

Encouragement During Tough Times

2 Thessalonians 1

INTRODUCTION:

- DISCUSS: How do deal with difficult times? Is there a certain person who you go to for comfort or counsel? Is there a favorite Bible passage you turn to?
- Illustration: Covid-19 revealed many pre-existing conditions in the culture at large, the church and in Christian lives. How did you handle such a major disruption?
- Discouragement and despair are destructive forces in the life of a believer. We are people who have hope! Christ is risen, Christ is Lord, and Christ is coming soon! In light of these realities, discouragement is a sin for the Christian.
- The Thessalonian believers were facing more significant persecution, and their courage was showing signs of spiritual fatigue. Paul begins this brief letter with strong words of encouragement that can bring comfort to us, as well.

BIBLE STUDY:

1. The Believer's Spiritual Progress Gives Encouragement (vs. 1-4)
 - a. Paul begins with his customary greeting (vs. 1-2), and then praises the Lord for what He was doing in the lives of his audience (vs. 3-4).
 - b. As he dives right into his thoughts, Paul points out that *encouragement comes to Christians as they make spiritual progress in three particular areas: faith, hope and love.*
 - c. Paul considers a growing faith (vs. 3).
 - i. Is your faith more like a cool mountain stream of fresh running water, or more like a stagnant pond?
 - ii. Our faith is supposed to "grow exceedingly."
 - iii. How does faith abound? You may not like the answer! In verse 4 Paul tells us our faith grows through "persecutions and tribulations."
 - iv. Persecution is a powerful tool that God can use to grow and stretch our faith. Illustration: Exercising our muscles...
 - d. Paul considers an abounding love (vs. 3).
 - i. While faith is the root of our salvation in Christ, love is the undeniable fruit of salvation. Our love for others is to abound.
 - ii. While faith is inward focused, our love is outward focused.
 - iii. Often, *the best cure for discouragement is to get our focus off of ourselves and our issues and on to others.*
 - e. Paul considers an enduring hope (vs. 4).
 - i. The word "endure" means to bear up under. It's the idea of keeping on.
 - ii. Trials build character into life. Hope is character's fuel to keep moving forward.
 - iii. DISCUSS: What is your personal leaning during tough times? Do you lean into your Lord or away from Him?
 - f. When troubles come, our faith should reach upward to Jesus, our love should move us to reach out to others, and our hope pushes us onward, looking for God to do more in the future.
2. The Believer's Spiritual Prospect Gives Encouragement (vs. 5-10)
 - a. One way to understand our prospect is to think of it in terms of a promise that we can hold on to un the midst of uncertain times.
 - b. DISCUSS: What are some of your favorite promises of God?

- c. God's promises advance encouragement by anticipating two powerful realities:
- d. First, the righteousness of God is a powerful reality (vs. 5-6).
 - i. The "token" is the evidence – the proof that God is working in our lives.
 - ii. *Paul is saying that suffering in many ways is God working out His righteous purpose for us.*
- e. Second, the revelation of the Lord Jesus is a powerful reality (vs. 7-10).
 - i. The term "revealed" has the idea of uncovering what was hidden. Jesus Christ has been hidden from our view for over 2000 years.
 - ii. One day is coming when the world will see Him in His majesty as He descends from Heaven.
 - iii. We must work to live with the end in mind! Jesus is coming!
- 3. The Believer's Spiritual Potential Gives Encouragement (vs. 11-12)
 - a. Paul wraps up the first chapter with a prayer for their future potential.
 - b. Paul prays for future realization (vs. 11).
 - i. Paul's focus is on the spiritual status of the Thessalonians – that they would be counted worthy.
 - ii. Paul is meaning that they live their lives worthy of the salvation that God has freely given them.
 - c. Paul prays for future glorification (vs. 12).
 - i. *When the world looks at the lives of Christians, the impression should be – "Here is what Jesus can do!"*
 - ii. The believer can never forget that their life reflects the Lord Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION/DISCUSSION:

- How do we take these thoughts and apply them in our lives when we are discouraged?
 - The Christian must strive to see how their faith can grow in the midst of discouraging times. Instead of pulling back, we should be diving deep!
 - Instead of focusing on our problems, focus on the possibilities to show the love of Jesus to others.
 - Instead of giving in to despair, remember the promises of God and allow them to fuel you through the discouraging events of life.
- Remember James 1, that the trials of life are what God uses to grow our faith! It is how God gets our attention and knocks off the rough edges in our sanctification process.
- Remember that this life is temporary and the best is yet to come! Jesus is coming soon and the troubles of this life will no longer endure!
- Question: Can you say that the way you handle life's disappointments brings glory to God? Or are you more interested in bringing misery to self and those around you?