

II THESSALONIANS 1:1-5 **HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN GROW?**

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to II Thessalonians chapter 1 as we begin our study through Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica.

Thessalonica was located in the northern part of modern day Greece and was the largest and most important city in the Roman province of Macedonia.

During Paul's day, the city had some 250,000 people, mostly Greek, but they also had some Romans and a Jewish community as well.

Not only was this city an important seaport city but it also was located on the major land travel route, the Egnatian Way, which connected Rome with the Orient.

Today this city still exists with a population of some 300,000 people and it is called Thessaloniki, (formerly Salonika).

Keep in mind that Paul established the church there in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Remember, in Acts chapter 16, Paul had this vision of a man from Macedonia who was pleading with him, saying, "**Come over to Macedonia and help us.**" Acts 16:9.

The Gospel had made its way to European soil! The first place they go to is Philippi, and then, some one-hundred miles to the west of Philippi they came to Thessalonica.

We are told in Acts 17:1-4, **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.”**

So, it seems from what we read here that Paul spent three sabbaths with the Thessalonians, sharing Jesus with them and then helping them to grow in the Lord.

Not a long time, and some feel that the three sabbaths was only ministering to the Jews, but I think the idea is that was his total time there being forced out and moving on.

Keep in mind that Paul did not just give them an hour of teaching, I am sure he taught for several hours and when people are hungry, they will listen and take as much in as they can! I think that is what we see here in Thessalonica.

That is what Pastor Dave and I saw when we were in Haiti. These pastors we were teaching sat in a room with some fans but no air conditioner, temperatures in the 80’s with high humidity, for several hours of teaching. And they were writing everything down they could because they were hungry for the Word! I think that is what was going on here in Thessalonica, taking in as much as they could in a very short period of time

Then Paul, getting kicked out of Thessalonica, went to Berea, Athens and finally to Corinth where he wrote I and II Thessalonians.

Many believe that this second letter to the church in Thessalonica was written within months of the first letter. So sometime in A. D. 50 or 51 Paul wrote both I and II Thessalonians from Corinth. Keep in mind that he spent some 18 months in Corinth or 1½ years establishing the church down there in Corinth.

Why another letter so quickly? Because word had gotten back to Paul about some misinformation, some false teachers spreading false doctrine and he wanted to correct those problems before these believers were discouraged and started moving in the wrong direction.

As you read through this letter it breaks down by chapter. The main focus that we see here in I Thessalonians chapter 1 is dealing with suffering.

In other words, Paul gives them *Encouragement in Suffering*. That is a good title for this chapter.

You see, the persecution against these new believers didn't stop and Paul wanted to encourage them to keep moving forward, to keep growing in spite of all that was coming against them, he didn't want them to give up!

Listen to what Paul said to this young church in his first letter. In I Thessalonians 1:2-10, **“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”**

As they came to faith in Jesus, persecution against them grew and grew. And you know how it is, as time goes by and things don't seem to be getting easy or better, you begin to doubt, you begin to get discouraged, and Paul wanted them to know that they needed to hang in there, persecution for your faith is the norm! Thus, he gives to them this *Encouragement in Suffering* here in II Thessalonians chapter 1.

Then, in II Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul gives them *Enlightenment about The Day of The Lord*.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians Paul spoke of the end times and the Rapture of the church. But there was still some confusion, which opened the door for false prophets, false teachers, deceivers to come in telling them that they missed the Rapture and were living in the Day of the Lord. And with all the persecution they were facing, you can see how they came to that conclusion!

Also, these false teachers even had a forged letter supposedly from Paul to help support their false doctrine. In II Thessalonians 2:1-2 Paul says, "**Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.**"

Notice that they were shaken as false prophecies were given that they were in the day of the Lord, "**by spirit.**"

The false teaching that they were hearing was that they were in the Day of the Lord, "**by word**", and it shook them.

They were shaken as this forged letter, supposedly from Paul, was being circulated, stating they were in the Day of the Lord, "**by letter.**"

Paul is going to clear up those misconceptions, those false prophecies, false teachings, and false letter that were being circulated through the church.

And think about it. Why were they so confused? Because of the persecution they were facing and the false information they were receiving about the Day of the Lord, as I have said.

