

God's Work Through Suffering

Living in Light of His Return (2 Thess. 1:3-12)

Introduction

- Let's start today with a short 3-question quiz:
 - How many books in the OT & NT are divided into 2 parts?
 - None, 7, 8, 15
 - The answer is 7 (Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Corinthians, Thessalonians, Timothy, & Peter - John is divided into 3 parts)
 - Why were OT books divided in two?
 - The Red Sea, numerology, to fulfill prophecy, the scrolls were too big
 - The answer is the scrolls were literally too big to handle
 - Why were NT books divided in two?
 - Easier to hide, add authority, time, a backup in case the was lost
 - The answer is time – the author had more to say at another time.
- The books 1 & 2 Thessalonica were originally letters written several months apart by the Apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit.
 - This gap is significant when we look at the main sub. in ch. 1. (Read v. 3-10)
 - Chapter 1 is all about suffering – something that started months earlier when a small group of people put their faith in Christ
 - Paul talked about suffering and persecution in his 1st letter to the Thessalonians and here he is - months later - talking about it again.
 - He doesn't ignore it, minimize it, hide it in the end, or make excuses.
 - He addresses the issue head-on in the 1st ch. & this time in more detail.
- As much as you & I would like to avoid it, today's focus passage makes it clear that **suffering is one of the ways that God works in our lives.**
 - As we talk last week, God can work in our lives through the Bible, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and even godly counsel.
 - But God can also work in our lives through suffering & here's how...

Body

I. Suffering builds endurance. (v. 3-4)

- Paul begins with great gratitude for 3 things in the lives of his readers.
 - Faith: Their trust in God's message (gospel) & messenger (Paul) were growing.
 - Love: Their care and concern for each other was increasing.
 - Perseverance: They didn't give up even though they were experiencing severe persecution and affliction.
- The story of their persecution goes all the way back to Acts 17.
 - The Jewish community was jealous that so many people had responded.
 - They recruited "scoundrels" from the marketplace to whip up a mob.
 - They attacked the church & dragged some of them before the city authorities.
 - Paul had to leave the city and promise to never return.
- The physical & political attacks continued in Thessalonica, but that's not the only way that Christians can experience suffering.
 - We experience natural disasters, accidents, & illness in our broken world.

- We feel the pain of our own sinful choices and actions.
- We share the hurt & grief of our loved ones who are suffering.
- We even receive attacks & oppression from Satan & his minions.
- Don't miss the last phrase in this section of verses: "which you endure."
 - You can't have long-term faith without endurance.
 - And you can't have endurance without hardship & adversity.

II. Suffering prepares us for eternity. (v. 5-10)

- Religious persecution & affliction involve a human antagonist.
- This type of suffering, especially, equips us for God's coming kingdom.
 - Those who persecute God's people will receive retribution.
 - Those who are persecuted in God's name will receive relief.
 - Nothing will be overlooked in God's final judgement of the world.
- Paul goes into some detail about this time of final judgment.
 - Jesus Christ will be "revealed from heaven" with His mighty angels.
 - Unbelievers will experience "eternal destruction" and be separated from God for eternity in hell.
 - Believer will glorify God & enjoy His presence forever in heaven.
- Suffering prepares us for eternity by creating an appetite for it. I enjoy listening to music in the background as I study & prepare for my messages. I used to use a music service that included targeting advertising & I noticed the ads for local restaurants would intensify as we got closer to lunchtime. They tried to create an appetite for something better than the turkey sandwich that I packed that day.

III. Suffering glorifies God. (11-12)

- Paul finishes this section with a prayer for the Thessalonians.
 - A prayer that believers will be "counted worthy" despite their suffering.
 - A prayer that believer will do good works even while suffering.
- And the purpose for all this is to bring glory to Christ Jesus by:
 - Worshipping Him as the sovereign God even though He allows suffering.
 - Trusting Him in front of other people, even while we suffer.
 - Following Christ's example of suffering first and then experiencing glory.
 - Suffering is not an end in itself, but a mean to a greater end – the glory of God.

Conclusion

- Tim Keller has an excellent book on *Walking with God through Pain & Suffering*. In it, he identifies the most vivid depiction of suffering in the Bible as the 3 faithful Hebrews in the fiery furnace. In the 3rd ch. of Daniel, the men are joined by a mysterious figure who walks around with them.
- Suffering is one of the ways that God works in our lives** as He walks with us through the fiery trials of life.
- I want to let God have the final word today as we finish the way this passage finishes – with prayer. We don't do this very often, but I want to give you a chance to be prayed for, & to pray for others. Pastor Jared & I will be available. I want to encourage you to come to the front or pray with others at your seats – but take the next few minutes to pray for those who are suffering, struggling, & hurting.