

## Worthy of the Calling

Call to Worship: Psalm 9:1-2

1st Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12

Hymn Insert- *Here I Am to Worship*

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

### **Introduction:**

Paul has just expressed why he is bound to thank God always for the Thessalonians, because of their exceedingly growing faith and their abounding love for one another. And the fact that this was taking place in the midst of ongoing persecutions and trials, made the church at Thessalonica a model church for exemplifying the blessed virtue of patience, to all the other churches.

Following this line of thinking, Paul sought to encourage the Thessalonians by reminding them of how their suffering was both, evidence of their being counted worthy of the kingdom of God, and the righteous judgment that was presently upon their enemies, who were rejecting Christ, in their persecution of the Thessalonians. The paradox in all of this is that the righteous, who suffer in Christ, would later obtain eternal rest, peace and joy when Christ returns, while the wicked, who were causing tribulation, would be given over to eternal tribulation, when Christ returns to destroy them forever. And so, Paul was seeking to encourage the Thessalonians to "keep on keeping on," in light of the big picture of the glory to come. The return of Christ would set all things straight, and God's righteous justice would prevail, gloriously on behalf of the suffering Christians, and terrifyingly against all who do not know God, and who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Finally then, Paul ends this section by informing the Thessalonians of his constant prayer for them, in the light of the things he has just stated in the previous verses, which we have gone over in the last few weeks. For this morning then, we will consider the content of this prayer.

## **I. Worthy of the Calling**

Paul begins verse 11 with the connection word, "Therefore...", which indicates that what he is about to say, is to be taken in the light of what he has just said. And, of course, when we look at the content of that which follows, this obviously makes perfect sense.

"Therefore (in light of what I have just said, about the final destination of the unbeliever and the believer), we (Silas, Timothy and I) also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling..." Now, let's stop here for a few moments, before moving ahead with Paul's thought, to answer two important questions: What calling is Paul speaking about here, and in what way, would the Thessalonians be considered worthy of this calling?

1) What calling is Paul speaking about here? Well, when Paul says *this* calling, clearly he is referencing something that he has just referenced, which he is now classifying as a "calling." And obviously, that calling is described in what Paul says about believers and not unbelievers. We can presume that Paul would not be praying for the Thessalonians to be counted worthy of the calling of the ungodly, who will be facing eternal destruction, when Christ comes to exercise fiery vengeance upon them. So, having narrowed things down pretty significantly, we can now logically deduce what calling Paul is speaking about here. We'll notice that verses 4-5 give us a clear understanding of what this calling is:

"...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, 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..."

Here, you'll notice a direct connection to what Paul is indicating by the "calling" in verse 11. Notice the similar language used in both places: "that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (vs. 5) and "that our God would count you worthy of this calling" (vs. 11). And so, understanding verse 5, gives us a window into understanding verse 11. And what then does Paul mean in verse 5? Well, as we have already seen when we considered this text in the past, the Thessalonians worthiness of the kingdom of God is directly connected to their patiently enduring the persecutions and sufferings, which they faced, because of their faith in Christ. In

other words, their willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ's kingdom was indicative of their worthiness of the calling. And so, what then is the actual calling, here spoken of by Paul? It is the call of (and into) Christ's kingdom, which in the present, involves enduring suffering for the glory and Name of Christ (the King).

Again, Paul addresses this in 2 Timothy 2:12, when he states, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us." Being called into the kingdom of Christ is a glorious privilege and a wonderful calling, but it entails great suffering, at times. And those who endure that suffering will indeed reign with Him. And so, Paul prays, as it were, that the Thessalonians would continue to persevere in their suffering for the glory of Christ and His kingdom, for which they were called to suffer. And the faith that they continued to exercise during this period of suffering, being more precious than gold that perishes, would bring praise and honor to Christ, the One who has called them, when He returns.

Furthermore, it is critical to recognize that this calling also includes the end result, the whole paradox, and not just the suffering. It is indeed a calling unto suffering for the kingdom of God, but it is a calling unto suffering, which brings about and leads into the final glorification of the believer. It is a calling that has, as its destination, what we have considered last week from verse 10, namely, Christ being glorified in His people, and His people beholding and reveling in the glory of Christ! And so, it is a calling that begins with a *temporal* cross, but it is also a calling that ends with an *eternal* crown! It is, as a whole, the calling of redemption!