And this phrase, "**the day of Christ had come**" is better translated, "**the day of the Lord had already come**" as the NIV translates it. Thus, they had a hard time distinguishing their present troubles from the Day of the Lord!

Thus, Paul gives them *Enlightenment about The Day of The Lord* in II Thessalonians chapter 2.

And lastly, in II Thessalonians chapter 3 Paul speaks of the *Establishment of Christian Living*.

In other words, it is a call to walk worthy of the high calling by which they were called.

Was this a problem for them? It became a problem for some of them because of the misinformation they had regarding the Day of the Lord and the Rapture of the church.

Some felt that the Lord's return would come at any moment, which it could, but this caused some to stop working, to become lazy, they were loafers and feeding off of others who were working.

Some may have thought if this is the Day of the Lord, what is the use, why work? Thus, Paul is going to correct their perspective on this issue and how to walk worthy of the high calling by which we have been called!

A theme we see in many letters that Paul has written. He gives to us doctrine and then the application of that doctrine is to walk accordingly!

Paul lays this out in II Thessalonians 3:10-15 as he wrote, **“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”**

Don't give up, don't give in but forge ahead in the work of the Lord for the Day of the Lord is coming, but until then, persecution will be heavy upon you!

And what we see is that Paul speaks of the *Establishment of Christian Living* here in chapter 3 of II Thessalonians.

Of this letter, William Kelly tells us:

As in the first Epistle, the apostle does not immediately grapple with the error, but prepares the hearts of the saints gradually and on all sides so as to clench the truth and exclude the error once it is exposed. This is the way of divine grace and wisdom; the heart is set right, and not the mere point of error or evil dealt with.

- William Kelly

Before we get to our text this morning, listen to how some see American Christians, how they view our faith. We are told"

At the end of a tour of the United States in 1963, Helmut Thielicke, the distinguished German preacher-theologian, was interviewed by a group of journalists and theological students. One of those present at the press conference asked Thielicke what he considered to be the most important question of that time for Americans. His carefully measured answer is just as relevant now as it was then, particularly in a discussion of excellence:

I would rather – if you will permit me to make a judgment – mention an entirely different problem as being the most important question which you are facing. Not a single person ever raised it in any discussion I had in this country (it would therefore appear that people are astonishingly unconscious of it); and whenever I raised it myself, it seemed to evoke a kind of disconcerted amazement, I might almost say, a kind of embarrassment, which was probably the reason why nobody ever broached the subject. I mean the question of how Americans deal with suffering. Yes, you have heard aright; I mean the problem of suffering. If I have not been totally blind on this journey, I believe I have seen that Americans do not have this color on their otherwise so richly furnished palette . . .

Again and again I have the feeling that suffering is regarded as something which is fundamentally inadmissible, distressing, embarrassing, and not to be endured. Naturally, we are called upon to combat and diminish suffering. All medical and social action is motivated by the perfectly justified passion for this goal. But the idea that suffering is a burden which can or even should be fundamentally radically exterminated can only lead to disastrous illusions.

One perhaps does not even have to be a Christian to know that suffering belongs to the very nature of this our world and will not pass away until this world passes away. And beyond this, we Christians know that in a hidden way it is connected with man's reaching for the forbidden fruit, but that God can transform even this burden of a fallen world into a blessing and fill it with meaning.

- Gary Inrig, *A Call to Excellence*, p. 119

You see, we tend to view suffering in a negative light and thus we try to avoid it at all costs. But that is not the case as we see here with this young group of believers in Thessalonica.

The suffering they went through, the persecution that came upon their lives was not in vain but was working in them and then through them, and we will see that this morning.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in II Thessalonians chapter 1, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we look at this topic, ***HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN GROW?***

II THESSALONIANS 1

VERSES 1-2

So, as I have said, several months after Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, he penned this second letter to them from Corinth.

And I want you to notice that this is personal. He starts out by saying, "**Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.**" Why did he start out that way?

I believe it was to show them that these men, Silas and Timothy were also involved. Not really in writing this letter, but they were involved in establishing the church in Thessalonica with Paul and thus, Paul includes them for the people would have known them very well.

Now Silvanus, also known in the Scriptures as Silas, was a companion with Paul. He journeyed with Paul on his second missionary journey. He was imprisoned with Paul in Philippi and set free, (Acts 16:19-27). And when Paul first visited Thessalonica Silas or Silvanus was also with him, (Acts 17:1-9).

