



"Do Hard Things..."

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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-2 Thess 1 -

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and

peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5 [which is] manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6 since [it is] a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7 and to [give] you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. 11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of [this] calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of [His] goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:5

Paul the apostle...in what is no doubt seen as extremely brazen in the worldview that is prevalent in our day, was saying that the very fact that the believers had been...and moreover, *are yet today*, persecuted and go through trials was the very thing that proved they were part of God's kingdom! He says in 2 Timothy 3:12 that "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" We tend to think that trials and difficulties mean something is wrong...that we are enduring spiritual warfare or have sinned or something. And that is exactly what Satan wants you to think...

Paul is going to lay out the scenario for them and for us:

- 1) Trials are going to come, but they don't have to only be a negative
- 2) God will deal with those who persecute you for your faith

3) he will return to take us to a realm where there will no longer be such tribulations that stem from our fallen world and fallen natures.

In reality, though we are loath to admit it, it is those uncomfortable and often difficult things that produce Christ like qualities in us. There is really no other way. If you want to be like Jesus, hard times are inevitable. Seeking to avoid such at all cost is therefore essentially avoiding God's work of love within us and within our lives, and we are bound to never know our purpose or calling. This is especially true of many of what is especially the Generation Z and Alpha groups that tend toward a fearful approach to life and a comfort/amenities driven position.

We can continue to live at any cost avoiding the challenges, the testing, the stretching of our faith. But doing so is to remain a spiritual child at best, and at worst, falling away from God in our idolatry of comfort and ease over holiness and pleasing God, not to mention completing the mission we each are individually called to.

When we look at a diamond, it appears quite beautiful. But let's not forget that to get there, it had to start as a worthless lump of coal, and then get squeezed hard for a very long time, and then finally get carefully and surgically 'cut.' A pearl is another example. What starts out as a speck of dust...an irritation to the oyster, eventually becomes something of great beauty and value. That's why Peter tells us our faith is purified by fiery trials (1 Peter 4:12), and James says, "Count it all joy when you go through those trials" (James 1:2).

So will we...do we...pray "God get me out of here!" or "God, your will be done when it comes to me...do what is best to make me like you?" Romans 8:17-18 *"And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later."*

How these believers, as well as faithful believers today, deal with their trials and tribulations is reflective of who they are in Christ. There is no evidence of their becoming hysterical. We see no bitterness, no anger, no retaliation. No weighted blankets and emotional support animals. Paul was proud of them! Back in verse 4 he says he boasted of them to others!

Note that on the flip side, we also don't see any signs that they were accepting the persecution like passive sheep either! They in fact kept living and loving the way they had always done. (vs. 3). They exercised a "righteous judgment" in their situation, just as we are called to do in ours!

In doing so, they were "counted worthy of being part of the kingdom of God." That doesn't mean they had 'earned their place', because none of us can. But it means rather that they had proved that they were in that sweet spot. They manifested Christlikeness. They bore evidence

that they were one of His. The fact is, our behavior speaks of that relationship every day, or the lack thereof. Our lives say we are His, or they reflect that we are not, or at least in deep rebellion and sin.

1:6

These believers trusted their God. They understood ...as we must... that “vengeance belonged to God” not to them. Paul wrote in Romans 12:19 “Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the LORD.” The question is, do you trust God in this?

How often we feel the necessity to “intervene” and try to fix things that are God’s to fix. 2 Peter 2:6-9 says “*God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people. But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him. Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day. So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment.*”

The fact is, we live in the midst of an evil and an unjust world. Therefore, much of the world's behavior—much of man's behavior—is evil and unjust. It will be that way...in fact it will only get worse, until the Lord returns to end all of this.

As Christians, we must live for eternity and not just for the present. In fact, living “with eternity’s values in view” is what makes our Christian life meaningful today. We walk by faith and not by sight. There is the story of the two farmers, one a believer and the other an atheist. When harvest season came, the atheist taunted his believing neighbor because apparently God had not blessed him too much. The atheist’s family had not been sick, his fields were rich with harvest, and he was sure to make a lot of money. “I thought you said it paid to believe in God and be a Christian,” said the atheist. “It does pay,” replied the Christian. “But God doesn’t always pay His people in September.”

This verse says it is a “righteous thing” for God to punish. Such an idea causes much anger and angst in a lot of people. They want to see the situation from the side of the entrenched rebel...saying “if God is really a God of love, then how can he punish? How can he send people to hell?” Yet we know that God has clearly and overtly provided a clear escape for sinful man. We only have to accept the offer and be set free from the guilt as well as the punishment, but the vast majority will never take up His offer.

What kind of a future does the unbeliever face? Look at the dramatic words Paul used to describe it: tribulation, vengeance, flaming fire, punishment, and everlasting destruction. The

Christ-rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave to God's people! When God recompenses, He pays in kind, for there is a law of compensation that operates in human history.

We have to understand...it is a righteous thing for God to judge sin and condemn sinners. A holy God cannot leave sin unjudged. People who say, "I cannot believe that a loving God would judge sinners and send people to hell" understand neither the holiness of God nor the awfulness of sin. While it is true that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), it is also true that "God is light" (1 John 1:5), and moreover He is a "God of justice" (Ps 89:14) and a "God of Holiness" (Isa 6:3) and in His justice and holiness He must deal with sin.

