



The Sermon

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2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

"Marks of a Godly Church"

February 26, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

So I invite you to open your Bibles to 2 Thessalonians, the book of second Thessalonians. And in our Sunday school class we've been going through 1 Thessalonians, we've just finished it; fantastic book. I think a lot of things we can identify with with the Thessalonian church. They were a young church, they were in a metropolitan area, they had a lot of cosmopolitan things happening, they were strategically located, and they were really suffering,. We're not suffering like they were, but they were in persecution, and they were concerned about when the Lord was going to come back, and a lot of things that we can identify with, and living in a world that's changing and persecuting, and a lot of things going on in the church today that we can identify with these Thessalonians.

So this is why God wants us to be here this morning. He wants us to look at this; and that's what we're going to do. So I've entitled our message "Marks of a Godly Church." And if you'll turn with me, again, I hope you're there, we're going to read the first five verses of 2 Thessalonians.

"Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to give thanks to You, God, for you, brethren, as it's only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows over greatly; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of

God for your perseverance and your faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering."

We get a lot of calls and a lot of texts from all over the world and a lot of questions because of Lawson's reach, and we can't answer all of them, but we get a lot of them. A lot of them are about the church and about, "How am I supposed to find a good church?" and, "What about this, and what about that?" And I thought I'd share a couple with you.

I got a call last couple weeks from a mother. She's out of state, and she said, "My children are in a Sunday School class where the teacher teaches annihilationism. What should I do? What should I do?" Here's another question: "How do you evaluate a church with sound teaching but unfriendly and not loving?" Here's another question: "If a pastor gets Jesus right but clearly rejects the Bible's teaching on homosexuality, is he a false teacher?"

Here's another one: "What about a pastor who's caught in plagiarism and continues to lie about it and he won't resign, and others in the church just don't care?" Or how about this one: "How would you deal with a head elder who is self-absorbed and he removes anybody that disagrees with him?" Or then one like this: "Can a preacher be sound if he's wrong on his understanding and teaching of the Trinity?"

And here's the most asked: "Where can I find a good church? I need a good church. What am I going to do? Where do I go? How do I find a good church?" And so many of us want a godly church, but we're not sure what one is. And today in our text we're landing on five verses where the apostle Paul says, "This is what makes up a godly church. This is what makes up a godly church."

Now what is the church? It's individuals, though. And yes, this is what makes up a godly church, and we're going to be looking at this, and there's

four points we're going to go through; but I want you to think about it, because a godly church is made up of godly individuals. And so when we look at this I want you to think in your own mind, "Is this me? Is this me? Not just the leadership in the church or the elders or the deacons, but is this me?" This is what Paul wants us to think about.

You know, our churches today are really drowning in secularism. Instead of the church changing the world, the world is changing the church, even good churches. You know, when Jesus hung out with sinners, they're the ones that changed, He didn't. And so our churches unfortunately have become like the world, they're bringing the world inside. They're incorporating the world's culture: social justice, wokeism, critical race theories, egalitarianism. In fact, many churches have stated, "We're going to dumb the services down, we're going to be like the world, because if we can be like the world in the way we look and the way we teach, you know what; they'll come. And then when they come, we'll convert them."

That's not Bible. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible doesn't teach that. The church is for Christians and for believers to come and grow and learn the Bible and become more Christlike. And if nonbelievers come, then hopefully the Word of God will convict them and they'll be saved. That's what the church is supposed to do.

But unfortunately, that's not what's happening. The worship looks worldly. The churches are organized in a secular fashion. The preachers dress like they're going to work out, and the music is like going to a concert. And the messages are worldly, all sandwiched in between biblical verses and Christian talk; very little Scripture, if any. And even if the Bible is read it's twisted to fit some worldly idea. The biggest war that we face, it's not with China, it's not with Russia, it's not what's going to happen in the Middle East; it's the war for our church, it's the battle for the church.

