

STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-17



God chose you...to be saved..."

*Several years ago I received a letter from Pat Williams, Senior Vice-President of the Orlando Magic (a pro basketball team in the NBA). Although I had never met Mr. Williams, I knew he was a brilliant sports executive and also a fervent Christian. He wrote to say that he was working on a book about the life of Christ and wondered if I had any thoughts that might be helpful. I jotted down a page or two of ideas and sent them to him by e-mail. Several days later he called and we had an excellent conversation. Eventually he sent me a copy of his book called **How to be Like Jesus: Lessons on Following in His Footsteps**. In looking through it, I came across a chapter called "How to Endure Like Jesus." Page 237 contains a quote from German theologian Otto Dibelius, a leader of the anti-Nazi resistance movement in World War II: "God does not lead his children around hardship, but leads them straight through hardship. But he leads! And amidst the hardship, he is nearer to them than ever before." That's a striking way to put it. Not around hardship but straight through it.*

God does not lead his children around hardship, but leads them straight through hardship. But he leads!

Several pages later Pat Williams addresses the issue of endurance head-on:

"If we want to be like Jesus, we must endure like Jesus. We need to persevere under pressure as Jesus did." "If it hasn't happened already, a time will come when you must endure like Jesus." ... "No one in history deserved to be more honored and respected than Jesus of Nazareth. Yet he was treated with contempt and put to death. If we endure like Jesus, our own battle scars will be the righteous and beautiful wounds of those who have taken a courageous stand against evil. Our wounds will be like his" (pp. 250-252).

Life is a journey for all of us, and that journey is not always easy. There are hard days and difficult nights and sometimes there are weeks and months and years where the road seems to lead from one hardship to another. If we live long enough, we'll have plenty of chances to get the battle scars Pat Williams talked about. No one gets a free ride and no one is exempt from the troubles of the world.

*Sometimes when we are discouraged, we can feel like giving up and walking away from the Lord. We're not the first generation to feel like that. Our passage ends with a prayer by Paul for the infant congregation at Thessalonica. It helps to remember that these new believers were just recently rescued from paganism. Now they were under intense pressure to leave Jesus and go back to their old life. That's why Paul prays in verses 16-17 that they would be encouraged and stabilized by the Lord. In order to grasp the full impact of his prayer, we need to back up to verse 13. **There we will find a message of encouragement that speaks to us in the 21st century.**¹*

¹Sermon by Ray Pritchard entitled *Strength for the Journey* found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/strength-for-the-journey>



OPEN IT

1. What family traditions do you celebrate? How did they begin? Are they still meaningful?



EXPLORE IT

READ 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13–17

2. Why does Paul give thanks to God?

3. What two exhortations does Paul give in verse 15?

4. What does God give believers according to verse 16?

5. In what ways does God establish the believer?



GET IT

In this section, verses 13 through 17 of chapter 2, we will see that God has chosen us for salvation; and that God will strengthen us for good works.

Paul's letter is one of encouragement, instruction and admonishment to the Thessalonians regarding the "day of the Lord." Having come under the influence of false teachers, they began to fear that this day had already come and they had missed it. So Paul again shares in his letter the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and outlines the order of the events of that time. First, he says, comes the "apostasy," then the "man of

sin" must be revealed, but not until the "restrainer" is removed. Meanwhile. the persecution and affliction they were suffering resulted from the "mystery of lawlessness which was already at work." Then he asks, rather plaintively, "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?"

Paul goes on to describe the fate of the antichrist: "the Lord will slay [him] with the breath of his mouth . . . [at] His coming." Then, he says, God will judge all "who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness!" What very bad news for those "who did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."

But the good news for the Thessalonians was that they were a community who had a living hope, as Paul will go on to show in this section.²

6. Paul begins with the word "but" in verse 13, which reminds us a contrast is being made between that which was written before the word "but" and that which is recorded after it. What contrasts does Paul make between the unbelievers in verses 9–12 and the believers in verses 13–17?

BELOVED BY GOD

We seem to resist believing this truth despite the fact that the Bible lays much emphasis on God's love for us. We are so conscious of our own failure that, although we hide from others the mess we have made of our lives, we know we have not even measured up to our own hopes and dreams, let alone God's. Thus we have a hard time believing that God could love us. But Scripture everywhere begins on that basis. Perhaps the most often quoted verse in the New Testament puts it best: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life," {cf, John 3:16 KJV}. How amazing to know that God loves us even though he knows everything about us! He knows our likes and dislikes, the wrong things we have done, the evil thoughts, the whole sorry mess – yet he still loves us! I am reminded of the jingle that expresses this so well:

*Isn't it odd, that a Being like God,
Who sees the facade, still loves the clod,
He made out of sod; now isn't that odd?
What a wondrous thing it is to know that God loves our broken and hurting race!³*

7. In what ways have you experienced the love of God? What things keep us from fully experiencing that love on a daily basis?

