

GLORY TO CHRIST

BIBLE BASIS: II Thessalonians 1:312

BIBLE TRUTH: Our Christian commitment must always give glory to Christ.

MEMORY VERSE: Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power (II Thessalonians 1:11).

LESSON AIM: That your students will reflect upon a time of personal persecution and their response to it.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources—charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, Bibles (several different versions)

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To explain how Paul's statements about the commitment of the Thessalonians and the justice of Christ motivated the church at Thessalonica.

BIBLE LEARNING

In today's lesson, students will consider how intercession has touched their lives and those for whom they pray so that negative situations can be turned around and give all honor to God.

BIBLE APPLICATION

The trials and tribulations of life are very real, up close, and personal. Our lesson today shows us that we must encourage each other in the Lord; we must intercede for each other through the storms of life.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Students will engage in intercessory prayer.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

II THESSALONIANS 1:312

3. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every

one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4. So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

5. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

6. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7. And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10. When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

11. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Apostle Paul

Before he met the Lord on the Damascus Road, the apostle Paul had a very colorful history of persecuting Christians. However, once Jesus saved him, he became a sold-out follower of Christ and was very influential in shaping the history of Christianity from that day forward. His frenzied persecution of Christians after the death of Stephen, one of the first deacons, served as a catalyst to take the Gospel worldwide. A transformed (converted) Saul of Tarsus therefore not only became Paul, world

traveler for Christ, but preached for Christ throughout the Roman Empire on three missionary journeys. He carried the Gospel to non-Jews and helped found churches. When these infant churches experienced spiritual problems, the apostle visited or wrote letters to help them work through their difficulties. His letters became a part of the New Testament. His second letter to the Christians at Thessalonica is one such epistle.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will recognize the importance of being positive witnesses in the midst of their trials.

INTRODUCTION

Firm in Commitment

At the time of Paul's writing to them, the church at Thessalonica had only recently been formed and was experiencing much persecution for their newfound faith. This was one of the churches that the apostle Paul, Silas, and Timothy founded on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 17:110). Paul had to leave Thessalonica suddenly because of ever present persecution from non-Christians in the region. However, he had written a letter a few months before to this same congregation to help them: (1) grow in their faith, and (2) to comfort and encourage them by reassuring them of Christ's second coming. Unfortunately, some had misunderstood Paul's teaching on this matter. Because Paul had said basically, "Christ could come at any moment," some believers stopped working and just spent their time awaiting Jesus' return. The persecution and misunderstandings propelled Paul to write this

second letter to help these people remain faithful to their God.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That students will recognize the importance of believers encouraging each other in the Lord.

I. ENCOURAGEMENT DURING

PERSECUTION

(II Thessalonians 1:310)

Sadly, today we can find many people who were raised in the church and even attended as adults, but now they have stopped going because they feel that no one really cares about what they are going through. We hate to admit it, but even some saved people feel that their problems are bigger than what others are experiencing. Too often we find coworkers, friends, and loved ones (and maybe even ourselves) who are really struggling under the load of their problems. What should we do?

Paul Speaks Encouragement in the Face of Tribulation (verses 320)

3. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

In today's passage, notice that Paul will have nothing to do with flattery—he is not puffing up the Thessalonians in order to get what he wants—rather, he attributed any and all spiritual growth on their parts to the work of God. For Paul, seeing Christians flourish in their faith was not cause to idolize them—something our own modern, celebrity focused culture may well be guilty of doing—but was instead cause for celebration of "grace upon grace," to put it

in the apostle John's words in John 1:16 (RSV). Matthew Henry helps us see how important Paul's words are to us: "We may be tempted to think that though when we were bad we could not make ourselves good, yet when we are good we can easily make ourselves better; but we have as much dependence on the grace of God for increasing the grace we have as for planting grace when we had it not" (Commentary on the Whole Bible, electronic ed.). Indeed, such is the grace for which Paul remained exultantly thankful; the grace that initiates the Christian life is the same grace that carries it to the end.

The reason Paul considered it "meet" (appropriate, fitting) to thank God for the Thessalonians was their abounding "faith" and "charity" or "love" (NLT, NIV). The reader of the Thessalonian epistles may notice that Paul repeated here two of his powerful triad found in I Thessalonians 1:3. And, lest we think he has left out his third of the trio, "hope," in this case, the "patience" he referred to in the next verse of today's passage has much in common, biblically speaking, with hope. So, as we saw in our reflections on I Thessalonians, faith toward God and love toward God's people are equally signs of God's marvelous grace, and Paul rejoiced equally for both.