Then there is Timothy. Timothy was a son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother by the name of Eunice, (Acts 16:1, II Timothy 1:5). He was a resident of Lystra, which was a city in the province of Galatia, (Acts 16:1-3). And from a young age he was taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother, (II Timothy 1:5; 3:15). So, he knew the Scriptures very well and during Paul's first missionary journey Timothy probably heard about the Gospel message from Paul. I think Paul lead him to the Lord for in I Timothy 1:2 we see Paul call Timothy "**a true son in the faith.**" Timothy was a trusted companion of Paul's and accompanied him on his travels. And we saw that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica on a previous occasion to find out how this church was doing, (I Thessalonians 3:2).

Again, I want to bring this point out once again, because it is important. We think that you have to be a Christian for many years to be mature. That does happen, but not always. What I want you to notice here is that this church in Thessalonica was established by Paul on his second missionary journey and he was only able to minister to them for three sabbaths. Then he was run out of town for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But what Paul left behind was a church, a group of new believers who were strong in the Lord and they were active in the Lord. They lived what they believed and others saw it and were ministered by what they saw!

Then Paul says, "**To the church of the Thessalonians.**" And for many, they read over this and don't think much about it. "Let's get to the good stuff. This is just the introduction" they might say!

But what does Paul mean when he says "**church**"? When that word is used some think of a building or a denomination, but that is not what Paul is speaking of. The Greek word that is used for "**church**" is EKKLESIA, (ek-klay-see'-ah) and it speaks of a "called-out assembly.

What that means is a group of believers whom God has called out of the world and not just called out of the world, but, as I Peter 2:9 tells us, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”**

You see, the church is a living organism but many times it is made into an organization. We are not an organization, but, as a living organism we work together for our Lord. We are open to what the Lord is showing us.

Here at Calvary, we do not have big board meetings. We do have board meetings with the elders to go over the things of the church, but if someone wants to do something, you let me know, and if it is honoring to God, go for it. You don't have to present it at a board meeting, it doesn't have to go through all kinds of groups to see if they approve of it or not. Let God work, don't get in His way!

And then Paul shows us that this church is built upon **“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Again, I think we just take this for granted, to us it is simple. Of course, the church is built upon God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. But keep in mind that this was a young church and Morris tells us, “The Greek makes it plain that the Father and Christ are one source. It is remarkable that even at this early date the Son is placed side by side with the Father as the fount of divine grace, without any need of comment.” (Morris cites Bicknell)

And then Paul says, **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul speaks of the Siamese Twins of the New Testament, *Grace and Peace* and always in that order.

I have said it before but it truly bears repeating. You will never be able to experience the peace of God until you first make peace with God and you cannot make peace with God until you first receive His grace into your life, the grace that is in Jesus Christ that He extends to us, the forgiveness of our sins!

Paul put it this way in Romans 5:1-2, **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”**

The Amplified Bible puts these verses like this, **“THEREFORE, SINCE we are justified (acquitted, declared righteous, and given a right standing with God) through faith, let us [grasp the fact that we] have [the peace of reconciliation to hold and to enjoy] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). Through Him also we have [our] access (entrance, introduction) by faith into this grace (state of God’s favor) in which we [firmly and safely] stand. And let us rejoice and exult in our hope of experiencing and enjoying the glory of God.”**

You see, apart from Christ we are at war with God, we are fighting against Him. But as we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of our lives, that fighting ends and we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ. Sin no longer separates us from God because our debt of sin was paid in full by Jesus!

And it is then, and only then that we can truly experience the peace of God in our lives. Now, when you think of peace you think of an absence of trouble, but that is not the peace that is being spoken of.

People today tend to look for peace in this world. They want wars to stop, they want just an absence of problems. But, as you look at this world, the only time there was an absence of problems was in the Garden of Eden before sin entered this world.

Since that time there have been wars, fighting, all kinds of difficulties in our lives. So, this world will not give you the peace you are looking for. In fact, in Isaiah 48:22 we are told, **“There is no peace,’ says the Lord, ‘for the wicked.’”**

But Jesus will give you the peace you are looking for as you repent of your sins and ask Him to be Lord and Savior of your life. In John 16:33 Jesus said, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

Our peace is found in Jesus but, again, it is not the kind of peace you might be thinking of. In Philippians 4:6-7 we are told, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”**

Once you make peace *WITH* God then you can enjoy the peace *OF* God in your life. I know, you are probably thinking, “Are you kidding me? Do you see what is going on in my life? This is not peace!”

