

Second Thessalonians Chapter 1

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

The single most important event in the history of Europe was, and is, the coming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that Gospel, bringing as it did the good news of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, set men and women, boys and girls, in a right relationship with God. That led to the transformation of the lives of both individuals and nations. We still live today in the many lasting benefits of the undoubted blessing which Christianity has brought to us. Sadly, we also live in a day where the powers that be, as well as many ordinary people, are often ridiculing and even rejecting the gospel of the grace of God, with very sad consequences for all the populations of all countries throughout the world.

The bringing of the Gospel into Europe was an event specially marked out by God. We read in Acts 16 about Paul, together with his companions, Silas and Timothy, being on his second missionary journey. They had been preaching in Galatia, part of central Turkey. It seems that they may have had plans then to continue westwards. However, Luke tells us that they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to do so. Similarly, when they subsequently tried to go northwards, the Spirit of God did not permit them.

When Paul, and his companions, reached Thessalonica, they stayed there for three Sabbath days only – somewhere between two to three weeks. In line with his normal practice, Paul went first of all to the synagogue, so that, as usual, the Jews might be given the first opportunity to respond to the Christian gospel. He preached that Christ must, of necessity, suffer, be crucified, and be raised from among the dead. He thus emphasised the fundamental terms of the gospel message, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As is said of so many things, from such a tiny acorn the mighty oak of Christianity has developed. From this relatively brief visit, the thriving New Testament church at Thessalonica was planted and grew. This is confirmed in the details of Paul's letters to them.

There, Paul was able to share the Gospel with them, showing from the Old Testament the necessity for Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 17:1-9). It is noteworthy that, throughout the Acts, these were the twin themes of the preaching of all the apostles – the death of Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins, and His resurrection as God's sign of His acceptance of that sacrifice.

The Lord blessed Paul's preaching in a very special way. As a result, many of the Thessalonians turned to Christ. Amongst them, significantly, Luke tells us, were several of the leading women of that city. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, all were welcomed by the Saviour!

But, if the Gospel brought peace to the hearts of many of the Thessalonians, it also aroused antagonism on the part of some. It does just the same today! Troublemakers created an uproar in the city. Because they could not find Paul, they had Jason and some of his fellow believers brought before the city fathers with the accusation, "These who have turned the world upside down have

come here too" (verse 6). Unknowingly, they thus rendered tribute to the great power of the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. And this Gospel had only just arrived in Europe!

The accusation made was, of course, only a half truth. The main truth of the matter was that the world was already in an 'upside down' condition because of man's sin and separation from God. The Gospel, which Paul and his companions brought, was sent by God to turn man right side up!

So, in these very early days, those young Thessalonian believers learnt the cost of following Christ. Because of the persecution, they thought it wise to send Paul and Silas away by night to continue their work of preaching the Gospel elsewhere. That was probably in the early summer of A.D. 50. The next stop in Europe was Berea, where many believed, including several prominent women.

We shall be wise to bear this in mind, scheduled as we are to begin today looking at the second of the two Epistles, or Letters. That being so, in the long term, it shall be a great help to us as individuals if we take the first opportunity we have of reading Talks numbered T1204 – T1209 inclusive, which examine the details of the five chapters of the First Epistle.

First, then, a few general comments, including comparisons and contrasts between the First and The Second Epistles.

The First Epistle emphasises the heavenly aspect of Christian truth.
The Second Epistle emphasises the earthly aspect of Christian truth.

The First Epistle is corrective. The Thessalonians were in a dilemma concerning the coming of the Lord, and they had wrong ideas about dead Christians. The Second Epistle was written to them because they had wrong ideas about living Christians.

The First Epistle highlights, in chapter 4 verse 15, what Christian scholars call the Parousia – the second coming of Christ into the air; what we commonly call The Rapture. That will be the moment when the Lord Jesus takes to be with Himself all those whom the Bible classifies as 'in Christ.' That is, as far as we are concerned, all those who have trusted Him as Saviour, and confessed Him as their Lord. In the same way, chapter 1 verses 7 - 10 of The Second Epistle emphasises the Apocalypse – the Coming of Christ to the earth at His Appearing in power and great glory.

He will then initiate and commence His kingdom reign (see Matthew chapter 24 verse 30).

By way of contrast, the Jews had an earthly hope, whereas Christians have a heavenly hope. To that end, the First Epistle emphasises the heavenly aspect. The Second Epistle emphasises the earthly aspect. The First Epistle is largely instructive, whereas the Second Epistle is corrective. Contrasting the two Epistles, examining the detail of each, it is fair to say that The First Epistle emphasises that, at the time it was written, the local believers tended to have wrong ideas about Christians who were already dead. Equally, the Second Epistle points out that, at that time, the living Christians had wrong ideas about the living. For those reasons, it is obvious to those who study them now that the First Epistle highlights in chapter 4 verses 15 – 17 the Parousia – relative to the air;

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Putting it simply, generally speaking, the Jews had an earthly hope, whereas Christians have a heavenly hope. At the time it was written, it would appear that many living Christians, like the Jews, thought that earthly matters were more significant and important than spiritual ones. The Rapture is a matter of Revelation. The Appearing is a matter of Prophecy, which leads on to that which is practical.

In the Second Epistle, we are given the following:

- Chapter 1. Encouragement to the feelings, the emphasis being to the soul?
- Chapter 2. Prophecy and doctrine, with emphasis to the mind, and spirit?
- Chapter 3. Practical matters, with emphasis to actions, and therefore affecting the body?