2) In what way then, would the Thessalonians be said to be "counted worthy of this calling?" Is Paul implying that the believer, in some way, merits any of the privileges that are attached to the calling of God, in Christ? Of course not! What he means is similar to what he means in Ephesians 4:1, when he charges the brethren there to, "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called..." Paul is not implying that the Ephesians or the Thessalonians could ever merit anything related to the plan of salvation, whatsoever. What he means then is that the children of God, having received such a glorious calling (rooted, grounded and completed in grace), would reflect, by their actions, that they have, indeed, received such a calling, and that what has been produced in them, manifests that God's investment (the shed blood of His Son) was worth it. He is speaking of the fruits that ought to be manifested by those who have truly

become the objects of such magnificent grace! To walk worthy of the calling then, would be to walk in a manner that is fitting of and evidencing the fact that such a calling has indeed been received by the one professing to have received it.

The gospel changes sinners. It must! It doesn't simply provide fire insurance, it brings about a new life, heading in a new direction, governed by new ideals and desires, in keeping with the glory of the God, who has called us by it! You cannot simply profess faith in Christ; you cannot simply claim to be an object of the gospel's blessing, while remaining unchanged by that gospel. It's impossible. And so, there is a worthiness attributed to the walk that proceeds out of the gospel calling, which evidences a true and authentic work of God in the professing Christian. That is why Paul can command in Ephesians, to walk worthy of that call by walking in unity and love, with long suffering and patience toward one another....etc. And in this context in 2 Thessalonians, it includes the call to persevere in suffering, for the glory of Christ, who has called us, if indeed He has truly called us! The worthiness herein described then, is the authenticating factor, which confirms the power of God at work in us, causing us to do what is unnatural to fallen men, namely, suffer wrong for the sake of the gospel! Again, the investment of God is proven to be a worthy investment.

And so, when Paul prays for the Thessalonians to this end, he is praying that their perseverance would continue, as a confirmation of their calling...as a worthy walk, suited to the glorious privilege attached to the glorious call! [III. *Saving Private Ryan* - Tom Hanks whisper; and what of the shed blood of Christ?]

Consider then, how the rest of the text affirms our understanding of this calling and being counted worthy of it. "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; 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.*"

## **II. And Fulfill all the Good Pleasure of His Goodness and the Work of Faith With Power**

Paul prays then that God would count the Thessalonians worthy of this calling, *and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power..*" Now, there's a lot

going on in this prayer, isn't there? Let's break this up a bit, before bringing it all back together in a summary fashion.

1) "And fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness." What does Paul mean by this? Well, certainly we know that the calling, just spoken about by Paul is a calling that is given by God. God is the One who graciously and effectively calls anyone into the sphere and blessing of His kingdom. And so, when Paul prays that God would count the Thessalonians worthy of the calling (a calling initiated and given by God Himself), he further prays that God would accomplish everything intended by that call. He prays that God would fulfill all of His good pleasure; all of His preordained design for the Thessalonians, by prospering and advancing them in their patience and suffering. And when he states, "the good pleasure of His goodness," Paul affirms that all that God designs to do; all that pleases Him in the exercising of His sovereign will is good and proper. It springs out of a good and righteous heart.

Now, to appreciate this, imagine for a moment that God were like us. If we were serving even a good King (perhaps, like David), we might say to David, "May you fulfill all of your good pleasure. May you accomplish all that you intend to accomplish." But, we cannot be certain that David's intentions will always be backed by good and pure motives. Even the heart of David was imperfect, and his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah the Hittite confirmed this, didn't it? But God is quite different, isn't He? We can say with full and absolute assurance, and with the utmost trust and confidence in God, "Lord, may You fulfill all the good pleasure of Your goodness." You see, we know that all of God's good pleasure is good. Every iota of God's design comes out of a pure heart with spotless, righteous intentions. This is thoroughly encouraging because we are a people who are called to walk by faith in God. We are called to entrust ourselves to Him in every respect. And if God has even the potential for some lack of good in Him (even if the probability were infinitesimally small), there would be something for us to be concerned about. And so, Paul can entrust the Thessalonians fully with God, knowing that God will fulfill all His desire with them, and this desire can and will, only spring from good, pure and perfect motives.

2) "And the work of faith with power." What is this "work of faith?" This is the "work of faith," which Paul has been speaking about, in his commending the Thessalonians (see 1

Thessalonians 1:2-4 & 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4). Here, we find that the "work of faith," is the work and godly life that proceed out of a sincere faith in Christ. It is a loving faith that breathes in the love of Christ, and exhales Christian service and love for the brethren. And so, Paul prays here that God will continue to work that work of faith in the Thessalonians, by His glorious power, which is able to prevent any and all opposition from hindering that work.