So, what's the bottom line? What's the answer? I read a quote by a man named Merle d'Aubigné. This was written 150 years ago. He was a Swiss Protestant minister, and he nailed it. You see, people never change, and

what he wrote 150 years ago is just as relevant today as it was then. And this is what he wrote, listen to this: "The Word of God is the only power that can subdue the rebellion of our heart. There is power in our fallen nature and it revolts against divine truth, which nothing human can overcome. No teaching of man will do it, not even that of your father or your mother. The teaching of the church and of the most beloved pastors will not do it, nor time-worn tradition, which is the teaching of the ages. All this is powerless as the slenderest thread to lift the weight which presses us down to make the kingdom of God enter our hearts. We need a battering ram."

Now do you know what a battering ram is? Do you remember what that was? It was used in ancient times where a huge log would hang on this cart they would push, and they'd swing it to break down these concrete barriers and walls. And he's saying we need a battering ram. That's what we've got to have, "a battering ram, that can only overthrow the strongest walls in men's heart, and that battering ram is the Word of God." That's it. That's it. And so that's what we're going to be looking at today. We're going to be looking at what makes a godly church, and not only that, specifically, what makes godly individuals.

Now I want to bring up what's going on at Asbury just briefly. We don't know for sure. I haven't been there. We're not sure how much the gospel is being presented. We're not sure about repentance. Hopefully, we would love for a revival to start; I would. This country needs a revival, we need it. But ultimately, only time will tell if this is really a true revival, because if it's of man, I can assure you it will fizzle out; but if it's of God, if it's of God, it will prove to elevate a hunger for the teaching of the Bible, and there will be noticeable repentance, it it's of God, if God is really doing this. You see, that is proof that it is of God.

The Word of God is primary in any real movement of God, it is the centerpiece. We need to always be lining up whatever we're seeing, whatever teaching, whatever preaching, whatever church it is, even if it's this church: "Does it line up with the Word of God?" You see, that's our battering ram. That's all we got. That's what we've got to have. It's

impossible to practice godliness for a church or for an individual without a constant steady diet and intake of the Word of God.

Now I need to hear this, and I hope you do too, because when all the dust settles in life, the most important thing is your relationship with God and how much time you are spending in the Word with Him. That's what makes a difference. Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, it's so simple, but we miss it: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by" - what? - "the word of Christ, the word of Christ."

So Paul writes second Thessalonians. The church is probably two years old, and he writes this second letter to them probably a couple of months after he finished the first letter. And as I mentioned, they were a young church, and they were battling persecution, and they were questioning when Christ was going to come back, and they weren't sure about a lot of things. But Paul was thankful for this church. He was thankful that they were holding the sound truthful teaching of the Word of God, even while they were under attack.

And so we're going to go through it. We're going to look at four points in these five verses, and very simply it's going to be this. What we're going to look at is four marks of a godly church, and I would say four marks of a godly person, someone in the church. And here's what they are. Number One: "There's an absence of worldliness." That's verse 1. Number Two: "They are abounding in grace and peace." Number Three: "They are advancing in faith, love, and perseverance." You see, it's just not stuck in their head, but it's down in their heart. And the proof that they were true believers is that they were doing this, that God was working in the furnace of their trials, that they were advancing in faith and love and perseverance. And lastly, "They were had an awareness that the coming kingdom, the day of the Lord was coming back. He was coming back; and that helped them when they were in their trials.

And so, let's look at our first point: "There was an absence of worldliness." "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy." Paul - I like to use the term Silas, that

was his Greek name, Silvanus was his Roman name. These were the missionaries. These were the guys that brought the truth to them earlier, several years earlier. They were the A-Team. They were the people that gave them the gospel, they set the church up, they organized it, and they're trying to keep up with them. They left. They're trying to encourage them. They'd sent Timothy back. Timothy had gone and met them and come back and reported, and now Paul is sending this letter back to them because he is so interested that they stay strong, because he knows people.

It's relevant for us. Satan's always trying to infiltrate the church. So he acknowledges right up front. Look what he says. They're a church. They're a church. Now what does the Bible say a church is? You know, I think if we were to do a survey we'd get answers all across the board what a church is. But what does the Bible say a church is? Well, the church in Greek is ecclesia. It's literally called out ones. It's a company that's called out. And it could even be political gatherings, not necessarily a church. But Paul clarifies what this ecclesia group is. This church, this church has a spiritual address and a physical address as the called out ones.

