

II Thessalonians 1:1-4 The Provision of the Lord

Today we begin the book of II Thessalonians. Our focus will be on II Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 1 through 4.

II Thessalonians chapter 1 is entitled The Instruction Concerning Afflictions or Tribulations. And our focus this morning on verses 1 through 4 is The Provision of the Lord with his focus on The Comfort in Trials.

II Thessalonians is Paul's second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. You remember Paul visited Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. As he traveled across Asia Minor going from East to West before he wound up in Troas, which is right on the Aegean Sea. And he received a vision, what was called *The Macedonian Vision*, where a man from Macedonia said, "Come over here and preach the gospel to us." So they went across the sea, arrived in Philippi, ministered there, encountered hardship. Chased out of town they went from Philippi to Thessalonica. They were there for a couple of months they estimate and they were run out of Thessalonica and they wound up down in Berea. The same thing happened there as Jews from Thessalonica went down to Berea and caused trouble for Paul and his cohorts. And so Paul left Berea by himself, and went down to Athens, and from Athens he went to Corinth.

But then he called for Timothy and Silas - Silvanus as he is called in our text - and he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to find out how the new Christians were doing, new converts. By *new* I mean this is the first time that anybody has ever heard of Jesus Christ in Thessalonica. Mostly made up of Gentiles. There is a pocket full of Jews that were in Thessalonica, but mostly Gentiles. They had not heard of Jesus Christ. So as soon as they received Christ and responded to the gospel, the rest of the town turned on them. And that is when Paul and the others had to leave. But now Paul is wondering, he is down in Corinth and he is wondering how they are doing. Because most Christians, according to Paul's estimation most Christians fall away because of the great afflictions they encounter for being a Christian. So he sends Timothy and Timothy comes back and gives him word that they are doing fine, their love and faith is growing, they are still under afflictions.

So what is interesting is that II Thessalonians was written by Paul from Athens where he wrote the other as some ascribe, some believe that he wrote it from Corinth. But he wrote the second letter within a few months, maybe even as much as one year from the first letter. Now what is interesting about our text in II Thessalonians, Paul was inspired to write it because according to chapter 2 verse 2 a false letter was circulated by false teachers. A false letter that had Paul's name on it and the teaching was a false teaching about the tribulation period.

So the courier who took the first letter came back and told Paul about what was going on, that there was a false letter being circulated. And Paul's information about the tribulation period, that the Christians in Thessalonica were actually in the tribulation period - that is what they said Paul said, which is not true. So he wrote this letter, the second letter, to set the story straight about the tribulation period and that is that the hard times that they are going through as believers were not the tribulation period.

We know from I Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 9 that God has not appointed us unto wrath, but salvation. So God has not appointed us for the tribulation period. He has appointed us for salvation. The tribulation is the judgment upon those on the earth who have rejected Christ and have not received Christ. It is not a trial. It is a judgment time. What they were going through is not the tribulation period. It was normal hardships and sufferings that come with identification with Christ.

So as we begin the verse 1 of this second letter, in the comfort of trials in verses 1 through 4, we study the provision of the Lord.

Verse 1 says, **Paul and Silvanus**, we know him as Silas from the book of Acts, **and Timothy, to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. He opened up the ~~first~~ second letter with the same three that opened up the first letter, Paul, Silas and Timothy. To the same church, same suffering church. To the church of hardship.

It is interesting that from day one to all the way through and until the reign of Caesar Nero, the Christians of Thessalonica suffered. Yet they were the church that Paul held up as an example to everyone else. Both Peter and John and Paul, all the writers of Scripture present that suffering in Christ is normal. Because in I Peter chapter 4 verse 13, if Christ is in me then I am also partaking of His sufferings. If He is in me, I am partaking of His total life of who He is. So the more they suffered, the stronger they became in the faith, in their trust in Jesus Christ. It is interesting from back in I Thessalonians chapter 2 that God proves us. We will see that word again today.

Paul says that he was entrusted with the gospel because he is proven. Back in Philippi, that is the first city they went to after they came across the Aegean Sea - back in Philippi before he came to Thessalonica, he said, "I suffered back in Philippi before I brought you the gospel. And because I made the decision to keep going on with the Lord in the midst of hardships God entrusted me with the gospel." So the Lord says, "You have got one requirement, you have to be faithful." I Corinthians 4:2, the only requirement that God makes is His faithfulness. You must keep on and not quit.