4. So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

As Paul notes in Philippians 3:1, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." This last sentence expresses the relationship in Paul's mind between thanksgiving toward God and encouragement toward humankind. To praise God, for Paul, was

"not grievous" (an example of understatement, to be sure!), but more importantly it was "safe" for his hearers. That is, praise to God is meant to bring forth encouragement and comfort to God's people. In the same way, in verses 34 of today's passage, he knitted together praise toward God—for the good things taking place in the hearts and minds of the Thessalonians—and the encouragement to other churches that those good things ought well to produce. We can appreciate the King James Version's translation of *kauchaomai* (*kowKHAHomahee*), as "glory" (rather than "boast" in NIV, RSV and other modern translations), because it tied the exultant happiness of the believer together with the glory of God who lavishes all good things upon the children of men. For Paul, living in Christ means living with glory and spreading word of that glory throughout God's people.

5. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

But why in the world should the Thessalonians be faithful and patient in the face of intense persecution, given that they could achieve a more comfortable life if only they would let go of faith in Christ? There remained for them the promise of God's "righteous judgment" at the end of the age, which will make all things right. Paul referred here to a "manifest token" of this judgment; it is not immediately clear from the grammar of the Greek what exactly that "token" might be. It seems, though, that Paul was drawing upon the larger picture of verse 4 to help his hearers comprehend the "manifest" (the certainty of something by a display or understanding via the senses) "token" to which he was pointing in this verse. That is, it is not just the suffering of Christians which points to

Christ's second coming, but especially their faithfulness in the midst of that suffering. This understanding makes the best sense of the Greek grammar, for the word *endeigma* (*ENdighemah*), given in the KJV as "token," which means evidence. Seeing the "token" as the Thessalonians' patient way of life amid suffering also connects the "token" with the latter part of this verse, which pointed to them being "worthy" (Greek, *axioo*, *axeeO o*) to be part of the kingdom of God.

How are we to understand this worthiness? From this verse alone, it might appear that Paul spoke of gaining entrance into heaven by means of one's faithfulness. But we cannot read the Bible as a whole and come to this conclusion. Matthew Henry summarizes well the Bible's view of suffering's merit: "We cannot by all our sufferings, any more than by our services, merit heaven as a debt; but by our patience under our sufferings we are qualified for the joy that is promised to patient sufferers in the cause of God" (Commentary on the Whole Bible, electronic ed.).

6. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

This verse reminds us that God does not deal equally with the church and the world; we would be terribly mistaken to believe that the difference between the saved and the unsaved comes down to a matter of personal worthiness. Quite the opposite; while we saw in the previous verse that the righteous inherit God's kingdom through magnificent grace and are then disciplined to be made fit for that kingdom, verse 6 shows a simpler principle at work: the principle of "recompense" (Greek, *antapodidomi*, *antapodEE domee*). This means repayment, or simply, people "getting what's

coming to them," whether good or ill. Paul's point was that the final judgment of God will be perfectly just with regard to those who do not believe; their punishment will perfectly fit their crime. In this particular case, Paul's word would have brought great comfort to the Thessalonians, for it would have reminded them that their oppression was not going unnoticed. On the contrary, to the degree that anyone "troubled" them because they were Christians, to that same degree would God bring trouble to the "troublers." What a comfort that God brings perfect, balanced judgment, particularly when both ancient and modern times have been filled with such injustice that no one seems to answer for!

7. And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

The phrasing of this verse's first half might be confusing at first glance; the idea is, "And to you who are troubled, (God will give) rest with us..." It is clear from the Greek that we are to understand the word "recompense" from verse 6 as being in play here. So, to summarize: God will repay those who persecute the Thessalonians, but will also give rest (relief, comfort) to those who have experienced terrible upheaval and suffering because they named the name of Christ. This is the "reward" of which the Bible often speaks; that the heir of God's kingdom, having endured to the end, will receive "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" from the hand of God (Ephesians 3:20). The glories of God's eternal kingdom will make Christians wonder why they ever thought anything at all about their sufferings on this earth! This contrast is the clear teaching of Paul here, in Ephesians, and also notably in II Corinthians 4:16-18.