Now what's interesting is, again, the physical address is Thessalonica. Look what he says: "To the church of Thessalonica." Strategically located by God on the Adriatic Sea and on the 600-mile Ignatia Way, which is what the Romans traveled east and west across Europe. And so here was this church in a metropolitan area with a harbor and a highway running through it, and God planted it right in the middle, because He wanted it to spread. It was said by one commentator, "Without the church at Thessalonica Europe would not know the gospel." Now I mentioned this this morning that it's so cool that Thessaloniki is a southern town in Greece right now, it's there; it's still there. It's proof that God works in real time with real people at real locations.

And so, that's where this church was located. It was strategically located there. And next, notice it had a spiritual address; and this is the part that's really good. It says, "This church" – the called out ones – "were in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That's who they were. That is what they came out of, "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus writes what the definition of a church is in John 17:14-17. Let me read it to you; you don't have to turn there. He says, "I have given them Your word," - that's the church - "and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as though I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." - that's the church - "They're not of the world, even as I'm not of the world, Sanctify them in the truth; Your word truth."

So the world is devoted obviously to the temporal, to the material, and the world is opposed to God. The world system that we live in says, "Get all you can get," and God says, "Give." The world says, "Build yourself up," and God says, "Deny yourself." The world seeks to the present, the now, and God says, "You need to be looking to the future." The world glories in man rather than God, and the world promotes the desires of the flesh; and God wants faith in the unseen. And the world says, "The way up is the way," and God says, "The way down is the right way."

So this is the mindset in most churches; they've got to be like the world, they've got to be like the world to attract the world and get the people to attend. How sad is that, and how obvious is it. You need to dress like the world, and sing like the world, and talk like the world, and entertain like the world, instead of using the battering ram of the Word of God.

So we can be certain of this, that the real church of Jesus Christ is not of this world. It's in the world, but we're not of the world. It's not about a man, no; it's not about a personality; it's about the battering ram of the Word of God. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, I love this. He said, "The glory of the gospel is that when the church is absolutely different than the world, she invariably attracts people." I wish we knew that. I wish we would remember that, as all the churches need to.

So our first point is that a good church, a godly church, and I would say a godly person, you, is that we need to be absent of worldliness. We need to be checking our lives to see how worldly are we. And it's a constant battle.

We never get to a point, we never arrive, but it's something we've got to be focused on, because the world is constantly on us. Someone said it's like a boat; we're in the water, but the water can't be in us. That's why we got to stay in the Word.

So let's look at number two, "A godly church and a godly person is someone who is abounding in grace and peace and perseverance." Wow, listen to this: "Grace." He says, "Grace to you," verse 2. What is grace? What is grace? Grace is receiving something you don't deserve. Grace is God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace is God's heart of kindness, that for some reason beyond us His heart of kindness shares with sinners Christ, those of us who deserve hell. That's grace.

And grace is what saves us. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; that not of yourselves, it's a gift of God." And so Paul writes, "Grace. Grace to you." It's the heart of the gospel. In Acts, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course in the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify solemnly" - listen to this - "of the gospel of the grace of God."

So if you're here this morning and you love Jesus, it's because of grace, because of grace. It's God's unmerited favor. It's God's unmerited favor, and it's all bound up in the cross of Jesus Christ. It's His rescue mission. It's where Jesus Christ came to bear our punishment. It's where He did it all, and all we bring is our sin. We can't add anything. What an insult to add to the grace of God to think that one good work would pile onto what Jesus Christ did. We can't do it. And so Spurgeon said, "The mark of true gospel preaching in any godly church is where Jesus Christ is everything, the creature is nothing," - that's me and that's you - "and salvation is all of grace through the work of the Holy Spirit, applying it" - see - "through the precious blood of Jesus Christ."

And so Paul says, "Grace" - and then look what he says - "and peace." He says, "Grace and peace." Grace is the cause, and peace is the result. You



see, grace comes first, and then peace. If you've experienced God's grace, then you're going to experience His peace. If you've never experienced God's grace, you're not going to experience His peace; you can't. You see, it doesn't say peace first and then grace; it can't happen. We try to figure out how we can have peace all the time, and you can't have it. There's no way to get it unless first you experience the grace of God. It's the only way to obtain real, lasting peace.

