

Visible Growth

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[0 : 00] So let me summarize, give a brief summary of the first letter of Thessalonians. So this was an important city, actually was the capital of Roman province of Macedonia.

And everything started in Acts chapter 17, when we have Paul and his friends preaching the gospel in this community. So we have conversions from the Jews, but also from Gentiles.

And the result of this is that we have people like against Paul and his preaching. So we have conversions. That's really good, but also we have afflictions.

So Paul and his friends, these missionaries had to leave that place. And after that, Paul sends Timothy to get some report of this church plant.

And the report is really good, actually. However, there was an important issue in that church that some Christians had died.

[1 : 10] So the main question here in this letter, well, this is the summary of the summary. But it is what is the hope for the Christian, both in life and death?

What is the hope for the Christian, both in life and death? And the answer of that is that we belong to Jesus. To the Jesus who lived and died for that church, for this church, for us.

That we belong to that Jesus, but also that that Jesus is coming for a second time. So the coming of the King, the Savior and the Redeemer is the main theme of Thessalonians.

Why? Because we as Christians, and I mean like every people, need assurance, security in life. But in fact, assurance about eternity.

Eternity when we die, assurance 30 seconds before we die, assurance right now when maybe everything is okay.

[2 : 25] Assurance in the best moment, but also assurance of this reality of the gospel in the very worst moments. So the first question that I would like to ask is, do we have a view of the eternity of the second coming of Christ?

In the context of suffering and persecution? So that's first Thessalonians. And second Thessalonians, again, is about the importance of the second coming of Jesus.

First Thessalonians was that Jesus is coming, so this is our hope, but second Thessalonians is about Jesus is coming, but not yet. So we have these two implications about this.

First is about the importance of good teaching, the importance of good doctrine, but also the importance of good practice from good and sound doctrine.

It's not mainly or simply about doctrine, but good and sound doctrine. And it is not also about having good teaching, but also at dispositions, sorry, that is rightly understood.

[3 : 44] So it's about receiving with a good heart the good teaching or doctrine of the Bible. Why? Because this doctrine of the second coming of Christ was misunderstood by some Christians according to second Thessalonians.

So a bad understanding of good doctrine led to these Christians to live in a bad way. That's the reason why we have in the third chapter of this letter Paul preaching against this idleness in the Christian life.

So in summary, doctrine matters, but also how we do we receive doctrine in order to live according to what we confess and what we believe.

Because otherwise we can just live according to our own ideas or thoughts. So that was one of the issues in that church.

Actually, some Christians, they thought that it doesn't matter. Jesus is coming, so it doesn't matter if we live like this idleness. It doesn't matter. Please do not work. Your earthly vocation doesn't matter because Jesus is coming.

[5 : 02] But Paul is preaching against that because Jesus is coming because our view is fixed on eternity. We don't need to be idols because Jesus is coming.

We are faithful in our earthly vocations, in our job, in our families, whatever you are because Jesus is coming. We have to live according to that confession.

So that's a brief summary of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. And today I would like to just look at these four verses. And I would like to focus about this.

And actually this is the title of the sermon. It's about growing abundantly when it seems impossible to grow. Growing abundantly when it seems impossible to grow.

Many of you, maybe you don't know, but I'm not from Scotland or from the UK. I am from Chile, South America. And every time that I preach I have to say something about my country because I love my country.

[6 : 16] But in Chile it's very important to harvest. The harvest is key for our economy, for food. For economy the harvest, wines, whatever, it is important.

So everything depends on the good harvest. However, when we have a storm or bad weather, all this harvest can be destroyed in just a couple of minutes.

So all the work, everything is just... It's really sad to see people working hard during a whole year, then you have a storm, everything is destroyed.

Why I'm talking about this? Because this church, they were living something very difficult moments. And even now in our society we see that things are not going well sometimes.

Maybe in terms of economy, what is going on right now in Latin America. It's really bad, politics, morality, so on. We think, oh, this is not going well.

[7 : 25] And sometimes we think that it's impossible to see a good fruit even in the church. Maybe you think it is impossible to see a good fruit because I am so weak.

