

You Have to Keep Going

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Date: 02 February 2020

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[0 : 0 0] In 2 Thessalonians we read in chapter 1 verses 4 and 5, 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.

Of course Paul is not saying, well you Thessalonians you're under the judgment of God, that's why you're suffering, that's why you're getting persecuted, but rather what he is praying is that as they have been faithful and been sustained by God in the midst of their sufferings and persecutions, so they would be enabled to continue and that this would show the justice and the righteousness and the perfection of God, if you were to read on to verse 6, seeing it as a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels and so on.

So the justice, the perfect judgment of God is shown in enabling his people to endure the woundings, to endure the persecutions and the sufferings whilst continuing faithful.

Notice that these persecutions and tribulations, they do not cause the Thessalonians to stop dead in their tracks. They do not cause them simply to sit down and give up and say, oh well that's it, if we'd known it was going to be as difficult as this, this slough of this form is too much for us, we're going to climb back out and go back to the city of destruction, but rather they are enabled by grace to keep going in the midst of their sufferings, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God.

What Paul is saying is that they make a boast about, see how good the Thessalonians are, eh? They've all that they've suffered, all that they've endured, they're keeping going. Don't you think that you, whether Corinthians or Philippians or Ephesians or whatever it may be, don't you think you could be inspired by their example?

[2 : 1 6] Don't you think that when it comes to a time for you to suffer, you can do as they've done? They boast for them, they're encouraged in them. We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, just like we were to turn back to 1 Thessalonians, we'll see in chapter 1 and verse 8.

We read, so that you, verse 7, so that you were in samples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia, for from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God's word is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything.

For they themselves show us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. So the fame of the Thessalonians' faith, their strength, their reviving, if you like, has become news.

It's become big news around the church of Jesus Christ, around the Roman Empire of the time. So what Paul is saying, despite the fact of all that you're suffering, you're keeping on going, and so we ourselves glory in that, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you 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.

Now, this is a biblical concept for us to grasp. The idea that the very fact of our enduring pain or suffering or even persecution for the gospel of Christ is not a sign that God has turned away from us.

[3 : 58] It's not a sign of his being displeased with us. It is rather quite the contrary, quite the reverse. It is a token, rather, of his counting as worthy and able to endure these sufferings, that they are permitted to fall upon these particular believers.

Remember what Paul writes to the Corinthians, where he says that God will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able to endure.

Verse 13 of 1 Corinthians 10, There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is coming to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

So if you are being visited with this particular trial or persecution or temptation, God already knows that you are able to withstand it. You may not withstand it, but that was your choice.

It wasn't because you didn't have enough to do it with. You chose, perhaps, to give in. But rather, nothing has overtaken you, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, except what is common to man.

[5 : 15] Sufferings, difficulties, persecutions, attacks for belonging to Christ, are going to be common right across the board. And God is not going to allow you to be loaded with a heavier weight than he knows that you are able to bear.

And the Thessalonians have borne with it. And this is inspirational to the rest of the church round about the world at the time. A manifest token of the righteous judgment or justice of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.

Now this is something the apostles themselves, of course, recognized. If we go to Acts chapter 5, where, of course, the apostles, having witnessed and testified in front of the council, the Sanhedrin there, and they were then whipped.

They were beaten. And when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus. And then they let them go.

Well, of course, they didn't pay any attention to that. They kept on speaking about the name of Jesus. But they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

[6 : 30] Rejoicing that they were counted worthy. So this is the kind of almost back-to-front logic we might think. We are so conditioned to think that if everything is going smooth and well and fine, then that's the blessing of God.

And so we must be well-pleasing in his sight because everything's going well. We're not getting any difficulties, not getting any attacks. The Lord at times does give us times of quietness, times of refreshing, times of being left in peace to recover your strength.

But also, when the time of battle comes, when the time of attacks and wounds and difficulties, it's not because God has withdrawn from the believer or the church or the believers.

It is because, rather, they are counted worthy. We might say, trustworthy. He can trust them to go into battle. Just like a commander, if he knew that particular troops were really, you know, they're going to break and run the first sight of the gunfire, don't hold them, don't put them in a key position.

You can't afford to have your critical point on the line or on the wall or whatever defended by those who are just going to turn and run away as soon as the noise of battle gets loud or as soon as one of them gets a flesh wound, they're just going to break and run.