Paul writes in Romans 5:1, you've heard this many times, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have" – what? – "peace, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In this peace, "with God." There's no more war; He's not against us. Sin is gone; He's for us now. And when we have peace with God, that's when we experience the peace of God. One commentator said, "The peace of God is first and foremost, peace with God."

It's the state of affairs in which God instead of being against us is now for us. No account of God's peace, which does not start here, can do other than mislead. And Paul writes in Philippians 4:7, "It's the peace of God" – I love this – "which surpasses all understanding, all comprehension. It will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus." Listen, this peace is incomprehensible. It's impossible to understand. It's what our human minds can come up with. It's a supernatural peace. It Siri talking to me on my wrist. But it's a supernatural peace, it comes relieving anxiety. You can't get it from a song. And look, Paul tells us where it comes from. Continue, look on the verse: "It's grace and peace" – look – "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That's where it comes from. That's where it comes from, no other place.

Paul writes again in Ephesians 2:13-14, let me read it to you: "But now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly far off" – that means we weren't Christians – "we were brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ. For He Himself" – I love this, here it is – "is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall between us and Him." So the Father and the Son worked together to bring salvation of those who believe. The Father elects, the Son atones, and then the Holy Spirit

applies all of this; and when that happens, and when you're saved, that brings grace and peace. That's the mark of a godly person who's amongst a bunch of members who are in a godly church. They've got that because they're saved.

And so I want to make a point about this is that a godly church and a godly person that receives grace and peace through Jesus Christ has to believe in the Trinity, because that's where it came from: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If there's a denial of that, then it's a false teacher. You can't have it.

The more I look around of all these people teaching, all these churches everywhere, one of the places that these false churches are exposed is their doctrine of the Trinity. It breaks down in who Jesus is and who God is and who the Holy Spirit is. I mean it may all sound good; and then you try to find out what they believe on the Trinity, and you're going to find in many of these churches it breaks down there. Let me give you an example.

There's a very famous preacher named Steven Furtick. He is the founder and pastor of Elevation Church in Charlotte. He's a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has well over 25,000 people that come every week. He's, you know, television all over the world. Last year in a sermon he made headlines when he quoted John 16:7 talking about the Holy Spirit. Now listen to this. He read this, here's the verse, "But very truly I say to you: it is for your good that I am going away." Jesus is saying, He's talking to His disciples and He's saying, "It's for your good that I go away," because remember Jesus is saying, "The Holy Spirit will come."

So he's saying, Furtick is quoting this, and then this is what he says: "How could You say something like that, Jesus?" Furtick says. "How could You say it's good that You're going away. We followed You, we trusted You, and now You're leaving us." And Furtick goes on to say, "Jesus is saying, 'I'm not leaving you, I'm just changing forms, I'm just changing forms.'" Well, that's heretical. He believes that God is always in different modes and never

all three at the same time: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If we don't believe and embrace God as a triune God, we can't have Christianity.

Anything more or less than the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, you see, is just an invention, it's an idol. And what he's talking about is modalism, different manifestations of the Trinity, and it just came out. But a true Christian cannot say that. So the first mark of a godly church is it's got to be absent of worldliness, and the first mark of, really, a godly person is we need to be less and less worldly.

The second mark of a godly church is their people will be abounding in this grace and peace which comes from a true salvation from someone who places all their trust in Jesus Christ who paid for their sins on the cross, all orchestrated from God the Father, atoned for by Jesus Christ, and applied by the Holy Spirit: three Persons in one. You have to believe that. That's the sign of a godly church and a godly person.

Next, a godly church will be advancing in faith and love and perseverance, and so will you, and so will I. And so Paul, Paul sees this in this young church. He says, "Look, we ought always to give thanks to you," verse 4. And the word "ought" refers to - he's obligated, he's wanting to give thanks to God for them. He's so obligated to do this, and he has a deep appreciation to thank the Lord what He's done in this church, and he gives God all the glory for the work that he's seen in these members' lives. And he wasn't focused on their faults so much as what had been changed in their life, he was focusing on that.

And I think that's good for us to stop and think, "How much do we really appreciate others, other believers? Do we stop and thank other believers that we know and we love for who they are and what they're doing?" It takes our mind off ourselves, it really does. It's healthy, and it puts our mind back on God. That's what Paul's doing here. Andrew Murray said, "Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with Him and will take our attention from ourselves and give the Holy Spirit more room in our hearts to work."

