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

[30 : 07] Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation, see this in verse 21, when tribulation or persecution arises on the account of the word, immediately he falls away.

I'm going to repeat that. when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. I think Jesus makes clear the role of suffering and persecution and affliction very clear. In this parable, the word is the illustration of the seed, like the seed is the word, and some receive the word with joy, but when tribulation or persecution comes, because of the word, they fall away. Others are choked out by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. And what this parable exposes is something vital related to affliction. That trials and temptations aren't just kind of just side issues, kind of the sidecar and the motorcycle of salvation, right?

[31 : 44] Just attached. Maybe, maybe not. There's surety. Trials and temptations are not side issues, but they reveal by God's working whether the word has really taken root.

And so, church, if that doesn't search our hearts, I don't know what will. Like, when things get hard, how many are ready to pack their bags and say, well, go back to Florida, right?

For instance, what does pressure reveal in us? Pressure will always reveal something in us because of the fruit of the gospel being produced.

When life gets hard, do we run to Jesus Christ or do we withdraw from him? When obedience is costly, do we endure or sort of tend to negotiate?

Like, yeah, I'll go do that, but maybe just not this way. How about that, Lord? Let me try to baptize that idea. Right?

[32 : 52] When comfort is threatened, do we still believe the kingdom is worth it? The gospel does not promise that Christians will avoid suffering.

That's a false gospel. The gospel does not promise that Christians will avoid suffering. It gives us a Savior who entered suffering, endured suffering, and came out the other side in resurrection glory. Jesus did not abandon the Father's will when the cross was before him, or as Hebrews 12 2 testifies, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross.

So Christian endurance is not grit detached from grace, but we endure because Christ endured for us. Christ lives in us, and Christ holds us until the end.

Jesus will hold you and never let you go. There's a letter that Martin Luther, reformer Martin Luther, wrote to Elector John Saxony after a season of grief and political turmoil.

[34 : 05] Luther said, suffering is the school in which God chastens us and teaches us to trust in him.

What a great reminder. How wonderful to see Paul boasting for this church who's suffering, whose hardship has not exposed empty religion or comfort or consumerism, but hardship has actually revealed faith.

May it be true for us as well, that our suffering may be the context of our health revealed and our endurance be the evidence. And this is precisely where Paul leads to in verse 5.

Verse 5 in the third section, suffering reveals kingdom citizens. Paul names it. He said, this, this is evidence of the righteous judgment of God.

The this is referring to all of that, all of what we just read. It doesn't refer to afflictions alone, as though suffering by itself proves that someone belongs to God.

[35 : 28] In other words, the harder your life is, the more spiritual you are. No, it's nonsense. Nor does it refer to endurance that's isolated away from suffering. Instead, the evidence points to the whole gospel ecosystem and the pattern that Paul has just described, the growing faith, the increasing love, the steadfast endurance in the midst of persecution and affliction.

See, that pattern is evidence that God's judgment is righteous, is true. We often hear judgment only in the negative sense, right?

Don't judge me, right? Get our attitude, our sassy face on, right? But when a judge makes his judgments, he does more than just condemn the guilty, right?

a righteous judge also vindicates the innocent and declares what is true. Paul is saying that God has judged rightly concerning these believers.

They are marked out as kingdom people. In their perseverance, under pressure displays the truth of that verdict. He's judged righteously. this is where we must be careful theologically in such a workspace culture, because their suffering does not earn their worthiness, their endurance doesn't purchase their kingdom, right?

[37 : 05] Paul says that they are, look, considered worthy. That means that this grace was working from beginning to end.

God does not find worthy people and then reward them with the kingdom. Well done, my good and faithful, worthy servant. Come on in. God makes sinners his own.

counts them righteous in Christ and preserves them until the kingdom comes. Endurance in that manner is sort of the receipt for a Christian of God's work in them.

Just as the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the receipt that sin was paid in full, so the endurance of the church is evidence that this redemption is truly at work in us.

