



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

THANKSGIVING IN TOUGH TIMES • 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-4 •

11/20/2022

MAIN POINT

We can be thankful to God, even in seasons of great difficulty.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think back over a difficult time in your life. What predominant emotions did you feel during that time?

At the time, how did you think God felt about your situation, and what did you think He was doing?

When you face a life crisis or struggle, is your initial reaction to turn to God for spiritual growth or turn away from Him? Explain. How is gratitude related to this?

Sadly, suffering is a staple of life. We have all felt pain, and it is easy to look around and know that we are not the only ones. What is not so obvious, though, is that even God has suffered. Isaiah told us that Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Look at the cross and it is clear that the Father, Spirit, and Son all experienced suffering. Yet, in these seasons we can continue to show gratitude to God, trusting that He is working for our good no matter what we face.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-4.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 and compare Paul's greetings in both letters. What are the main differences between these two openings?

What has happened since Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians?

How had persecution affected this church?

What was the evidence of God's work in the Thessalonian believers' lives?

At the outset of this letter Paul reminded the Thessalonians that God already had worked in their lives. Further, God continued to give evidence of His presence and power in their lives. As those who had received grace from God, they already had come to know He had been more than fair with them despite their troubles. Paul was impressed with the faith of these Christians, and he noticed that their love was increasing in their dealings with one another.

Further confirmation of God's work in these believers was their endurance or perseverance in all the persecutions they were putting up with. We know little about whether these afflictions were a continuation of the first troubles this church endured (Acts 17:1-5; see also 1 Thess. 3:3-5), or whether they were facing a new kind of difficulty brought by persons hostile to them.

What might these words of gratitude and thanksgiving from Paul have meant to a group of people struggling to keep their faith in the midst of adversity?

When you find yourself facing persecution or adversity, what brings you patience and hope?

Why is it important to spend time reflecting on the things God has done for you and the ways He has blessed you?

If you received a letter or email from someone who had been helpful in leading you to Christ, it might open with words similar to those Paul used to open 2 Thessalonians. The writer would be happy to boast to someone else about what God had done in your life. Perhaps this Christian would think not only about when you were converted but also would point out what God is still doing in your life. Comprehending what God has already accomplished in our lives will help us realize we can keep on trusting Him. He is already being more than fair to us.

What is the relationship between demonstrating gratitude for all God has given us and trusting Him to be fair to us? Between realizing what God is already doing in our lives and realizing He already has been more than fair to us?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Where is God calling you into greater gratitude no matter what you are currently facing?

How might you encourage others who are facing difficulty and having a hard time finding a reason for gratitude?

How does a spirit of thankfulness in the midst of difficulty give us opportunity to share the hope of Christ with others?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to give you a spirit of gratitude no matter your current circumstances. Thank Him that His people always have reason to rejoice because of Jesus.

COMMENTARY

2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-4

1:1-2. Within a short time of Paul's first letter, the Thessalonian Christians received yet another letter, co-authored by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Since the three missionaries were still together, most likely only a few months separated the two writings. They wrote to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a good description for any local church — grounded in a

particular city or town, belonging to the community, but connected to our Lord. The church is an assembly of people, called out from the city's throng to worship Christ, then sent back into the city to proclaim and live his goodness. We are citizens of two worlds.

The words grace and peace address significant dilemmas which all people face: the struggle for personal significance and the assault of personal guilt and failure. Paul directed us to the answer: God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is the wellspring of grace. He has a passion to give, and this extravagance issues from His love. Grace is any action or gift freely given; it cannot be earned or retained by personal effort. And when we are speaking of God's grace, it covers everything. But even though God's grace does not depend upon us, it can be hindered by us through sin, ingratitude, and refusal.

Peace can be achieved only through Jesus Christ. Peace deals with our legal standing in the court of God's justice. No person could ever survive the divine judgment without divine intervention. The cross and resurrection give us access to God through faith in Christ; we are admitted into His presence. Peace from God also brings wholeness, restoring the fragmented condition of humankind. Through Christ, we are able to grow and develop into a complete self and personality as God designed. We also join other redeemed persons to form a unified community as He purposed.

1:3. Paul's opening statement, We ought always to thank God for you, sounds a bit like grinding duty. While obligation is felt in these words, it is not guilt-induced. Paul did, in fact, feel a duty to give thanks, but the duty was not to the Thessalonians, but to God. Paul literally had an outstanding debt before God, and it was a debt of thanks. Hearing of the spiritual life and development in the Thessalonians, he knew that God's faithfulness undergirded their progress. Consequently, an ongoing offering of thanks was due God.

The Thessalonians were the occasion of Paul's thanksgiving, but God was the source, for it was God working in partnership with them, which had caused their faith and love to increase. Faith refers to the outworkings of Christian belief. It is not just doctrinal dogma, but coherence of belief and action.

Love, action to meet the needs of others, was continually increasing like a river overflowing its banks. This overflowing was demonstrated by all the Thessalonian

believers. Paul praised these Thessalonians because they expressed love indiscriminately toward all the brethren.

1:4. This is a transition verse, combining delight with a hint of what will follow, as Paul turned his attention to the hardships these believers confronted each day. Despite some of the internal problems of the church, such as laziness and misconceptions about Christ's return, Paul recognized some sterling qualities in these believers. He encouraged them by pointing these qualities out: we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. Love (v. 3), faith, and perseverance (made possible through hope), form the eternal triad. Paul not only commended them for these qualities, he also spread the news to other churches. He was thrilled at the genuine nature of their faith.

The persecutions and trials they encountered were varied, yet unspecified. These could have been anything which resulted from faith in Christ and from seeking to live righteously in a hostile culture. Their perseverance was not a meek "I can take it" but a steadfast, heroic strength from God. Such continuance under difficulties results from an abiding trust in God's goodness and sovereignty.