But look at what Paul says here. First of all, we are not to be anxious over the situation. But why, how can that be? Because God is in control, He knows what is going on and He will see us through those times.

Secondly, instead of trying to carry the burden of these things upon your life, give them to God, rest in Him and be thankful that He loves you and will see you through. I am not saying that the problem will go away, but you will find peace in God!

“But I don’t get it? How is that peace? Where is that peace?” Notice the peace that Paul is speaking of here. He tells us that, **“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”**

In other words, from a human perspective, from a worldly perspective, you should be going crazy with the things that are going on in your life. But you are not because you have given it to the Lord, with thanksgiving, and God gives you this peace that surpasses all understanding. To the world it doesn’t make sense. To us, it still may not make sense.

But God gives to you this peace and in doing so He will guard your heart or emotions and your mind or your thoughts! I like that because that is where the enemy usually gets us. We are emotional people and things are out of control and so are our emotions. Things get out of control and our minds are racing all over the place.

But as we surrender to God, give these things to Him, that anxiety, that fear, that anxiousness, will be replaced with His peace, that goes way beyond our understanding because it is a peace in the midst of a storm in our life!

And Paul continues on and shows us what we are to focus on and what I want you to see as I read these verses in Philippians is that nowhere in them do you find Paul telling us to focus on the turmoil that we are going through. Then what are we to do?

Listen carefully as Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8-9, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

Think about this for a minute. What would happen if when you woke up in the morning you focused on all the bad things that are going on in the world? In other words, you turned on the news. And you not only did this in the morning, but throughout the day you are bombarded by all the evil that is happening in the world! You would be discouraged, down, maybe even depressed.

And please understand I am not saying we are to ignore what is going on in the world or pretend that these things are not happening, they are! But we live in a time where you can get the news 24 hours a day, 7 days a week! It just does not end.

Instead of doing that, what if you focused on the things of God, meditated upon His Word? I think Paul tells us what will happen in our lives if we get refocused upon the Lord, then **“the God of peace will be with you.”**

The Thessalonian believers needed to hear about the peace of God because of the persecution they were facing for their faith. It doesn't stop the persecution but it gets you to look up instead of upon what is before you.

It is as Solomon said in Proverbs 3:5-6, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”**

It is hard to give all our cares, all our anxieties to the Lord because we like to be in control. But let's face it, we are not in control but the Lord is. Thus, we put our trust in Him, we rest in Him and not our own understanding of the situation. And I love how the Lord does not ignore us, but He will lead us where we are to go!

When things are tough, and they will be if they are not already, trust in the Lord and not in your own understanding of the situation. Praise Him, thank Him for who He is and His great love for you and He will show you the next step you are to take, what you are to do!

VERSES 3-5

When you hear of churches today, what are they boasting in? Many times, it is their church size, their programs that they have, this and that. And that is not what we are to be boasting in. But because it is all about us, that seems to play out very nicely, even though it is not right. One writer nails it when he wrote the following regarding why people go to church, what they are looking for. He wrote,

Churches take pride in many things: their large membership roll or attendance, the size of their campus, the design of their buildings, their wealth, their music, the social status of their members, the prominence of their pastor, their political clout, their influence in the community, or their zeal for a particular theological cause. Others celebrate their creativity and freedom from traditional modes of worship, trading theology for psychology, choirs and organs for rock bands, and replacing sermons with skits, musicals, and other forms of entertainment in an effort to create an inoffensive, nonthreatening atmosphere for the unbelievers and nominal Christians in their congregations. They have become the model churches many seek to emulate.

- John MacArthur

But that is not what Paul does here. He focuses on their faith and how it was growing. And the evidence for their growing faith is the love that they had for people. You see, their faith grew even though persecutions or the hostility from the enemies of the Gospel were coming against them. That is the first point in these verses, ***FAITH GROWS!***

They grew in the faith even though tribulations or afflictions that may have resulted from the persecution that was coming against them. They did not renounce their faith, cave in, compromise what they believed, they did not give up, but they grew in the faith during these times.