- [7 : 55] You can't do that. But rather, you will put there those whom you know you can rely on. Those who are, again, battle-hardened. Those who have endured wounds.
- Those who have endured sufferings. Those who have been through the battle and the mill and endured the losses and still, they stood fast. Those are the ones you could put in the breach.
- Those are the ones you can send into battle against the enemy. Those are the ones who are experienced in the trials and difficulties and pains and tribulations of this spiritual warfare.
- Now, nobody likes getting wounds. Nobody likes getting scars. And nobody likes sufferings and persecutions.
- Just like nobody who joins the army, even if they're a professional soldier, maybe for a sailor or whatever, nobody joins in order to get wounded, in order to get killed, in order to suffer hardship.
- [8 : 56] But they know that it goes with eternity. And they know that all that they endure, all the campaigns they serve on, all the things they suffer, are building up their experience and knowledge and strengthening them.
- If they are wounded but not unto death, it's something they have come through. It's battle scars. If they experience great hardship, it means that they're experienced for when difficulties come next and they are ready for that kind of challenge in the future.
- So you see, it's not about these soldiers are having a hard time because they're really rubbish soldiers. If they were really good, they'd still have their shiny boots and their bright uniforms and their guns would never have been fired and they'd just salute smartly and they would show everyone what fantastic soldiers they were.
- No, it's because they're slogging through the mud and bullets with the bleeding scars and perhaps having taken losses that they are able to demonstrate these are men you can rely on.
- These are soldiers you want in the breach. These are ones who are counted worthy to be in the hottest part of the battle 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.
- [10 : 18] Now of course not everything that we suffer in this world is persecution as such. And you'll notice that in verse 4 it says faith, your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.
- Now some commentators have distinguished between these two in the sense that persecutions is that which you endure for the gospel's sake, for righteousness' sake. because you are a Christian.
- You're getting a hard time or getting attacked because of a position you've taken because you're a believer. They say well I'm not going to subscribe to that or I'm not going to do that because I'm a Christian and I'm not doing that.
- And you get all manner of hard time and vilified on social media or whatever it might be. All of that or perhaps physical attacks or whatever the case may be.
- Or in other countries of course our brothers and sisters in Christ get their homes attacked. some of them are martyred or they see members of their families martyred or they're driven from their homes. These things that they endure because they are Christians these are persecutions.
- [11 : 25] But there are other things that of course we suffer in everyday life which are tribulations. You know if for example you had a hurricane that blew you down and destroyed your house so you were left homeless then if the same hurricane had destroyed every home in the community so everybody was in the same boat whether they were a Christian or not that would be a tribulation.

It is something you are suffering it is something that yes it's painful it's difficult but everybody else is in the same boat and you're not suffering it just because you're a Christian. But if you have been rendered homeless because everybody else in the community decided they were going to burn the Christian family out of their home and destroyed your home and burned it to the ground the end result is the same you're still homeless but on this occasion you're homeless because your home has been destroyed because you're a Christian.

The other occasion it's just one of these things of nature that has happened to everybody else too. Now it doesn't make the suffering any less and it doesn't make it any more any more or less real but some things are a tribulation the ordinary difficulties and problems that happen in life and everybody has it nobody gets a free ride but there are also those things which happen because you are a Christian and there is undoubtedly the knowledge or there should be the knowledge when you start to follow Christ your way will diverge from the rest of the world there will be times or there will have to be times that you're going to be faithful to Christ when what they are content to do you are no longer content to do when there is a parting of the ways and that they will react to some of them may be inspired by it and say well you know credit to them because they're sticking to what they believe fair enough don't agree with them but credit to them most will probably turn against them and say well what a bigot how narrow-minded what's wrong with doing it the same way as we always used to do or whatever now in Thessalonica in particular we read up how the crowds turned against them comparatively quickly we go to Acts chapter 17 let's read the first eight verses or so on now when they had passed through

Amphipolis and Apollonia they came to Thessalonica where it was a synagogue of the Jews and Paul as his manner was went in unto them and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures opening and alleging that Christ must meet to suffer and risen again from the dead and that this Jesus who might preach unto you is Christ you see what's happening here amongst the Jewish community in the synagogues for three weeks which is not that long a time but it's a reasonably stable continuous period when he is opening the scriptures to the same this is what it says about the Messiah this is how it describes the Messiah these are the things that's going to happen to him these are the things that he's going to fulfil now look this is Jesus of Nazareth and this is exactly what happened to him in fulfilment of the scriptures this is what he taught this is what he suffered this is what he endured and this is how he rose again from the dead look see Jesus of Nazareth is the one that fits every part of these prophecies he's the fulfilment of the scriptures he's the Christ this Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Messiah is Christ and some of them believed you see we shouldn't think that automatically everywhere he went to every synagogue they always rejected it many did perhaps most did but there were always some there were always some that believed it you know he's right that's where the evidence leads that is the truth that's what the