When we have time, it will do us good to meditate on First Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 23 – “your whole spirit and soul and body.”

But for now, let us look at details of chapter 1.

Verses 1 and 2

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

What a great joy and privilege to be able to begin with a reminder that the great God Who is not only their Creator, and their blessed and eternal loving Father, but also the Source and Giver of every good and perfect gift received by them. Likewise, that the Lord Jesus Christ is One Who left heaven and came into the world to be their Lord and Saviour, and the means by Whom they would be brought into salvation and enjoy the love of God through Him.

Verse 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.”

Happily, their faith was increasing. Their love was abounding. However, their hope was diminishing (or perhaps being distorted?), and is not mentioned. The concern is not what will be the character of the period of world history ushered in by the Day of the Lord, but the preceding events that will usher it in. We need to distinguish The Appearing, which relates to our responsibility and takes account of present suffering and service, from The Rapture which is entirely a matter of privilege, received and enjoyed by the grace of God. 1 Peter 1:11 speaks of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” In principle, the measure is likewise with us, but, of course, of no comparison to our blessed Lord. This opens the door to the following verses.

“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: 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” (vv.4-5).

The Thessalonians looked to the negative side of the Day of the Lord – judgment.

There is also a very positive side – glory. Reaction to tribulation manifests their position; it does not qualify them for it. It manifests the genuineness of their faith. It was an outward seal. As we get to know God better, we trust Him more, and grasp the truth that we are in less danger from violence than from corruption.

Verse 6

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

God will be publicly vindicated when His enemies are put down. He takes notice now, cares for His own through present circumstances, and will then vindicate both Himself and those who have suffered because of their faithfulness to Him in difficult days. He is not unmindful of the injustices suffered by His children. He knows. He notices. He cares. He will recompense.

Verse 7

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

At His Appearing, Christ will:

First - overthrow the last head of Gentile power.

Second - destroy the man of sin.

Third - display the saints in glory.

Fourth - judge the world in righteousness.

Some details of these events are given in chapters 4 and 5 of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, and chapters 2 and 3 of the Second Epistle we have begun to look at today.

[It is noteworthy that The Day of the Lord is always described as imminent; near, not distant.](#)

Verse 8

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

In flaming fire? – there will be no public display of the righteously awarded rest and vengeance of the servants of God on their enemies till Christ is revealed in flaming fire. Them that know not God? – a reference to unbelieving Gentiles. Obey not the gospel? – primarily the Jews as an unfaithful nation? At His Appearing, to usher in His earthly Kingdom, there will be the judgment of all nations alive upon earth (Matthew 25:31 – 46). At The Great White Throne, at the end of what Hebrews 2:5 calls The World to Come, there will be the final judgment of all the wicked dead (see Revelation 20: 11 – 15).

[The Day of the Lord will involve suffering, but for His enemies, not for His own.](#)

Verse 9

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

The punishment of the enemies of the servants of God will be punitive, retributive, but not remedial.

- They will be destroyed - cut off for ever from His presence!
- not purgatorial, that is for a finite period!
 - not annihilation!
 - not cessation of existence!
 - eternal destruction or total loss of well-being, not loss of actual being!

The natural man might well not regard this as any hardship at the present time, saying "I'm not a religious person." Or, "Religion does nothing for me." But, in the end, all blessing and joy, including every creature comfort, comes only from God. To be cut off from His presence, without the present-time provision of relief which the longsuffering of God provides through the Gospel, there will be no blessing, no joy of any sort, no lessening or softening of the pain and distress which will be the eternal portion of the unbeliever.

Being eternally in His presence will give fulness of joy.
Being eternally out of His presence will give fulness of sorrow.

The glory of His power suggests the outward and visible expression of His inherent personal power. There is a great distinction between being on the one hand;

- 1) In His presence - of unapproachable light, compared to
- 2) Out of His presence – in total, outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 22:13 and 25:30).

The glory of His power will destroy the wicked whereas the glory of His grace will be exhibited in His saints.

Verse 10

"When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe ... in that day."

What we are at The Appearing shall be the result of Christ's work in us, wrought by Him, and therefore to His glory, honour and credit. In measure, it can be true of us now. Paul prays that it might be so. Not glorified privately, at the Rapture, but publicly, at His Appearing (John 17:22 – 23, Colossians 3:1 – 4, Revelation 21:23 - 24).

"Glorified?" – admired. Wondered at? Startled!

"In His saints?" – because of the results of His work in them, what His grace has wrought in them.

Because the Gospel "was believed?" – previously, in faith, not because of being impressed, by sight, when it actually happens.

How do the Thessalonians know they will be included? They had believed the day of grace.

"That day" – God's appointed day (see Acts 17:31).

Verse 11

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

Everything Paul details in verse 10 will be true “in that day.” It can be true, in measure, now. Paul prays that it might be so. “Wherefore we pray.” The Lord Himself has the power to do all things in His own power. Yet, He chooses to move His people to pray to Him, and then it pleases Him to accomplish His own will by answering the prayers of His own.

Now, grace is necessary in difficulty to arm the saints to endure affliction (cp 1 Peter 4:1).

God’s grace will take His own to heaven. Righteousness will then deal with His enemies on earth.

Verse 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.”

His Name glorified – not yet universally, but in the saints practically.

He in you – Christ is glorified, practically. Ye in Him – morally. In union and association with Him in Whom all is secured; in Him Who is seated at God’s right hand in heaven. Praise His holy Name.

Now let me say, “Thank you very much indeed for your patience and interest in listening to this Truth for Today talk number T1274, entitled ‘Second Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 1 – 12.’”

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