Remember what Paul prayed for them in I Thessalonians 3:12, “**And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you.**” Now we see that come to pass here, they were growing and because of that they were examples to other churches, other Christians.

Now, honestly, how many of you really like persecution, tribulations, things going crazy in your life? If you do, see me after study! The reality is, sometimes suffering is what we need, as hard as that may be to swallow. Let me show you what I mean with this story. We are told,

A man found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge. One day a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled but couldn't seem to force its body past a certain point.

Deciding something was wrong, the man took scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon. The moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, the wings small and shriveled. He expected that in a few hours those wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they did not. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings.

The constricting cocoon and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings. The "merciful" snip was, in reality, cruel. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need.

- Beth Landers

Persecution is tough, it can rock our faith! But who are you putting your trust in, yourself or the One who loves you so and died for you? Perspective is everything folks!

And here me out on this. I am not saying that we don't struggle with persecution but one thing is for certain, persecution will destroy false faith.

Jesus made that point in Matthew 13:20-21 as He was sharing a parable of the soils or really a look at the heart where the Word of God falls upon, the various soils of the heart.

And regarding the person who had a stony heart, we are told, "**But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.**"

But, on the other end of the spectrum is true faith that will not be destroyed but grow. Peter tells us in I Peter 1:6-7, "**In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**"

Now again, hear me out on this. I am not saying that we never get discouraged, depressed over the situations that we face as Christians. The problem when that happens is we have taken our eyes off the Lord, we are not trusting Him!

You see, Job struggled with that in all the suffering that he went through and in the end, because of his doubting God, he repented.

In Job 42:1-6 we are told, **“Then Job answered the LORD and said: ‘I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, “Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me.” I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.”**

That needs to be our response when we are suffering and not trusting God, that He will strengthen us and see us through this time.

Now the question is, “If I have to suffer, how long will it be for?” For most of us if not all of us the shorter the time we are suffering the better. But God doesn’t give to us a timeframe. For some, it may be a lifetime and when they are raised in glory they will cease from suffering. For others, it is periods of time, maybe a day, a month, a year. You see, God knows what we need and how far we need to go and when we need it!

In Job 23:10 Job tells us the purpose of suffering, **“But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”** You see, pure gold is reflective in nature and thus, as Jesus looks upon us as pure gold, He sees His reflection. That is what He is doing, making us into His image, molding and shaping us down here to fit in up there!

You see, fire will destroy wood and paper but it will purify gold and temper steel and that is what the Lord is doing as He is testing our faith, helping us to grow!

And let's face it, suffering gets our attention; it forces us to look to God, when otherwise we would just as well ignore Him.

And I don't know about you but I see faith like a muscle and if we don't exercise it, like the muscle, it will get flabby, atrophy, waste away. But, as we do exercise our faith, placing our whole weight upon God no matter what we are going through, our faith will grow as we take the promises of God from the Word of God and apply them to our lives. As we walk by faith in Him and not by sight, we will grow!

Spurgeon explained how to get a strong and growing faith. He wrote, "By that means you are to grow. This is so with faith. Do all you can, and then do a little more; and when you can do that, then do a little more than you can. Always have something in hand that is greater than your present capacity. Grow up to it, and when you have grown up to it, grow more."

So, we have seen that faith grows as we exercise it, as we walk by faith and not by sight. As we trust in the Lord and not our own understanding of the situations we are facing. ***FAITH GROWS!***

Now, look at II Thessalonians 1:4 and you see the second point here, that their ***TESTIMONY GROWS!***

These were young believers and yet, Paul, Silas and Timothy boasted of the steadfast endurance, the faith of these believers in spite of all the suffering, the persecution that they were going through. They were witnesses to other believers; they were an encouragement to other believers of their faith, a powerful example to them.

Now I may not like this, and you may not like this, but the testimony that seems to speak the loudest of our faith is that which is seen in the midst of suffering.

Think about it, if you went through life without a care in the world, if nothing difficult came your way, how hard is it to live a life like that? Do you really have to work at it? Not at all and the reality is, if it is not difficult, if there is no suffering, then it is hard for that to be a witness to anyone!

But when things get tough, when your world seems to be falling apart around you, when suffering and persecution come your way for what you believe, how you respond in that situation will be a testimony of your faith. It will show either that your faith is real or it is not!