I am being persecuted even by my own temptations or sins or whatever. So the question is, how can we grow in the midst of adversity when things are going pretty bad?

So how can we grow when things are going bad only because of our faith in Jesus Christ?

And as I will say, even it's not about faith itself, but about the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. So let me just briefly talk about two points here.

The first one is about the heart in the midst of bad times, and that is steadfastness and faith. And secondly, the second point is the fruit of that heart, of that steadfast heart full of faith, and that is growing abundantly in faith and love.

[8 : 38] So the first point is the heart in the midst of bad times. We can read in verse 4, sorry, I don't know if you can put it on the screen, but we read here that Paul says, therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your good times, no, in all your persecutions, and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

But think about this, these people are growing faith and love when they are being persecuted. And this kind of persecution is a really strong term or word, because it means pain, death, sentences, because of their faith.

It was a persecution with the objective of having people, Christian people, but just saying you have to renounce, you have to give up your faith, you have to renounce everything if you want to live, because if not, we're going to kill you.

That was persecution. It was a punishment there. And also afflictions, every kind of afflictions, not just a physical affliction, but also emotional afflictions, like afflictions in your mind, in your head, stress, economical afflictions, social afflictions, because they were being persecuted, because of their faith, because they were committed with this message of the gospel.

So think about this, this is the context of a church that is growing faith and love. We can think, yes, we are suffering, maybe we are being afflicted by things that we see, and it's easy to identify bad things outside of the church, outside of us.

[10 : 45] But let me tell you this, our worst enemy is not outside, it's here, and it's our simple heart, that's our worst enemy, because every day this old Israel, this old hunter, the old Derek, or whatever, is going against us, against the faith, against living by grace, and in different ways, the old man, the flesh, whatever you call it, or the body of death, as Paul used to call it, in different ways, is leading us to renounce our faith by creating idols, maybe, by distorting sound doctrine, I don't know, but we are being persecuted not by the things mainly outside of us, but because of our flesh, because of our sin.

But in the midst of this suffering, if we read this, Paul and his fellows and his friends, they boast about this church, about them, why?

Because of this heart, the heart of this church, and its steadfast heart, full of faith. So, yes, they were being persecuted, they were experiencing afflictions, but this church, these people, they had this steadfast heart, full of faith.

So, let me just think about this word, this steadfastness. Today, I preach about this, but in Spanish, and in the Spanish version, we read this, but not as steadfastness, but as patience, patience, sorry. So, some versions actually translate this word, the original word, as patience, like something passive, maybe, but that's not actually the idea of this word.

[12 : 57] It's more than that, it's not just like being patient, but it's just, it is not something passive, but it's an active disposition of the soul, of your being, of being resolute about the things that we believe.

It is a disposition, the power to withstand difficult moments, or even the stress of life, or in this case, persecutions and afflictions.

It is the power, the disposition to resist the adversities. It is not something that comes from us, but actually, it's a gift from God.

So, it is about, it is to have this resolution about like, stand firm through the storm, everything is going pretty bad, it's just a stand firm.

But the question is, how can it be? Because in human terms, it is impossible in any language, impossible, impossible, it's just, how can we just stand firm when everything is going bad, when we are being persecuted or like we are falling like every day in the same kind of sin?

[14 : 25] How can we just stand firm? Because of them, because of the Thessalonians, because they have something special? No, the answer is not.

Because this steadfastness burns from faith. And faith here changes everything. Because faith means this unconscious recognition that we are weak.

We are weak, that we are not strong. So, how can we have this steadfast heart when we recognize that we are weak?

We are weak. That we have nothing, that we are in bankrupt. We don't have nothing to give. That's the reason why I love this definition of faith by some Puritans.

It is like the empty hand of a poor man who has nothing to give, but he wants to receive everything. That's faith.

[15 : 31] That's faith. It's a thirst for God. It's a hunger for God. So, how can weak people stand firm through the storm, through problems, through the circumstances?

Not because of faith itself, but because of the object of their faith, in the case of this church. It wasn't because of them, but because of where they...

of where we are. Do you remember the first question that God asked to Adam after the fall?

What was the question? Where are you? Where are you? So, the same question. That question is for you and for me.