Verse 2, **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul had two reasons for saying *grace and peace* in his letters:

- 1) That is what he wanted them to experience when they read his letter, that is the first thing that he wanted them to know. He wanted grace to touch their hearts, for them to be at peace after reading his letter and being taught. He only had one motivation that the grace of God and the peace of God would be experienced in them, and it would be from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The great provision of God is grace, and Paul wanted them to be at peace because of God's grace.
- 2) And the second thing, why Paul uses grace and peace, *grace* is the greeting to Gentiles and *peace* is the greeting to Jews. But the experience of God's grace and God's peace is for everyone.

It is interesting that the provision of the Lord is God's grace. We read about this in II Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7 through 10. You can turn there if you would like, if you have your Bibles. II Corinthians 12:7-10, **And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to beat me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.** And so the Lord's answer to Paul experiencing great revelations - he was caught up in the third heaven, left for dead, and saw things that he was not allowed, it was not lawful for him to relate to the people here on the earth - so a thorn in the flesh was given to him. Satan to beat on him lest he be exalted above measure because of his revelations. So he pleaded with the Lord three times that this thorn in the flesh might depart. But the answer of the Lord is in verse 9. **The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you."**

The sufficiency of God's grace. The word *sufficient* means *sufficient*. It is all you need. He said, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power - if you have *strength* in your English text, it is the word **δύναμις** (dunamis) where we get our English word *dynamite* from - for My power is *perfected*, that is *brought to fulfilment or maturity*, in weakness."** So the weaker we are the more we are empowered by the Spirit of Christ. The Lord is saying, "My grace is sufficient. I can take you through anything Paul because Satan's attack against your flesh just makes you weak." That said, Satan's attack has no spiritual influence at all to take us away from Christ. That is important. His attacks against our flesh has no spiritual influence at all to take us away from Christ. He is just battering our flesh.

What is interesting is Paul's whole approach to trials changed after that answer. He says in II Corinthians chapter 12 verse 10, **Therefore I rather take pleasure in my distresses, and my infirmities, and my persecutions, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** So Paul says, "The more trials I have on me, the more persecutions and hard times that I have on me the weaker I get. And the weaker I get, I get stronger in the Lord, in me, because I have to rely on Him the weaker I am." We become humbled. And the Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you in every situation."

If you have your Bibles, you can turn back with me to I Corinthians chapter 10. We were just in II Corinthians. I Corinthians chapter 10 - this is where he warned in verse 12, **One who thinks he stands let him take heed lest he should fall.** But in I Corinthians chapter 10 verse 13 he says, **No trial - the word *trial* is also the word *temptation*. No temptation or trial has overtaken you except human.** The term in the English Bibles *common to man* is the word *human*. Do you know that whatever we go through it is just human? It is common among the human race. **But God is faithful, who shall not allow you to be tempted or tried above what you are able, but shall with the trial or temptation, also provide the escape or the way out, that is the ability to bear up under it.** Very important, the word *ability* means *capacity*. To give us the capacity to bear up under the trial, under the temptation. This leaves some people with the impression that this means if you trust God through trials the trial will go away. But the text says it will give us the ability to bear up under it to carry it.

Do you realize that every situation is challenging us to the sufficiency of Christ? Is not the Lord sufficient to take care of everything?

You might turn with me, if you have your Bibles again, to Hebrews chapter 4 verses 14 through 16, **Therefore having a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we hold firm to the confession. For we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses.** Now the word *sympathy* is made up of the word **σύν** (sun) which means *with* and the word for suffering. To sympathize with somebody is not to sit there and have a bleeding heart and go, "Poor baby." It literally means *to suffer with* somebody. That is our word *sympathize*. But the Lord has been tried or tested everywhere **according to our likeness.** That is our literal translation, **according to our likeness, yet without sin.** What is our likeness? Human. He suffered all the trials and pressures that would come upon a human life except without sin.

Verse 16 of Hebrews chapter 4, **Therefore we should come with boldness to the throne of grace, in order that we might receive mercy, and find grace at the time of help.** God says that His grace is there to come and receive every opportunity at the time of help.

Back to II Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 3, **Brothers, we are indebted to always thank God concerning you, according as it is fitting, because your faith is increasing exceedingly, and the love of each one of all of you is abounding toward one another.** The word *fitting* - **we are indebted to give thanks because it is fitting** - the word *fitting* or *right* is the Greek word for the scales and balances down at the marketplace. If you were to purchase something down at the marketplace you would go down and put the item on one set of scales and then put money on the other side of the scales until they evened out, and that is how much the object is worth that they want to buy. So he says we give thanks because it is equal to the occasion. It is fitting. It evens out because of what is happening in your midst.

