

Bound To Give Thanks • 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Corrie Ten Boom*

1. Many of you have heard the story of Corrie Ten Boom who wrote the book, *The Hiding Place*
2. She lived with her family in Holland during WWII
3. They were Christians and when the Nazis began rounding up Jews, they hid many in their home
4. Eventually they were betrayed and arrested
5. Corrie and her sister, Betsy, ended up in at concentration camp named *Ravensbruck*
6. On entering the barracks, they found them overcrowded and flea-infested
7. On their first morning, during their devotional time together, they read Paul's words at the end of 1 Thess - 5:18

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

8. Corrie had been complaining bitterly about their circumstances, but Betsy now challenged her to obey God's word and thank God for every detail of their new living quarters
9. At first, Corrie flatly refused to give thanks for the fleas, but Betsy persisted and finally Corrie gave in to her pleadings, thanking God, even for the bugs.
10. During the months they spent at the camp, the two sisters were surprised to find how openly they could hold Bible studies and prayer meetings in their barracks without interference from the guards.
11. They later learned the reason the guards would not enter the barracks was because of the fleas!

B. *Thankfulness*

1. Today we're going to see that thankfulness is something that ought not be determined by our circumstances
2. For the Christian, thankfulness and gratitude are a way of life.
3. It's how we treat life, not how life treats us!

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 3-4*

- 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,**

1. Paul wrote this letter just a few months after 1 Thessalonians
2. In that first letter he had given them some instructions, and now he's heard back on how they were doing
3. Though the church at Thessalonica was suffering harsh persecution, they were weathering the storm and for this Paul expresses his joy
4. Look at what he says here . . .

- 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,**

5. It's that first phrase of v. 3 I want to focus on this morning, but look at what Paul says he is thankful for.
6. He's thankful for two things:
 - a. first – that their faith is growing exceedingly
 - b. second – that their love for one another is abounding
7. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul said he was praying that in the midst of the pressure they were under, they would *grow* in their faith
 - a. they had!
 - b. and now he gives praise and thanks to God for the way their faith had blossomed
 - c. in fact, the Thessalonians were so faithful to the Lord in the midst of persecution they served as an example to other churches

B. *Faith Made Strong*

1. Look at v. 4 . . .
- 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,**
2. Faith is like a muscle – it only grows when it's exercised
3. Trials are one of the chief means God uses to strengthen our faith
4. Note how Paul links *patience* and *faith* here
 - a. our faith in God needs to be consistent and not shaken by difficulties
 - b. a faith that cannot be *tested* cannot be *trusted*
 - c. Rom. 5:3 says,

We glory in **tribulations**, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance

5. The Thessalonians were enduring both *persecutions* and *tribulations*
 - a. pressures from *without*, in the form of the opposition of an unbelieving world
 - b. and pressures from *within*, in the usual trials of life
6. But the *result* was that their faith was becoming stronger
7. These pressures weren't beating them down, they were building them up!
8. At the beginning of the movie, *The Patriot*, Mel Gibson, who plays the main character, is in his workshop
 - a. he's trying to make a light-weight rocking chair
 - b. so the frame is thin and the scene opens with him weighing the chair on a scale
 - c. content that it is only 11 pounds, he slips it off the scale, and sets it on the floor of the shop
 - d. then the moment of truth arrives – what good is a chair just to look at – it's made to sit in
 - e. so he turns, puts his hands on the arms and slowly lowers himself into the seat
 - f. it holds, he smiles and rocks forward; then backward,
 - g. and on the backward arc, the legs give way and the chair shatters
 - h. in a flash of anger, he jumps to his feet, lifts the broken chair and flings it to one side of the shop where we see a pile of previous attempts
9. The Thessalonians faith in God was not like that chair; it didn't shatter under the pressure – they had found God to be faithful and had come to a settled faith in Him, even when they were being persecuted and pressed by life, their faith grew and became more vibrant and live
10. Romans 10 tells us that faith *comes* by hearing the Word of God.
 - a. it is only as we discover the Truth in the Scriptures that the *seed of faith* is planted in our hearts
 - b. but the seed must burst forth and bear fruit if it is to be real.
 - c. and it's only by being challenged and stretched that faith has an opportunity to be expressed
11. When I was still in high school, I got interested in backpacking
 - a. before I ever went on a single hike, I checked out books from the library on camping and backpacking
 - b. I read everything I could lay my hands on
 - c. I learned about boots and how to buy them; how to pack, what equipment to buy, emergency medical procedures, dangerous plants and animals, how to avoid an encounter with a bear, water treatment
 - d. if it had to do with backpacking, I read about it and knew it – I thought, until I took my first trip
 - e. 6 of us planned a week long Sierra trip for the Summer, but since 5 of us were novices, we decided we needed to do a weekend shakedown trip in the local mountains of Southern CA.
 - f. I realized just a couple miles into that first day in the local mountains that reading about hiking and doing it are two very different things!
 - g. books can't impart the feeling of tightness and nausea you get
 - h. a book can't give you the experience of your legs feeling like rubber because your backpack is 60 pounds and you're out of shape
 - i. a camping manual may have a picture of a rattlesnake in it, but seeing one up close and personal is a whole other experience!
 - j. books also can't convey the august majesty of standing at the top of a mountain pass after you've struggled for the last 3½ hours to reach it, looking down over the ground you've just covered and in to the gorgeous canyon you're about to enter
 - k. reading can't compare to sitting on a bolder in the middle of a stream while the water cascades around it in a might rush that fills the air with a beautiful melody of sound
12. No – books merely impart *knowledge* / only *living* can impart experience
13. In Thessalonica, knowledge had been translated into experience
 - a. the seed of faith planted through Paul's teaching and preaching –
 - b. had burst forth into life through persecution and trial
14. Paul is quick to tell them how thankful to God he is for their victorious faith and how he was bragging about them to others
 - a. he says this because he knows that people who are suffering often fail to see themselves realistically!
 - b. in the midst of their distress the Thessalonians only saw themselves as weak and hurting
 - c. they were under it, pressed down, seemingly powerless, troubled, beset on all sides
 - d. but Paul saw what was really going on – through it all, their testimony for Christ was shining through and seeing the conversion of dozens of others to the faith.
15. We are not the best ones to evaluate our own lives and spiritual growth.
16. Many times others can see spiritual improvement and maturity in us when we cannot
17. Paul could see it in the Thessalonians and tells them that their faith was an example to all.
18. But again – it came against a backdrop of suffering
19. An *easy life* usually results in a *shallow faith*.
20. Look at Hebrews 11 and you will discover that the men and women who are listed there in the *Hall of Faith* are people who were pressed and suffered *greatly*.
21. It seems we spend so much of our time seeking comfort and doing our best to avoid pain
 - a. sometimes in our attempt to avoid pain we end up doing things we ought not
 - b. we compromise our principles, or lie, or simply refuse a challenge because of the risk and possible pain involved
22. Friends, we ought not either *seek* or *avoid* pain – we simply ought to live!
 - a. we ought to commit each new day to the Lord and ask Him to use it to make us more like Him
 - b. then whatever happens today, we believe that ultimately God intends it to strengthen us
 - c. no matter what happens – we can rest assured that all things work together for our good!

C. Abounding Love

1. The second thing Paul was thankful for was the love among the Thessalonians
 2. In fact, he says their love was abounding toward one another
 - a. the word “abound” is a superlative
 - b. in other words, it was “over the top”
 3. Paul knew that their love for one another was the primary evidence of their genuine faith in God
 4. Faith is the root, love is the fruit!
 5. This is James’s point in chapter 2 when he writes . . .
- 14 **What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?**
- 15 **If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,**
- 16 **and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?**
- 17 **Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**
6. *Suffering*, especially the kind of intense suffering the Thessalonians were enduring, can lead to one of two results:
 - a. *Selfishness or Service*
 - b. I’m sure this is something all of us have either experienced firsthand, or witnessed in others
 - c. when some people suffer, they turn inward and become bitter and selfish
 - 1) they look at the world as *unfair*
 - 2) they rail and cry out at the injustice they feel they’re being forced to experience
 - d. when others suffer, it breaks their pride and they become humble
 - 1) then, instead of drawing apart and centering on themselves,
 - 2) they become others-oriented
 - 3) their suffering moves them to become *compassionate* to the suffering and hurt of those around them
 7. That’s what was happening in Thessalonica – rather than railing at God for allowing them to suffer, they united in love and care for one another.
 8. The persecution they were under drove them together rather than tore them apart.
 9. And as Paul witnessed this, he gave praise and thanks to God.
 10. How do you respond to personal suffering?
 - a. do you feel sorry for yourself?
 - b. do you get angry and feel that life is unfair?
 - c. or does it drive you to God – trusting He’s at work, using your pain as a way to help you see the needs of others?