Where we are. That's very important. Because this church, it wasn't because of them, but because where they were.

[16 : 41] It was about the foundation, where they exercised their faith, the place where they exercised their faith. And if we go to verse one, if you can just...

if we can read that, Paul, Sylvainus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians. This word changes everything again. In God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, they have steadfast hearts because they are a church. They were a church that is in God and Christ.

Not simply God, but Paul says here, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, where we are right now? Where are you? Are you in God or outside of God? Where are you? Because they were in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 49] That's the best place that we can stay and live and breathe and everything. When things are going bad, through the storm or whatever, if we are grounded on the rock, that's the best place where we can stay and live and die and everything.

But it wasn't simple God, but our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The God to whom they belong, the God to whom we belong is infinitely bigger than the circumstances.

According to Romans 8, 18, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time, the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Can I tell you this? Yes, pain is real. Suffering is real. The things that you are living right now, the things that you are experiencing right now, that maybe only you know, yes, it's real.

But the glorious reality of God, of the gospel, is even more real. Because this glorious reality of God, not just any God, but it is the God of the covenant.

[19 : 18] It is a glorious God, the infinitely happy as we learned this morning, the blessed God, that comes to us to say, I am your Father.

You do not belong to your sufferings, or circumstances, or temptations. You belong to me, says God, because He is our Father.

In the midst of our diseases, losses, pain, or rebellion, God comes to us to tell us that He is our Father, and we are His sons and daughters, only by the grace of the Son, Jesus Christ.

So if you have time this night, please go and read the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism. Beautiful, beautiful. So we have a Father, and we have a Lord Jesus Christ, and we leave according to the sanctification of the Spirit.

Chapter 2, verse 13. So what's the fruit of this? So now let's go into the second point. What's the fruit of having this steadfast heart that is rooted in God?

[20 : 38] It is growing abundantly in faith and love. This was a living church, because they were rooted in a living God.

An organism grows, and because they have a living faith, that living faith grows.

So growing abundantly. And the word here means to increase in great amount, like maybe beyond the norm. They were just growing and growing and growing abundantly in faith and love.

And it's like to flourish. That's the meaning of that word. And they were growing abundantly again in faith. So do you see like the connection again?

Faith and faith, they were just growing in faith. So how can we grow in faith? Because according to the word, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ, Romans 10, 17.

[21 : 54] So this church, they were a church of the book of the Bible, a church that loves the word of God.

If we can go quickly to 2nd Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 1, it says, Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored.

Again, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you. This was a reality. This was a church that honored the word of God in their daily life.

A church that deepens in this doctrine for life. Christ is coming. So we have to live according to that reality.

Martin Luther used to say, we have to live as if Christ had died yesterday, resurrected today, and he's coming tomorrow.

[23 : 02] That's the Christian life. And doctrine. Let me just briefly talk about this. Paul talks again about the second coming.

And this is a doctrine for life. To avoid idleness, I encourage earthly vocations. So please don't see doctrine as your enemy.

No, the only enemy is our sin that distorts doctrine, or uses doctrine for our benefit. So this church, they were growing in faith because they were growing in the word of God.

And if we compare again 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1 with 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 from verse 1 to 2, do you have your Bibles there?

So there is 2 Thessalonians. Just keep that. Again, let me read the first verse of the 1 Thessalonians, the first letter, and just compare it with the first two verses of the second letter.

[24 : 09] So I'm going to read the first letter. Paul, Sylvannus, and Timothy. That's the same. To the church of the Thessalonians, that's the same.

In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. So can you see the development of the idea? It is not only God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, but now is in God our Father.

They have the idea and they have the doctrine, but they want to know more about that. Grace to you and peace. Yes, but now in the second letter is grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So if they want to know more about the grace of God, if they want to know more about the peace of God, if we want to know more about the grace and the gospel, we have to learn more about the God that we worship, about the triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They were growing in faith and in some doctrine. And because of this, the affections were growing again, because they were being imitators of Christ.

[25 : 33] And if we have to love our brothers as Christ did, we have to know more about the heart of Christ. We have to know more about the person of Christ, about the person who actually died on the cross, the God-men.