The word vengeance must not be confused with revenge. The purpose of vengeance is to satisfy God's holy law; the purpose of revenge is to pacify a personal grudge. God does not hold a grudge against lost sinners. Quite the contrary, He sent His Son to die for them, and He pleads with them to return to Him. But if sinners prefer to "know not God, and ... obey not the gospel" (2 Thess. 1:8), there is nothing left for God to do but judge them.

Furthermore, the current position of humanity is our own undoing! This is not Gods doing nor what He wanted for us! Our state of being began back in the garden with Adam and Eve, but we clearly finished it all by ourselves! Furthermore, hell was never meant for humans. But we have made our choice, and with said choice comes the 'baggage.' Either I will spend eternity with God...a place of 'no more tears and no more crying,' or I receive the 'bill' for a life of living as I please.

You know, a person has to work hard to get to hell. For He or she has to reject every attempt by God to reach him, to love him, to forgive him. It's been said that God doesn't send anyone to hell, he merely "confirms reservations." The choice is OURS. We make it, and He delivers upon our decision! This is on us.

1:7-9

No matter the depth and the length of our trials, they **will** come to an end. If not in this life, they will when Christ returns. At that time, all we have done...good or bad...will be 'squared up.' Not one "cup of cold water" given to one of the saints of God will have gone unnoticed and not one evil will be 'swept under the rug.' All will be made evident. All will be laid bare. His return will restore everything to the way that it is supposed to be. He will give true believers rest, and punish those who have rejected His gospel, and judge the 'pretenders' that abused it and looked upon it as inconsequential and insignificant. Job 3:17— *"There the wicked cease from troubling, And there the weary are at rest."*

Scripture tells us that eternity contains two judgments: One, for those that rejected the gospel, thus rejecting His grace. For these, they will appear at the "Great White Throne Judgment."

This is a judicial branch that confirms your rejection of Christ and the cross. There are no varying degrees of sentence here...just guilty and hell.

Leon Morris wrote *"If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ, incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning [ever] dawns."*

The second “judgement” is the “Bema Seat of Judgement.” (Romans 14:10 and 1 Corinthians 5:9) Hughes wrote the following: *“If our deepest longing is for that consummating moment when we shall at last be transfigured into His image, then it should be our present concern to progress daily, by the grace of God, towards the goal of Christlikeness. Love for the Master because of His matchless love for us should be sufficient incentive for us to follow devotedly in His steps. But there is a further consideration, to which the Apostle draws attention here, namely, that even for the Christian there is to be a day of reckoning.”*

Here, all believers will appear to be judged as to the life they have led...whether they invested their spiritual gifts that were given to them...whether they served God and kingdom...whether He was their Lord or just a distant Savior. Again, Hughes continues about this issue: saying “appear” means “to be revealed, to be made manifest, to show openly.” *“We will be revealed as we are, a revelation of what had previously been hidden. The secret thing of our heart and life will be made manifest to all. We must all stand revealed in our true character before the judgment seat of Christ. This means not just to appear but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward façade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one’s character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ — a clear indication, incidentally, of the absolute Deity of the Redeemer, for it is only the divine gaze which penetrates to the very essence of our personality: ‘man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’ (1 Sam 16:7).”*

These facts are important for all of us. For the unredeemed sinner as well as the saved believer. We all must know: there will be a day in which we all will answer for our lives. There is no dodging this. You cannot send an email and then just walk away.

1:10

Note that the passage says that Christ will come to be glorified in His saints. Such must be manifested in the act of “our finishing well.” We lived for Him in our lives and we “fought a good fight, ...finished our course, ...we kept the faith” (2Ti 4:7) until the end.

When He returns for us and all our trials are finished as well as all of our work and service, we will appear before that Bema seat judgement. In that day, there will be those who reveal lives

that “glorify” God. However, know this: It will not be those who shined in this life that will be the admired and applauded, but rather the one who carried us through it all, Christ himself. Even all the good stuff we did, it will be quite evident at that time that we can claim no credit for any of it. It is...it always was, all Jesus. All we ever did was let Him work through us. All we ever did was trust Him and His Word.

1:11-12

Will God count *you* worthy of His calling? If He did indeed choose you as He says He did, does your living reflect that? Paul’s desire for the church in Thessalonica, as well as mine for you, is that you “fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness. That you live out His work of faith and power.”

Is the name of Jesus Christ glorified in you? Do you understand what that means? Does your very living speak of His manifest power? When people come to know you, do they stand in awe of the God that is living in you? Even in the trials and the persecutions? Trials do not make a person but they do reveal what a person is made of, and where they are standing.

Unless your house is built upon ‘the Rock’...you will not allow and thus ever know the fulfillment of this prayer in your life. Our place...our calling, is to “fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power....” What a statement! That’s T-shirt stuff for sure! Despite the war we endure on this planet...our own trip-ups and shortcomings, He wants us to experience and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness. Do you? Are you? This is God’s desire for you as well as Paul’s and mine!

When we do, such overwhelms us with thanks. We get it. We *understand*. And when we know His good pleasure...when we know His goodness...when we live out not just works but a work of faith and mysterious power manifested through us, the name of Jesus will be glorified in us. All because of Him. All because of His boundless grace...