D. Bound To Give Thanks

1. Note carefully what Paul says at the beginning of v. 3

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting

2. The word “bound” means to be under an *obligation*
3. It was a word that spoke of a *debt* that must be paid
4. Paul is saying that it is his *duty* to thank God for the Thessalonians
5. Of course, it’s an obligation he *rejoices* in because they’re easy to give thanks for, they are doing so well.
6. But still, Paul sees thankfulness as something he is bound to – something that is part of the Christian life
7. That’s why he says in 1 Thess 5:18,

In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

8. Paul was practicing what he preached
9. Throughout his letters we see a consistent heart of thanksgiving
10. His was an attitude of gratitude!
11. Paul understood something you and I must understand as a basic reflection of our faith –
12. And that is this: Thankfulness is not something determined by circumstances – It’s an active expression of a settled faith in God.
13. If we let circumstances dictate our attitude,
 - a. then if things are going well, we’ll be happy and thankful –
 - b. but if circumstances are adverse - we’ll be bitter, angry, and frustrated
14. But if we really believe in God and the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death, then our attitude will be one of ***consistent thankfulness*** because we know that just as the scriptures say, all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose.
15. How we react to life is ***OUR CHOICE*** – and no one or nothing can take that choice from us.
 - a. to be human means to have the power to choose
 - b. this is something that many of the survivors of the Nazi death camps realized
 - c. the Nazis believed the Jews and others they had imprisoned were sub-human and so they treated them as such
 - d. the survivors of the camps were those who refused to lower themselves to the level the Nazis were pushing them.
16. Viktor Frankl, was one of those who survived the camps
 - a. his wife, his children, and his parents were all killed in the holocaust.
 - b. the Gestapo made him strip as a way to de-humanize him and steal his dignity
 - c. but as they cut away his wedding ring, Viktor said to himself

- d. "You can take away my wife, you can take away my children, you can strip me of my clothes and my freedom, but there is one thing no person can ever take away from me--and that is my freedom to choose *how* I will react to what happens to me!"
- e. in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl wrote,
- f. "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms--to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."
17. Just as the Thessalonians were suffering but chose to keep faith in God and love one another, so Paul was suffering as he wrote this letter
18. Yet in the midst of it all, he was thankful, because he chose to believe in the goodness of God and Christ's ultimate victory over evil.
19. It's all a matter of *perspective*. Let me give an example . . .
 - a. I ask you teenagers to excuse me but I'm going to use you for this
 - b. often times, young people will complain;
 - 1) "I'm bored."
 - 2) "Life's so unfair!"
 - 3) "This is my so-called life."
 - c. rather than being thankful, some tend to be sour, bitter and terribly apathetic
 - d. that's why Summer Missions trips are such a great experience for teens
 - e. they spend 2 weeks to 2 months in another country like Uganda, Russia, or Indonesia, and when they get home, they kiss the floor of the terminal at LAX.
 - f. they appreciate things like stop lights, and McDonald's Big Macs, and running hot water, and toilet paper that doesn't have splinters in it!
 - g. they have a comfortable bed in a house with central heating and normal food – plenty of it
20. Most teens coming home from a Summer Mission trip come home dramatically changed
 - a. the sour boredom is gone,
 - b. they are now grateful for where and how they live
21. It's all a question of perspective
22. Here's the perspective every Christian should have – We're going to heaven, not hell!
 - a. life here, *this* life now, is like a Summer Mission Trip in Uganda.
 - b. one day we're going to board Rapture Airlines and fly home – our real home; Heaven!
23. But every day we live here, is like a day on the mission field.
 - a. we are here to love and serve and grow in our faith in God
 - b. and because God is God, we have to understand that everything that happens to us is intended by Him to strengthen us and build the character of Christ in us.
 - c. EVERYTHING
24. So what else can we do but be thankful – even for the fleas?

III. CONCLUSION

A. *It's A Choice*

1. Paul was bound to give thanks – it was his joyous duty
2. What was true for Paul is true for you and me
3. Thankfulness is not determined by circumstances
4. Thankfulness is a choice - a living evidence of our faith – a faith that is made strong by trials

B. *Mushrooms Or Oaks*

1. Mushrooms grow quickly – they spring up overnight, and then with the sun comes out, they turn to mush
2. And oak tree grows very slowly, and only becomes strong by consistently weathering the storms that come to try it.
3. A healthy oak has seen many storms
4. What do you want to be – a mushroom or an oak?
5. Will the heat of adversity turn you to mush, or will it be cool in the shade of your Christ-like character?
6. The answer to that question is found in whether circumstances determine your faith, or your faith determines your response to the circumstances
7. Thankfulness – or complaint –
8. The choice, is yours.

“Feed My Sheep”

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