Christ purchases people and Christ preserves his people. This is where the gospel must steady us that apart from Jesus God's righteous judgment is absolutely terrifying.

[38 : 18] It's horrific. Apart from Jesus. We have sinned against him. We have rebelled against his rule. We have loved darkness, excused ourselves and tried to be our own Lord and our own God in our lives.

But if God judges us by our own righteousness, that's just not going to do. We are condemned if that's the case.

But Christ absorbed the verdict of condemnation so his people could receive the verdict of grace. He rose again so that all who repent and believe in him would be declared righteous, welcomed into the kingdom, and be kept until the end.

This is the mystery of the gospel, but also the wonderful truth of the gospel. If you're not in Christ today and you know that if you were based on righteousness, it's unrighteousness that you would be judged in if you were to walk out and meet the Lord in judgment, you would be considered guilty. not innocence, but by turning in faith to Jesus Christ today, you may receive Christ's righteousness, be clothed in his righteousness, and your unrighteousness dies and is substituted on Christ's body at the cross.

[39 : 51] Turn from your sin and come to Jesus. Don't wait until suffering comes into your life and exposes that your little religious facade you were putting on attending church and things like that and being a good person, helping that old lady.

I don't know who that old lady is, but helping her across the street, right? All of that was just revealing shallow roots. But what a grace to a believer.

Believers, Christians, suffering is not God's condemning wrath in your life. It's not him condemning you. It might be discipline.

Suffering sometimes is discipline. It's sometimes a refining fire. It may be persecution for the kingdom, but one thing it is not is abandonment.

Spurgeon said in one of his sermons, sitting in the refinery, he says, what he has redeemed, he will refine. What he has redeemed, he will refine.

[40 : 57] In other words, Christ is not purchase his people and then abandon them in the fire. I love how in our institutes this morning, Micah actually said that in Ezekiel.

You see that God went with them into the Babylonian exile. He did not abandon his people. See, God designs the flames not to destroy his people, but as just like the hymn, how firm a foundation says, and it declares, to consume the dross, to consume our scum, and to refine the gold.

He keeps us until the end. Comfort can make a church look healthy, can't it? But hardship reveals whether it truly is.

I have four questions I want to ask as we come to a close here and land the plane. number one, are we growing in our faith?

Are we growing in our faith? I'm not asking you if you attend church, if you sing loudly, if you're learning, or agreeing, but are you noticeably trusting more deeply?

[42 : 19] Number two, are we increasing in love? Not merely loving the people that look like us, dress like us, talk like us, like the same stuff as us, but people that you might perceive as maybe unlovable or very difficult.

Are you moving towards another because Christ first moved towards us? number three, are we enduring under pressure?

Not ignoring suffering, don't ignore suffering, not pretending like suffering is easy, ah, it's just whatever, it's just a difficult season, right?

But refusing to let affliction separate us from Jesus Christ, and refusing to let affliction separate us from the church, especially the local church, Steel Valley Church.

And number four, are we living as people of the kingdom? Remember, verse five says they are suffering for the kingdom of God. Their lives only make sense if Jesus Christ's kingdom is real, if it's coming, if it's worth suffering for, right?

[43 : 45] Church hardship in that sense is a spiritual diagnostic. It's not an interruption to live in the good life.

It's a spiritual diagnostic. It reveals whether we are religious consumers who follow Jesus only when life is convenient or citizens of a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

if anything good came from COVID in the year 2020, it was that. Hardship really did refine the church.

Some churches closed, some churches flourished. But please don't hear this call to prove yourself in your own strength. Hear it as a call to look to Jesus Christ, to receive His grace, and to endure with His power alone.

When hardship presses in, let it reveal that Christ is enough, His kingdom is better, His verdict over you is final. Turn to Him, trust Him, and stand in the grace and peace that no flame on earth around us can ever extinguish.

[44 : 59] Praise the Lord. Let's pray.