Bible actually teaches we're either going to have to be faithful to what the Bible teaches and embrace this Messiah and follow the Lord or else we just keep going our own way and say well we don't think that we want to carry on the way we are opening and alleging that Christ must lead to have suffered and risen again from the dead and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ some of them believed and consorted with Paul and Silas and of the devout Greeks a great multitude of the chief women not a few now this is significant because there were Greeks of course those who were Gentiles by nature worshipped in the synagogue and when it talks about the chief women it's a reference to the fact that whilst maybe the leading officials in a Roman or Greek city would not associate with the synagogue with the Jews or whatever because they worshipped the gods of Rome and they felt they had to do that their wives quite often were attracted to both the truth the simplicity the dignity of the

[16 : 22] God of Israel and the dignity that he gave to his followers and the morality and the straight dealing of the word of God as preached in the synagogues they were drawn to this God of Israel and these who would be Gentile women but who were highly influential because they were the wives of extremely powerful and influential men and officials this is why it says the chief women not a few but the Jews which believed not moved with envy took unto them certain lewd fellows of the base of sort in other words a mob not people who were especially offended by the doctrine that Paul had taught but they just wanted a good old riot they took certain lewd fellows of the base of sort and gathered a company and set all the city in an uproar they started a riot in other words and assaulted the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people and when they found them not they drew

Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city crying these that turned the world upside down are come hither also from Jason and hath received in other words the gospel was even that early on recognized to be at odds with the way of the world at odds with the way not only of you know the multi-faith Rome not only at odds with the ways of exploitation and the brutality of the Roman Empire but that it was that which if it challenged these things it would either have to be opposed or it would overcome them and if it did it would overturn everything that's good they already knew that this new teaching this gospel these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also and this is in Thessalonica they said so the Thessalonians themselves already had the choice to embrace this upside down world which is really the world being turned the right way up the way that

God designed or to carry on in the old dark ways of a genuinely upside down world not as God intended or to would worry about shize thumbs up on the market happens to see the crees of caesar saying there's another king one Jesus and they troubled the people and the rulers of the city when they heard these things so Thessalonica was already a center of the controversy that the gospel brought and that brought reaction it brought persecutions as well as ordinary tribulations for the believers but the point is as Paul says we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure and if we go back a verse in that verse 3 we are bound to thank God now the sense in the

Greek in the word bound is in the sense of we owe it as a debt we are obliged we have no choice but to give thanks to God we owe it as a debt for you brethren because it's right that we should because your faith grows exceedingly and the charity and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth we can see how you love each other and we know this was us we know it is only of God and so we we have to give thanks to God we have to acknowledge this is his work alone we are indebted to God for what he has done amongst you and your courage under suffering is not only an inspiration to the rest of the church but it is a token of God counting you worthy and this as we said is a thing that is so hard for us to get our heads around because we think we instinctively believe that if God is blessing all should be smooth all should be nice and if there's enmity if there's problems oh well God must be abandoning me and God must be displeased with me which is why all these things are coming against me now if these things are coming against you for being faithful to the

Lord then you can know that he is counting you worthy he believes you are able to stand in the battle and take the wounds and he will not suffer you to be tempted above what you're able to bear he will always be there right with you able to pull you out if need be able to bolster you and build you up always there with you but counting you worthy to suffer persecution or hardship or tribulation for his sake the way that you bear that if you bear it well not only delights the Lord but inspires others you see part of the devil's ploy part of what he encourages us to think is that nothing we do matters nothing we do matters and all the things that we endure all that we go through well it's just meaningless what's the point in it there's no point in this little hardship happening there's no virtue in that thing happening you know fair enough if I was about to be burned at the stake then I could see that that was for Jesus I could see that that was a purpose but not all these problems that just keep happening in my life these these aren't persecutions these aren't things I can say look I'm enduring these for being a