Think about it,

Most of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written in prisons. Most of the greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers of all time had to pass through the fire. Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress from jail. Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganized the hospitals of England. Semi paralyzed and under the constant menace of apoplexy, [stroke] Pasteur was tireless in his attack on disease. During the greater part of his life, American historian Francis Parkman suffered so acutely that he could not work for more than five minutes at a time. His eyesight was so wretched that he could scrawl only a few gigantic words on a manuscript, yet he contrived to write twenty magnificent volumes of history. Sometimes it seems that when God is about to make preeminent use of a man, he puts him through the fire.

- Tim Hansel, You Gotta Keep Dancin, p. 87

And here's the thing. Persecution does not destroy our faith, but it amplifies it, it shines forth from these dark times. For the unsaved, they see Christ in us through these times. For the saved, they are strengthened in the faith as we go through these times.

Make no mistake about it, our **TESTIMONY GROWS** through persecution!

We also see here in II Thessalonians 1:4 that suffering, persecution, we see that our **PATIENCE GROWS!**

Paul is saying here that in the midst of these trials, these tribulations, these sufferings the Thessalonian believers were facing, their patience grew. Now some, when they think of patience they see it as just waiting it out, kind of a stoic philosophy, hanging in there, but to the Christian it is far more than that!

You see, the Greek word that Paul uses for “**patience**” is HUPOMONE (hoop-om-on-ay) and it speaks of cheerful or hopeful endurance, consistency, continuance.

Think of it like this. Patience is a steadfast endurance in the Lord, that you keep going when the going gets tough because you trust in Him. It is sustaining hope in the midst of difficulty because your hope is in the Lord.

Notice what James tells us regarding this issue in James 1:2-4. We are told, “**My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**”

We are called to look upon trials with joy, which is not natural. This is a joy that comes from the Lord as we rest our whole weight upon Him!

In his commentary on James, Warren Wiersebe writes, “Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to ‘count it all joy!’ If we live only for the present and forget the future, the trials will make us bitter, not better.”

How true that is! And so, our *PATIENCE GROWS* as trials, sufferings come our way and without them, there is no growth!

And the last one we will be looking at this morning is in II Thessalonians 1:5 and we see that *SUFFERING MAKES US . . .*

First of all, let me say this. On one hand God will use tribulation to help us to grow, to purify us. But, as we see here in II Thessalonians 1:5, it will be the judgment of God against the ungodly who persecute the people of God! And we will see that as we move on next time in verses 6-10 of II Thessalonians chapter 1.

Here's the thing, when suffering comes, and it will, it will either break us or make us. If we allow it to break us, at times it can make us bitter and not better. But also, in the brokenness the Lord can use it to cause us to be less self-sufficient and to trust more in Him.

Now, if we allow God to work in us, if we don't fight the sufferings we are going through, if we don't allow them to make us bitter, then God will use them to make us better, to make us into the man or woman He wants us to be!

Remember being a kid and as you were growing up it was hard. There were so many things that we were being taught, so many mistakes we made, so many lessons to learn, and in the midst of all of that, we did not like it.

But now, as we look back at all that we learned as a kid, we see that all of those things helped to make us into the man or woman we are today!

The same is true with our Christian walk. All that we are going through, all the difficulties we face in life, all the persecution and suffering that comes upon us, God is using to make us into the man or woman of God that He wants us to be!

Remember the Mother Goose Nursery Rhyme, “Mary, Mary, quite contrary.” It goes,

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
 How does your garden grow?
 With silver bells and cockleshells
 And pretty maids all in a row.