So I'm convicted by that. I need to be more thankful for you, for all you're doing. And that's what Paul was doing here. See, Paul didn't say, "Hey, I'm so thankful for your building you got and that piece of property. And wow, you've really got your church organized. And, man, you've got programs set up, and I walked through your bookstore and it's fantastic; and, man, the music." No, look what he's saying, "because of your faith I'm thankful, because your faith is greatly enlarged," – that's what he's thankful for – "and that love of each one of you toward one another is growing." That's what he's thankful for, and for the perseverance of their faith.

And so let's look at this. He's thankful for their faith. This is an indication of a godly church, of sincere faith, and it's greatly enlarging. And look what he says: "This faith." Really, what is faith? It's trust and belief in the conviction of the truth of Scripture. It's the pinnacle of faith alone in Christ alone, trusting in Him in the gospel. And this faith is also involved in our everyday lives when we live and serve Him. It's true faith that's not only in our heart, but it's played out in our relationship with others. It's the conviction that God exists and He's the creator and the ruler of all things, and He's the provider and the giver of Jesus Christ and salvation.

And Paul is so excited to say, "Their faith was greatly enlarged." Now this word in the Greek means it was increasing beyond measure. And our faith can grow like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the more it grows. And I want more faith, and you want more faith, and Paul is saying that's the sign of a godly person and a godly church is that we're continuing to grow and increase. And this is a present tense. It wasn't, "your faith grew," but it's continuing to grow, and it's growing under the persecution and difficulties in their life. That's what's happening.

Look at the end of verse 4. He said, "It's a faith in midst of all your persecutions and afflictions." I wish it wasn't this way, but it is: our faith is strengthened in the storms of life, isn't it. I want to go around the storms, but God's more interested in building your faith, and so He allow storms to come in our lives for that reason. And so faith is not believing in spite of evidence, really, but it's obeying and believing in spite of the circumstances

and the consequences. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen."

Our faith, our faith may not be something – may be something in our life that we know where we're going, but we still have our faith, we still have our faith. And our faith has to be solid, even if we don't know where we're going, if we can't see past tomorrow, because we are trusting, we are trusting in God. That's what our faith is in. He's the one leading us. We're looking past our difficulties. That's what these Thessalonians were doing. And the Bible tells us that their faith was greatly enlarged, and this gives a picture – I love this – of a healthy tree and good soil.

When I was growing up we had a little orchard with pear trees next to the house, and they would just – there's so many pairs come over on those branches we had to put 2x4s under those branches to hold them up. And that's the picture of what Paul wants us to see and understand about our faith. That's the enlargement of our faith, that it's just growing and growing. And I think we need to stop and ask ourselves, "Are we stagnant? Is your faith growing?" see. Do you feel like you have more faith now than you did this time last year? That's the mark of a godly person and a godly church.

George Mueller said, "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible." I love that. "It doesn't operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins when man's power ends," see. So our faith grows in the furnace of difficulties; and this is what was happening to the Thessalonian church. And I think it's happening to us, and it needs to when we face trials. "Their faith was greatly enlarged"; and that's what we want.

You've heard of the famous missionary to China Hudson Taylor. He wrote his wife one time and he said, "We have 25 cents and all the promises of God." That's faith. See, that's what builds our faith. That's where God wants us. He's looking at our hearts and where we are.

Now notice next, the end of verse 3, "the love of each one of you toward one another is growing greater." Wow, this is so important for a godly church and a godly life, believers that are growing in their love for each other. And this is agape love. It's a love that urges us to sacrifice for someone else. It's a love that says, "I'm going to do this not because it benefits me, but it benefits others." It's a sacrificial love. It's not about me, it's not what I can get, it's not what I want and, "How come I didn't - you forgot me, me, me, me." No, this is the love for other people.

And our Lord prayed this in John 17:26, let me read it to you. He said, "I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." Can you think of the impact, the impact of visitors to our church if they say, "Wow, what an amazing thing to see the love that you all have for each other"?