But lest the Thessalonians be deceived into expecting "heaven on earth" in this life, Paul made no bones about the "when" of this ultimate rest: "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels" (II Thessalonians 1:7). Jesus Himself employed the image of His coming accompanied by angels (see Matthew 16:27; 25:31); their "mighty" appearance is always meant to point up the power of Christ Himself, whom they serve. Likewise, the Scriptures often speak of Jesus' second coming as a "revelation" (Isaiah 40:35; Romans 16:25; Titus 2:11-13); in fact, the "revelation" in the book of Revelation is more about the triumphal coming of Christ and His kingdom than it is about any particular message being revealed.

8. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

The doctrine of God's judging unbelievers is unequivocally present in the Scriptures, and the believer ignores such teaching at the peril of his or her own conscience. This verse helps us understand God's judgment by reminding us that "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). In other words, God is so holy and powerful, beyond our comprehension, that the purifying and destructive force of fire is an appropriate way for us to understand that mighty holiness. This verse probably carries both ideas represented by fire in Scripture: indomitable power (see the burning bush in Exodus, chapter 3) and purifying judgment (both Old and New Testaments use fire in this way; see Malachi 4:1; I Peter 1:7, for example). Both images come together in Isaiah 66:15: "For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of

fire." This imagery was almost certainly in the mind of Paul as he wrote these verses to the Thessalonians. We must see here that God's judgment is not an isolated action, but rather an essential element of His character. Fire, by its very nature, consumes that which is flammable; likewise, God, by His nature, consumes in judgment that which is offensive to Him. How immensely thankful should believers be that the Judge chooses to shield them from that fire with the covering of Christ!

9. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

In Paul's description here, the eternal suffering that takes place is not one of being away from God's presence, but rather one of being in the midst of God's wrathful presence, and wishing one could escape. Elsewhere, the Bible depicts hell also as a reflection of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden in Genesis 3; the absence of God's sustaining presence is an element of the misery of hell. But here, Paul focused more on how "the glory of God's power" will be unendurable for those who have opposed such glory all their lives.

10. When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

The picture that seems to be in Paul's mind—and entering therefore the minds of his readers—changes here from that of consuming fire to that of a king returning victorious from battle. A common scene in the ancient world found such a king parading down the streets of his city, surrounded by a cheering throng of his subjects. At these times, the citizens of the kingdom would gather to extol the splendor and

worthiness—in short, the glory—of their king. Similarly, Paul used the phrase "glorified in his saints" not to refer here to God being honored in the hearts of individual saints, but to refer to the overwhelming worship and acclamation that will prevail on the day of Christ the King's return.

Similarly, Jesus will return into the midst of His people, and will be universally "admired" by them. (Our modern sense of the word "admired" is surely not strong enough here!) How did Paul know that that the Thessalonians will be found among the happy, exultant subjects of Christ the King? He knew because "our testimony among you was believed." One's response to the message of Christ reveals everything about one's response to Christ Himself; it is those who have held fast to the Good News who will find the second coming of Christ to be a joyful day indeed!

QUESTION 1

Why is it so important that believers encourage each other in the Lord?

(Answer) When people face trials, they need to know that they can hold on to God's unchanging hand. It is important to encourage one another because any of us can get weary, discouraged, or slack in pressing toward the mark. Circumstances can sometimes overwhelm us, but God has placed us in the body to help one another hold on.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul Encourages the Thessalonians

In today's passage, verses 6 and 7 tell us that in God's own perfect justice, He will punish those who persecute His children—He will punish those who persecute the Thessalonians as well

as us. Not only will He punish the persecutors, but He will provide His rest for those who remain faithful to Him in the midst of their maltreatment. The saints may be going through much suffering now, but at the Second Coming, He will make everything right (verses 9-10). In fact, John tells us in Revelation 21:4 (NLT), "He [God] will wipe every tear from their [believers'] eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

II. INTERCESSORY PRAYER DURING PERSECUTION

(II Thessalonians 1:11-12)

Paul ended this section of his letter by letting the struggling Thessalonians know that other believers not only loved them, they were making prayers of intercession for them as well. They were praying that God would not only make them worthy of the life to which He called them to, but He would also empower them to live for Him. Matthew Henry explained, "That God would begin his good work of grace in them; so we may understand this expression: That our God would count you (or, as it might be read, make you) worthy of this calling. We are called to God's kingdom and glory."

Encouraged to Glorify God (verses 11-12)

11. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

The result of God's calling and His bestowal of worthiness is that the believer begins to desire things that are according to God's will. And so Paul prayed that all such desires among the Thessalonians would be fulfilled through the

goodness and power of Christ. The KJV does not completely make clear the sense of the Greek wording: that the "good pleasure" and "work of faith" in this verse refer not to God but to the Thessalonians themselves. What Paul meant is, "Where you desire good, may God add the blessing of His goodness; where faith is at work in you to bring forth good things, may God add His power to bring them about!" Indeed, the believer in Christ, the one awaiting Christ's glorious second coming, could hardly ask for a deeper blessing than the power of Christ's coming to help believers accomplish that which the Holy Spirit in them desires.