[22 : 19] Christian but it's just so much is going wrong so much hardship so much difficulty so many attacks from so many quarters and each individual one probably doesn't even know how much other attacks are enduring and maybe they don't even mean to be attacked but they're all coming against me and it's more than I can bear and it's all meaningless and it doesn't count for anything because it's not even proper persecution but it may be tribulations and it may be the pinpricks and the sufferings and the difficulties and the problems of if we can use the military metaphor again of army life which is not all battles and not all campaigns but there's an awful lot of training and there's an awful lot of equipping and preparing and submitting to discipline and authority and making sure that we are well prepared so that when the battle does come all these things that we have endured will be taken on board now with the Lord as we've said so many times in the past nothing is for nothing Satan would have you believe that all that you endure and all your difficulties or tribulations or indeed persecutions if you have them for being a

Christian that all of these things are just pointless God could easily have saved you from that he could easily have spared you you didn't have to go through that it's just because he doesn't love you it's just because if you were really a good Christian he would have brought you through that but look he doesn't care about you he's just letting you suffer he's just letting you go through it all my goodness he even pursued Jesus on the cross that's why he cried out my God my God why is thou forsaken me didn't he and all of this Satan will whisper in your ear and say that you don't matter and these sufferings are pointless just just give it up just turn back again go back to the old ways but two things to remember one is if you quit then what will all that you have endured up until then be worth it will definitely then all of being for nothing if then having endured so much and having gone so far and in the hope that it might actually lead to something you then just throw in the towel and turn back to the ways of the world and forget about the

Lord then it really was for nothing because with Satan and with lack of faith in God this world is yes meaningless it doesn't have the purpose it doesn't have the fulfillment it doesn't have the reality which there is only in Christ the fulfillment which is only in Christ that's the first thing if you turn back if you give it all up then it really was for nothing what was it all for but secondly the point we've already made that with God not only is nothing impossible but nothing is in vain it is all for purpose it is all for meaning we said how the apostles themselves counted themselves worthy to suffer shame because they were beaten by the cancer in Philippians chapter 1 in verse 29 we read for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake this is the thing that Paul is trying to encourage the Thessalonians to recognize that this is privilege this is battle stars this is metal ribbons this is glory for a Christian this is what counts for the whereby they can look back to you and do that went through that and stuff with that yeah but I'm a battle-hardened veteran in that sense so ready for the next thing for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake now it is not given to angels to suffer for his sake we look at angels perhaps you think oh angelic beings all that power all that that divine strength because the messages they are given to pass on to people there's no gain saying there's no turning back there roll back the stone from the tomb and sat upon it and their appearance was like lightning and when when the armies of heaven come in glory wow it's going to be so amazing yes it is but not one angel in glory has ever been called upon to suffer for the Lord not one it is not given to angels to suffer for him but to those who are his children here it is the privilege as well as the burden which is laid upon us that this is what Paul writes unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake angels which can't be given to him but also to suffer for his sake that cause of suffering against the Lord fell from heaven and became demons so there are the holy angels in heaven and there are the fallen angels in hell but there is no angelic being suffering persecution or torture or martyrdom or even tribulation for the Lord's sake but to you and me that cause of suffering is there that opportunity to suffer for the Lord's sake that opportunity to suffer and if we can say it without being bland to suffer well for the Lord's sake

Colossians 1 and verse 24 Paul writes that Paul I Paul have made a minister or servant who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake which is the church now there is no sense in my flesh for his body's sake which is the church in my flesh for his body and the church has a certain amount she has to go through a certain amount she has to endure a certain amount she has to suffer he says to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ that which has yet to be endured by the church of Jesus Christ on earth Jesus Christ on earth as Paul is saying the more that I can endure the less there will be for you guys to have to take it's like the big strong professional soldier at the front of the battle say the more bayonets or wounds or bullets I can take for the raw recruits behind me the better it will be for them the more I can take on their behalf the safer they will be and this is like what Paul is saying what he says in Colossians chapter 1 verse 24 who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake which is the church now you see one reason that Paul wrote 2 verse 24 was because there were wrong ideas creeping into Thessalonica and the ideas were that Jesus was about to come back any day now any day now he was about to come back and so it wasn't for long you know just keep going a little bit longer and then it will all be alright and Paul is like to say look it may not be any time soon that's what he's dealing with in chapter 2 in the meantime you have to keep going you've done brilliantly you've endured so much don't let it all be for nothing now if you turn back now it was all for nothing but if you go on with the Lord then it all will have meaning purpose and fulfillment you see it can often seem long for those who are going on in Christ in Revelation chapter 6 we read from verse 9 when he had opened the fifth seal verse 9 and he said should be fulfilled there is a time that will be fulfilled there is a time that will be fulfilled when all those who are meant to have been martyred will have been when all those who are meant to suffer will have suffered and yes we can try and dodge the bullet and yes we can try and hope that the suffering won't come to us but sooner or later one way or another it will if we continue in Christ and we can say more than that it will because we continue in Christ