And it's a love that's growing. It's not stagnant, it's not one time, it's continual. And this word in the Greek applies "like flooding your land with irrigation." It's like water going over the banks of a river. The people in the church are just overflowing with this kind of love. And that's what makes a godly person and a godly church, you see. And Paul recognized that this little Thessalonian church was like that.

You know, I was reading about the old redwoods in California, Sequoia trees. They're massive. They stand 300 feet tall, 30 stories tall, and what's interesting is their roots are shallow. They're shallow because they get the moisture from the surface. But the other thing is they grow in groups and they're intertwined, their roots are, to support each other in the storms, and they don't stand alone. So when the winds come they're not uprooted because, see, they're connected at the root.

That's what Paul's saying. A healthy, godly church is connected with love for each other. It's not natural, it's something we have to work at every day, thinking about other people. Someone said this: "Whoever loves much, does much." Wow. I've got to work on that.

And then Paul says in verse 4, "We're proud." He says, "Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your" - look at that word - "perseverance, perseverance." As I mentioned, they were under severe trials, they were under difficulties. And we're not here yet. I saw in the news this morning that China has ramped up persecution on Christians. It's all over the news. I thought they were already doing it. They use COVID. They were meeting in homes, and now they're after Christians. We don't face that yet, but it's coming.

Well this Thessalonian church, they had these trials and persecutions. It wasn't as easy to be a Christian as it is for us. And this word "perseverance" means to abide under. It means to subject yourself to something that you really want to run from. And it means to look forward to and the ability to focus on what's coming in the future and not on your present circumstances. And they were persevering, and they were hanging in there.

And then he says at the end of verse 4, "and their faith in the midst of these persecutions and afflictions that they endured." It means they had an organized opposition that was coming after them from outside and they endured it. They endured it. They were being harassed. They were probably in prison. A lot of things were happening to them, but they were hanging in there.

And then he says, "not only the persecutions" - look what he says - "and these afflictions." And afflictions, this means intense pressure in difficult circumstances. They weren't minor inconveniences like we have, but they were real hardships. And Paul was thankful for their perseverance in the persecutions and the inflictions. And then look what he says, "and you endured it, you stood up to it. You were upright. You walked through it. You were firm. You hung in there."

So that's the sign of a godly person. That's a sign of a godly church. And the question is, "What about your trials?" Maybe they're not persecutions from the government, but we all have trials, we all have difficulties. How are you holding up? Are you trusting in yourself? Are you trusting and say,

"I'm going to be able to work this out," or are you completely all in for Christ? Are you remaining strong in the Lord? Are you strengthened in the Holy Spirit? That's what we see in this godly church in the Thessalonians. And Spurgeon said this: "One of the clearest proofs of the judgment to come is to be found in the present sufferings of the believer through their persecution and trials, because if they're suffering, their love for God, there must be a future state and time for remedying all that suffering." See, and God will do that; and these Thessalonians do that; and we need to keep in mind.

God's going to put His own people in the furnace and He keeps an eye on the clock, someone said, and His hand on the thermostat, and He knows just how much we can take. And so that's what God wants for us many times. He wants that. We have to remind ourselves the Lord brings us in these difficult situations because He wants us more dependent on Him; that's what He wants. He wants us dependent on Him and not on ourselves.

And how do we do that? Well, our roots grow deeper into the Word of God. We look to Him more in everything. We take our eyes off ourselves, big and small. I always quote Jeremiah 17:8, but I'm going to quote Jeremiah 17:7. It weaves in like Psalm chapter 1. Let me read this to you: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water that extends its roots by stream, and will not fear when the heat comes; and its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought, nor cease to yield its fruit." And that's a picture of a tree planted by fresh water; we know it in Psalm 1. And that fresh water is the feeding on the Word of God, the battering ram that changes lives.

And so we need to trust Him more and grow in our faith, especially in trials. We need to send our roots deeper in the Word. I'm talking to me first. We need to look to Him in everything, no matter how big or how small; and that is the sign of a godly church and a godly member.



So we've looked at a godly church and a godly member needs to be absent from worldliness, they need to be abounding in grace and peace, they need to be advancing in faith and love and perseverance; and lastly, we need to live our lives with more of an awareness of the return of Christ and the coming kingdom when He comes back and sets it all right.