So because doctrine is real, doctrine matters. And Paul wishes in 1 Thessalonians again, 3 verse 12.

Here it is. In the first letter, May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another. And now in 2 Thessalonians we have the idea, that we are actually growing abundantly in love for one another.

So in the first letter we have Paul praying for, May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another. And we see the reality here, because in the first letter was, May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Can you see again the connection between doctrine and life? Do you see the connection between doctrine and what we are going to experience right now in the Lord's Supper, this covenantal meal?

[27 : 01] Do we know, do you want to know more about this word that Derek used this morning for baptism, this covenantal families, this child of the covenant?

This covenant is just this intimate relationship between the living God and us, just to enjoy him. Just to say, Psalm 73, Sorry, you know this version is Spanish, but it's like, Whom I have in heaven but you God, and there's no one in earth.

You know what I mean? Psalm 73, just give me a second. I have to read, sorry. I can say in Spanish if you want. I can't, I see it, I see it. But it's like, Whom have I in heaven but you, and there's nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail. Yes, because of persecution, because of sin, because of a staff here, he was just like saying God, why I see the prosperity in the evil persons?

But here is, oh God, Whom have I, Whom have I in heaven but you, and there's nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

[28 : 20] There's nothing here on earth that can satisfy our deepest desires, because we were made to glorify God, and never forget this, to glorify God means to enjoy him, enjoy him forever.

But not just you yourself, but you and your family, you with your friends, you and I in our sufferings, in persecutions and afflictions, because these afflictions means nothing compared with the glory of Christ, with the one who right now is praying for us, and he is coming for you and me, and for the saints that they were persecuted 100 years ago here in grass market.

Here's coming for us because he knows your heart and my heart, so doctrine matters, and how we do receive doctrine matters, and how we live according to what we confess and what we believe matters.

So let me finish with this. How can we grow again in the midst of suffering? Because we believe that we have steadfast hearts, because, hear this please, because of the steadfastness of Christ.

So it's not mainly about your faithfulness, it's not mainly because your patience and endurance, but it's mainly because of the faithfulness of Christ.

[29 : 57] So let's finally read this, 2nd Thessalonians chapter 3, 5. Listen to this, May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Verse 3, it was about the... Verse 4, sorry about the steadfastness of this church, but 3, 5 about the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ.

So it's not mainly about us, but about the faithfulness, the steadfastness of Christ. And can you think about this? If we talk about having this steadfast heart, means you have this resolution in our heart, can you think that before the eternity, Jesus Christ was resolute about our salvation, about His love toward us?

Can you think about His faithfulness right now, that He's faithful and He knows our hearts? He was resolute in the eternity, but also on the cross, because He loves you, because He loves this church. We can love more our brothers and sisters when we know more about the love of Christ, about the heart of Christ.

[31 : 28] It's about Christ. That's the reason why we are Christians, not because of our morality, but because we are united to Christ.

And He's worthy, He's worthy of our praise. He's worthy of living for His glory, because He lived and died for us, because there is nothing better.

Again, nothing can satisfy your heart, but only God Christ. Are you suffering right now? Are you experiencing suffering?

This is the moment to receive an experience according to this word, grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the best moment to receive that grace from Christ. Let's pray together. Oh God, we pray this night for, we pray for having a sense of, in fact, what we are doing right now.

[32 : 48] That we are in the presence of the Almighty God. We are in the presence of the One who is bigger than the Universe.

The Universe is just small dust compared with the glorious Creator.

And at the same time, that Creator is here with us, among us, within us.

Just to let us know that you are the only One who can satisfy our hearts. And we recognize and we acknowledge that, Oh God, we need more about you.

We need to know you more in order to glorify your name. While at the same time, we are loving our brothers and sisters and growing abundantly in faith and love.

[34 : 11] In the midst of bad times, suffering, losses, diseases, or good times, but in every time, help us to remember that you are coming, that you are coming again.

And because of that, we want to live for you, the One who died for us. And this is what we are going to celebrate today. So God, oh please, give us joy, joy, the joy of your salvation.

Maranada, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.