The whole system of Christian theology can be found in these verses. Everything we believe is here in tightly compressed fashion. The key phrase is "God chose you to be saved." That speaks of the sovereign grace of God in salvation. Did you know God chose you to be saved? If he had not chosen you, you would never have been saved at all. Sometimes we speak of "finding" the Lord, but if he had not found us first, we would never have found him at all. Salvation begins with God—not with us. He chooses us—and then we believe. In putting the matter that way, I simply mean to declare that salvation is all by grace, all of God, all the time. God is not just "making it up" as he goes along.

²Sermon by Ron R. Ritchie Sermon entitled Hoping ...In Light Of His Coming found @ http://www.pbc.org/system/message_files/8159/4001.html

³Sermon by Ray Stedman entitled Stand Firm found @ http://www.pbc.org/system/message_files/5325/4099.html

11. Share with your group how God “called you through the gospel.” Who and what did God use to share the gospel with you?

*Life is hard for all of us and we all have so many questions and doubts and fears and worries. **Even the best among us struggle with questions we cannot answer.** So many people struggle with hurts and pains they can hardly express. It is right at this point that the gospel speaks to our deepest needs.*

- Your **doubts** are not the end of the story.
- Your **fears** are not the end of the story.
- Your **worries** are not the end of the story.
- Your **uncertainties** are not the end of the story.
- Your **unbelief** is not the end of the story.

*If we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him. Better days are coming because Jesus rose from the dead. The grave will not have the last word. One day the children of God will exit the cemeteries once and for all. Let us be perfectly clear about it. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, therefore we have no doubts that one day the dead in Christ will rise and we will rise with them to meet the Lord in the air. Between now and then, we are living on the edge, waiting for what God has promised. It's like a TV cliffhanger where the end of the episode says, “Come back next week to see how the story ends.” Stay tuned, child of God. **The best is yet to come.**⁶*

12. How does knowing that the best is yet to come enable us to endure life's trials and tribulations with joy and peace?

Now the Bible tells us to be firm. Boy, it really does. We are to “stand for the faith” and “hold the traditions which you have been taught whether by word or our epistle.” Again, I say what is the key then, beloved? What is the key to being firm? It's the Word, isn't it? It's the apostolic doctrine. It's the epistles.

***If you're going to be alert you've got to look into the Word to see through it into the world.** If you're going to be firm you've got to know what the doctrine of the Word is and you've got to stay alert. So the key to being alert, the key to being firm, is the Word.⁷*

13. How does the believer use the Scriptures to stand firm in a world of compromise?

⁶Sermon by Ray Pritchard entitled *Strength for the Journey* found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/strength-for-the-journey>

⁷Sermon by John MacArthur entitled *Principles for Powerful Living* found @ <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/1888>

14. The Thessalonians had been impacted by the teaching of Paul and his team. What teaching or teacher has impacted you as a believer? How has the truth of that teaching allowed you to grow deeper in your walk with God?

Paul prayed that God might "comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word." The Thessalonians were being shaken by persecution and affliction, and they feared they might have missed the second coming of Christ... But here Paul reminds them that God was able to comfort their hearts, not to resist persecution, but to go forth and become involved in good works and words. God gives us comfort and he "strengthens our hearts in every good work and word."

Christians don't have to go around advertising themselves as the "local Christians." We're set free from that to go about our normal business. Then God, by his love and mercy, by his Spirit, through His word and by His people, will enable us to be salt and light wherever we go. We can't even interpret what we're doing, but God will use our good works and good words to draw out of our communities men and women who will be with Him forever. We know who we are, and are about our Father's business. We are not ruled by our emotions but by knowledge, so that every word we speak and every action we take is to further the gospel of Jesus Christ and result in the salvation of many.⁸

15. Describe a time when you have experienced comfort and hope that could only come from God. What did these "graces" enable you to do?

16. In what ways can we become more established in the word and the traditions that we have been taught?

"The universe exists so that we may live in a way that demonstrates that Jesus is more precious than life." – John Piper

17. Where is God calling you to share his love, comfort and hope? What steps can you take this week to become more engaged in the work God has called you to?

⁸Sermon by Ron R. Ritchie Sermon entitled Hoping ...In Light Of His Coming found @ http://www.pbc.org/system/message_files/8159/4001.html