And look what he says, verse 5. This is plain indication of God's righteous judgment, "so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering." Let me say it a different way: God is going to use your trials and my trials and persecution to show His justice so that we will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which we're suffering. You see, these church members, they were looking past all of that and they were doing what Matthew tells us to do in Matthew 6:33, what we need to be doing, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." See, that's the pinnacle, and that's what makes a godly church and a godly person.

And then Paul goes on and says, "This is plain indication," - or he's saying - "this is evidence and this is proof that you're saved, that you're enduring the persecution and you're staying faithful." And their godly response in all these difficulties is because they were Christians and God was still working in them and enabling them to get through it. And that's the sign of a godly church and a godly person, and it's evidence that this perseverance and faith of the Thessalonian saints was they were focused on Christ's return - look at that - to eventually bring this righteous judgment. See that righteous judgment? He's going to bring righteous judgment on all the unbelievers. He's going to separate the good from the evil, it's going to happen. One day Jesus is going to turn the tables, and the wicked are going to suffer, and the believers are going to be rewarded. So this is a plain indication that God's righteous judgment so that we'll be considered worthy of this coming kingdom.

So God's allowing this suffering so they can be counted worthy. And I think in our own way, we have difficulties in suffering, and God's looking to see how you're going to respond so you'll be counted worthy. Now this doesn't mean that we're earning our salvation, it's not earning our rights; these are

just trials to develop our Christian character, and mature us and build us in sanctification. So a godly church and a godly person is one that keeps an awareness of the coming kingdom. Our problems, our problems need to be used to point us upward, not inward. Our problems need to make us better and not bitter. And it helps us to keep an awareness that Jesus is coming back.

Steven Cole was a preacher and he quoted David Wells' book - I want to read this to you in closing - *No Place for Truth*. Wells says, "The evangelical church in America has lost its theological foundation. It's lost its theological foundation. It's lost its God-centeredness. And instead of being truth brokers who help the flocks come to know and live in submission to a holy God, pastors have become business managers who market the church and psychologists who help people find personal fulfillment and good feelings." He says, "What if the apostle Paul were looking for a pastorate today? He might be hard-pressed, because few would warm up to his personality. Most pastors stand and fall today on their personalities rather than their character." And he finally says, "The church has blended in with modernity, promoting God and the gospel as just another self-help method."

We're in a battle. We're in a battle for the church. And the church is made up of people. What was that little saying, "The steeple and all the people"? We're in a battle. We're in a battle.

You know, a lot of churches have a lot more programs than we have, they got a lot more things to offer. We get calls all the time, "Can you do this? Can you do that?" And we say, "No, we don't have that." I like to say, "We have a limited menu right now." But we want to use that limited menu and glorify God with it and excel, that's what we want to do; and we want to be a godly church with a lot of godly members that are absent of worldliness, abounding in grace and peace, and advancing in faith and love and perseverance, and they have an awareness of the kingdom of God.

So, let me close and ask you a question. Let me ask you a question. We can't be like this Thessalonian church unless we as individuals, you see, are doing this. Each one of us, starting with me, is responsible for these kind of characteristics: What does your life look like? Are you buying too much into the world? I am. Are you growing in peace and grace that comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you know Him? Do you know Him? Do you know all about Him, or do you really know Him as your personal Lord and Savior? Is your faith increasing, and are you showing more love to each other? And is the return of our Lord helping you in your daily life to think about, "He's coming back," you see; because if we want a church to move the world, we can't be people that are moved by the world. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for Your grace and mercy. We thank You for the grace that You give us and the peace that comes out of that grace. And we thank You for Your salvation as, the author of Hebrews says, so great a salvation, that You would send Jesus Christ into this world to live a perfect life, to fulfill Your law, and then die horrific death on the cross and bear all of Your wrath in place of us, so that we could go free.

So, Father, we owe You for that. We owe You. We owe You to be a godly church and to be a godly member and to live out what we believe. And Father, we can't do it without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. So we thank You for that, and we pray that the Holy Spirit would work in each one of our lives through that, and the reading of Scripture and our Bible and our personal studies and our walk with You, that You would make us godly people in a godly church, in Jesus' name. Amen.