friends this is what you sign up for you sign up for the knowledge that at some point somewhere along the line the prince of this world is going to make a fight to keep you somewhere along the line somewhere along the line he is not going to want to let you go now if he can do that by wooing you with just sort of niceness and ease and just sort of bribing you and just sort of all the kind of sweet soft cushions that this world can offer and trying to make things as good as possible shut out all the claims of Christ and just distract you with the world and all these things if you can do that he'll do it he doesn't mind he doesn't mind how he takes you from the world and all these things are good if he can do that he'll do it he doesn't mind he doesn't mind how he takes you down to hell it doesn't have to be with suffering or or battles or scars or winning it he can do it nice and soft and sweet he'll do it because the main thing is he wants you back in his domain he wants you in hell with them but when christ sets you free when christ enables you to follow him satan is then gonna make a fight for that and his fighting the more you look like you're gonna be free the more vicious he is gonna burn and somewhere along the line the sufferings and the persecutions and the tribulations will come to you not despite the fact you're a christian but rather because you're a christian and this is the thing we must recognize it's not accidental it is deliberate it is not because you are forsaken but rather it is because you are trusted it is because you are counted worthy of these scars and these battle wounds because how you bear them if you bear them well if the first sign of trouble you cut and run that's gonna have an effect on others you may not think it will we are we are conditioned again by seeking to think nothing you do matters come on just come back it's not gonna affect anybody they can do what if they want it's just you you don't have to worry about them you're not forcing them to do anything but the fact of the matter is you push one domino and others will fall you fall and others will be weakened in their witness you fall and others will think well i would never have thought so-and-so would have fallen i never thought they would give up all those years he or she was such a faithful supporter of the lord a faithful member in the church of christ and they were an inspiration to so many and my my kids were inspired by them and so on and now look what they've done oh if they're not really in the lord well my goodness who is and they begin to question the whole fabric of it all because one person goes back that person may not be very high profile they just might have been very well known and beloved to a few people but that witness may be in the midst of an unbelieving family that one christian person or perhaps in a community who maybe everybody didn't agree with them but they admire their faithfulness and then they went back they said ah well there you go that's okay we can feel good about ourselves now because they're just the same as us no you're not what you do matters how you bear these wounds matters how you take the blows and the scars matters because it will either weaken others or it will inspire others and what paul is writing for the thessalonians here is that he is blessing god for how they have been an inspiration in the way that they have borne their wounds and their suffering so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of god for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure which is a manifest token of the righteous

[36 : 30] judgment of god that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of god for which also ye suffer god is not unrighteous to forget your sufferings way back in ecclesiastes solomon was moved to write more over i saw under the sun the place of judgment that wickedness was there and the place of righteousness that iniquity was there that iniquity was there i said in my heart god shall judge the righteous and the wicked for is that there is a time there for every purpose and for every work there is a time and there is a purpose for every little scar you endure every little tribulation every little broken pencil point every little time you stub your toe or catch your finger in the car door and you think well this isn't an attack because i'm a christian but all these little things the devil will be doing whatever seeks to muck your life up whatever seeks to discourage you or to make you think that god has turned away from you whatever little pin bricks he can use to finally burst the balloon of your faith he will try and he will try everything now mr mcfee was here a couple of weeks ago he mentioned the lady who said gallic response to somebody asking a question you find good to say what the devil himself remember what you said well i'll say this to him he's not really and that is so true he's not he'll never give up try to call you back but he that is with us is stronger than he that is in the side of darkness and if you are suffering friend if you are wounded and scarred and wondering how you'll ever be able to continue in the battle and just like the piper that kept going to inspire others keep going because you will be inspiring others so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of god for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of god that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of god for which you also suffer amen the lord that is blessing to these thoughts let us pray you