So the second thing in the midst of trials is that God is proving His people and proving (or testing) His people, He is causing them to grow. He says in verse 3 **Your faith is growing increasing exceedingly.** The Greek word means *to grow above normal*.

Secondly, he says, **Your love is abounding.** Each one of you your love is abounding towards the others, toward one another. So he says, "There is growth. God's grace provides growth for you in your faith and in your love."

Turn with me I Peter chapter 1 verse 3 if you have your Bibles. He says I Peter 1:3, **Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** The word *blessed* means *to speak well of somebody*. It is literally saying that God and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is well spoken of, **who according to His abundant mercy has given us a birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For an inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and is unfading, and has been reserved in heaven for you, that is, those of you who are being kept in or by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last times. In which you rejoice** - the word *rejoice* literally means *to celebrate*. Back to the text. **Though for a short time it is necessary to have experienced grief in various trials.**

What he is saying is that we look forward to what we have. We, in the meantime, for a short time, we have to grieve through various trials. Notice this in verse 7, **In order that your testing of the faith.** The King James uses the word *genuineness*, but notice how I literally read that, **your testing of the faith.** The word *genuineness* is the word *testing* or *proving*. **In order that your proving of the faith being much more precious than gold which perishes (or destroys) is being tested through fire.** The word *tested* is the same word for *genuineness* at the beginning of the verse. As gold is tested through fire so God tests His people through fire. The whole purpose for passing through the trial is that when He comes, we might be found under the praise and glory and honor of Jesus Christ at His coming. So we are being changed. We are being transformed. Even though we have to grieve for a short time while going through trials.

Now turn with me to the right to I Peter chapter 4 verses 12 and 13. He said, **Beloved, do not think it is strange when you should find yourselves, or fiery trials should happen to you, as though a strange thing is happening to you.** Verse 13, **But just as (or the extent that) your fellowship with the sufferings of Christ rejoice that also the revelation, in the revealing of His glory you should rejoice with great celebration.** So what he is saying here is, "Do not think it is strange when you find yourself in a fiery trial, because you are fellowshiping with the sufferings of Christ." And in fellowshiping with the sufferings of Christ he says, "Rejoice." That is our word that we usually translate *be satisfied*. Instead of rejoice being *oh how happy*, it is rejoice: *be satisfied*.

Let us turn to James chapter 1 verse 1 for a moment. James starts out by saying, **James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are in the Diaspora.** The *Diaspora* is a title of a group of people. They are the dispersed Jews. The Diaspora of the dispersion. Verse 2, **Count it all joy, my brothers.** The word *count* or *consider* is our word *governor*. He is saying, **That which governs your mind be all joy, my brothers, when you find yourself surrounded in various trials.** When you find yourself in various trials what is the thing that governs your approach and attitude? James says, "Let it be joy."

Knowing that your proving of the faith - that is the exact same wording in I Peter 1:7 - **that the proving of your faith is working out patience,** which is literally the word *endurance*, **ὑπομένω** (*hupomenō*), *to remain under*. **For let endurance have its complete work.** In other words, let us finish it out, trust the Lord, let Him finish what He is doing. **In order that you may be mature (or complete) not lacking in any one area.** So whenever you find yourself surrounded and embedded in trials, he said, "Let the governing thought of your mind be joy," satisfaction, because it is knowing what the trial is. The trial is from the Lord. It is your test in respect to the faith to cause you to grow in Christ.

So he says in verse 4 of our text in II Thessalonians chapter 1, **So that for us to boast ourselves in you in the assemblies of God on behalf of your endurance and faith in all your persecutions, and the afflictions which you are holding up under.** He says we ourselves were boasting in you, in the churches of God, on behalf of your endurance. That is the **ὑπομένο** (*hupomenō*) word, *remaining under*, that we just studied in James. Notice at the end of verse 4, he is boasting about their endurance and their faith in the midst of their persecutions and trials, which they were enduring.

Now the purpose of God is that we should be an example, and a witness, and a testimony to be an encouragement to other people. So Paul's comfort to them about trials: this is not the tribulation period, you are going through normal hardship of a Christian. So it was to comfort them. What you are going through is normal. It is not the tribulation period. The tribulation period wipes people out. God has not chosen you to wipe you out. God has chosen you for salvation.

Let's close with prayer.