12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When such a miracle takes place, the futuristic vision of verse 10 comes into the present. In other words, not only will the glorious King Jesus be glorified in that day of His mighty coming, but even now, when the saints desire good and are given power from heaven to carry it out, Jesus is at that very moment glorified among them. We should not fail to notice how Paul spoke of Jesus as "in you (plural)," in other words, "in your midst." Such language does not make sense if spoken of only one person; clearly, Paul meant to point to the importance of the community of the Thessalonians living holy lives together in anticipation of Christ's return. Christians are not isolated individuals; we are members of one body, and it is the flourishing of that body as a whole that brings glory and honor to the Head, who is Christ Himself. And so Paul prayed for that same Head to pour forth grace upon the Thessalonians, for without such grace He will be neither glorified nor honored among them. Only that same grace can cause the purposes of God to be

accomplished in the church even in our day, so that the coming Christ might be glorified in our midst!

QUESTION 2

Why is it so important that we be positive witnesses in the midst of our trials?

(Answer) God has saved us through Christ that we might glorify His name in all we do. He has placed us in the body and in the world so that by His grace we can be counted "worthy of this calling and fulfill the good pleasure of His goodness." Only positive witnesses prepare this world and God's people to see the power of God in "the work of faith" that He has called us to fulfill.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

We, Too, Are Called and Chosen

We as believers must realize that we cannot live this Christian life on our own. We need the Holy Spirit to empower us to live for Christ. We are called to become more and more like Christ (Romans 8:29); however, we need the Holy Spirit to help us do so. In order to be worthy of His calling, we have to desire to do what is right and pleasing in His sight. Again, we cannot do this on our own. It is the Holy Spirit who perfects us, teaches us, leads, and guides us into all truths. Therefore like the Thessalonians, we can thank God for His great, undeserved favor—His Holy Spirit that works in us.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will discover how and why God expects believers to pray for each other.

Going Through

After class, with tears in her eyes and voice, Marilyn came to her Sunday School teacher and asked her to remember her family in prayer. They had been experiencing one trial after another: There were mounting pressures at the accounting firm where she worked, her husband was nervous about the pink slips others had gotten at his job at a local auto dealership, and their daughter, who had only been married for a few years, was having major problems in her marriage. With much anxiety Marilyn said, "Our plates are filled to the brim right now. Please pray our strength in the Lord!"

Just because we are Christians, it does not mean that we will be exempt from life's many problems. In fact, sometimes the trials and tribulations seem to come so fast that we feel we cannot get our breath. The Thessalonians were experiencing persecution for their newfound faith from without and from within, they had misunderstandings about Jesus' second coming. Like Marilyn in our story, the apostle Paul knew that these infant Christians needed encouragement and they needed the saints to make intercessory prayers on their behalf, so that they would continue to stand in faith under mounting pressures.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will discuss what it means to "live faithfully to God."

Have you noticed a coworker, a friend, or loved one who seems to be under the load of their problems? If so, determine in your heart that you will engage in intercessory prayer for this person. Encourage him or her in the Lord. Let the person know that she or he is not alone, that you are steadfast with your faithful prayers

PRAYER

Dear Lord: As we face the persecutions and trials of this life, strengthen us to go through with attitudes that praise You and bring glory and honor to You. Help us, Lord, to encourage one another, remembering that we must face tribulation with the full knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Help us, Lord! In Jesus' Name. Amen.

HOW TO SAY IT: Recompense. 'relompen(t)s. Thessalonians. thehsuhLOnihuhnz. Thessalonica. thehsuhloNAIku.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read II Thessalonians 2:1317 and study "Chosen and Called."

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

Remain Steadfast in the Faith (1 Peter 5:611)

TUESDAY

A Nightlong Farewell (Acts 20:712)

WEDNESDAY

Worthy Is the Lamb (Revelation 5:914)

THURSDAY

The Saved Praise God (Revelation 7:917)

FRIDAY

The Eternal Gospel Is for All (Revelation 14:613)

SATURDAY

Give God the Glory (Revelation 19:18)

SUNDAY

Worthy of Christ's Call (II Thessalonians 1:312)