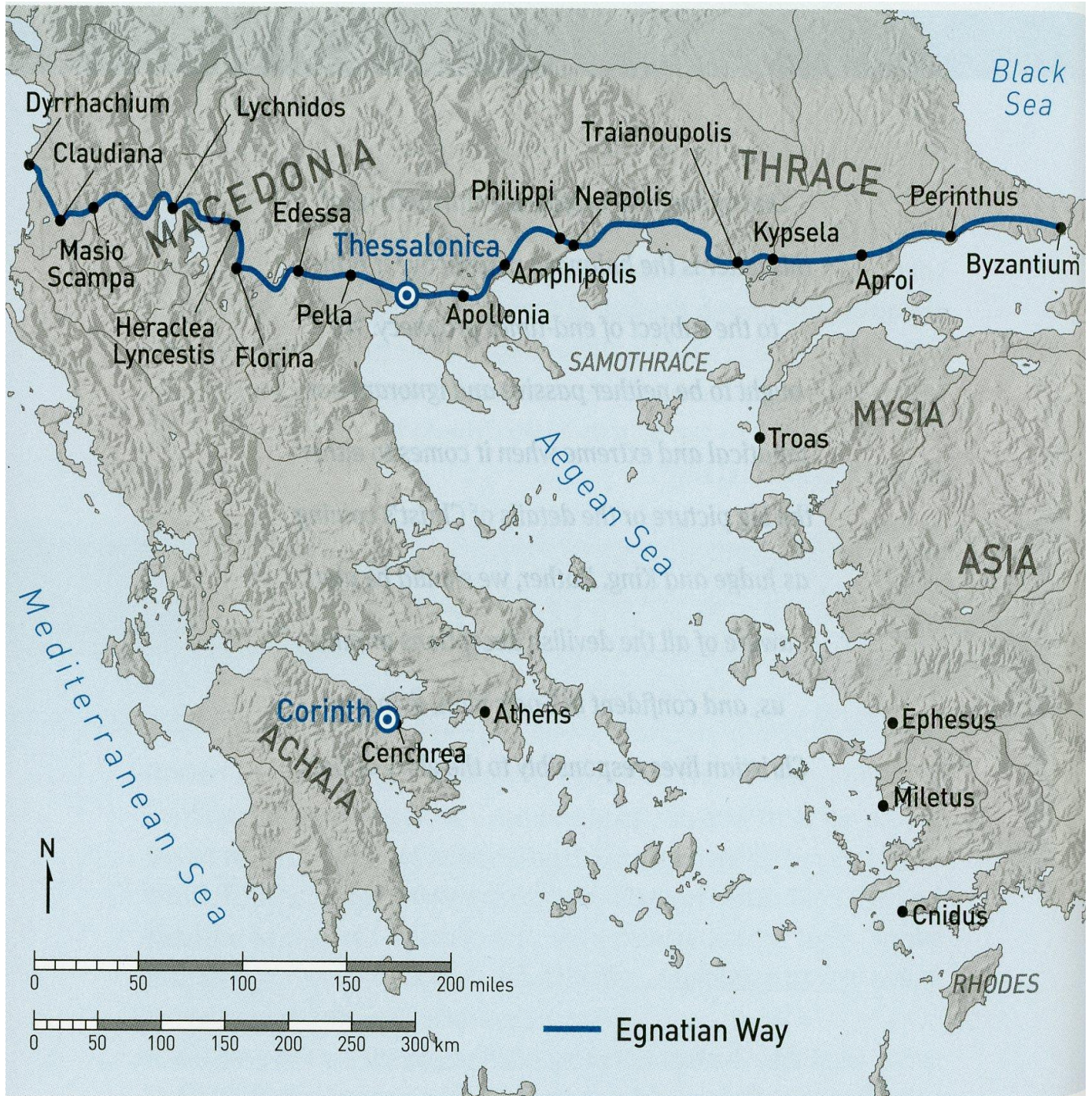
That is a nice nursery rhyme but the reality is, our faith grows through suffering. Make no mistake about it, *SUFFERING MAKES US . . .*

So, how does a Christian grow? As we have seen this morning, suffering causes our *FAITH TO GROW*, our *TESTIMONY TO GROW*, our *PATIENCE TO GROW*, and *SUFFERING MAKES US* into the man or woman God wants us to be!

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 1:6, “**being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.**”

Thus, as a Christian, we need to understand that if we are going to grow, just add suffering! And we don’t have to add it, God will because He is growing us in the faith!

Let me close with these words from Job, “**But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.**” Job 23:10.



The **Egnatian Way** was a significant road built by the Romans from Asia Minor to the western edge of Macedonia, where the road ended in the port city of Dyrrhachium. This port was connected by waterway to the Italian port of Bundisium, which was the southern end of the Appian Way, a main road to Rome. Several of the cities where Paul ministered, including Thessalonica, were situated on the Egnatian Way, which made for convenient and easy travel between the cities.