You see, again, Paul knows very well that what is going on in Thessalonica is supernatural. To endure such terrible, ongoing persecutions and to continue to serve Christ (in spite of them), is evidence of the real power of God at work in them! It is resurrection power at work in them! And so, he prays that God will fulfill all of His good pleasure, in continuing to do what He has been doing in and by the Thessalonians (because if God let go, even for a moment, they would fall apart), counting them worthy of the calling, by which, God has effectually called them into this work. [See Ephesians 2:8-10, emphasizing vs. 10]

And all of this has an intended goal in mind. To be sure, there is an ultimate end in God doing what Paul is praying about here.

### **III. That the Name of Jesus Christ Might be Glorified**

"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" (vs. 12).

The goal in all of this, is the same righteous goal that God is after in everything that has to do with this creation and His glorious plan of redemption, namely, that the Name of Jesus Christ might be glorified! The whole business of God redeeming a people for Himself, finds as its ultimate end, the lifting up, the exalting, the universal recognition and praise of the Name of Jesus! In short, it's all about Him! [This ties right into verse 10, doesn't it]

But notice something else, which is quite profound, brethren. Paul prays these things unto the end of Christ's Name being glorified in us, *and us being glorified in Him!* Now, this is not to say that Paul wishes that we would be accredited with anything. That would be blasphemous. Rather, Paul highlights the fact that we will be exalted and lifted up, perfected and purified in Christ! In our union with Christ, He is glorified in our salvation, and we are glorified in Him. It is the greatest "rags to riches" story ever told! The people of God are graciously taken

out of the ash heap of their sin. They are stripped of their filthy garments, which Christ wore on the cross, bearing the judgment that we deserve, in Himself. We are given the righteous robes of Christ, and we are glorified in Him; His rays of beauty, perfection, righteousness and excellence shine forth in us, because of the robes, which He has given us! And in the end, what He is, we ourselves will become, on the inside as well as the out. And, in this sense, we will be glorified in Him. He is glorified as the architect and carpenter of our completed salvation, and we are glorified in the perfection that we have become because of Him. The beautiful, hand crafted sculpture, which was sculpted out of a solid, dumb block, now bears a particular glory which is beheld by all, and that, unto the praise of the magnificent Sculptor!

And all of this is no thanks to us, whatsoever, which is why Paul concludes this prayer thought with these words, "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Yes, we are glorified, but not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done in us and for us, by His glorious work on the cross! It is always, from beginning to end, according to the free grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, in all of this, Paul ultimately prays that God will finish the work that He has begun in the Thessalonians, granting them continual perseverance and patience in suffering, so that God might accomplish in them, what He desires, in accordance with His good purposes, unto the glorification of Christ's Name, in the finished product (sanctification) of His work in the Thessalonians (their glorification in Christ), by the grace of God.

#### **IV. Wrapping it all Up**

Brethren, let us then conclude our time by wrapping this all up, in a way which would find its relevance right here and now for us.

1) Recognize that suffering for the Name of Christ, while not easy, and often times, very painful, is actually a privilege that is granted to the people of God, as a means of glorifying Christ. Sadly, the health and wealth movement contradicts this reality, by seeing suffering as contradictory to the will of God, rather than in accordance with it. And because of this, they treat suffering as evidence of a lack of faith, rather than a means of expressing your faith unto the glorification of Christ's Name. We are called to suffer for His Name in this life, and it is a

privilege to do so. [Ex: When the Apostles were whipped thirty-nine times each for their faith in Christ, in Acts 5:40-42]. [See also Philippians 1:27-30]

2) Let us see here, once again, that Christ is not merely glorified in a "Christian label," but in an effectually changed sinner. The fruit of His labor is not simply seen in a profession of faith, but rather, in the changed life that comes out of that sincere profession. His Name is glorified in the power of a changed life, for all who call upon His Name.

Easy believism is utterly atrocious because it makes the salvation of the sinner from hell fire, ultimate and paramount, rather than the glorification of Christ's Name, in actually sanctifying, justified, redeemed sinners! Easy believism is man-centered and not Christ and God-centered. It is a doctrine from hell, which limits the effectiveness of Christ's atonement to achieving mental assent rather than a changed heart. There is nothing impressive or noteworthy about condemned sinners seeking fire insurance in the Name of Christ! But the jaws of heaven's hosts drop when they behold former, dead, deceived, ungodly, hell bound rebels, now laying down their very lives for the sake of the Name of Christ and His Gospel! Former blasphemers of God, now totally obsessed with seeing God glorified, living "Our Father in heaven, let Your Name be hallowed and revered!...", is what manifests the true power of the gospel and the radiant glory of the Christ of the gospel! The world sees mere "professors," and that is why they mock Christianity. But when the true children of God, stand out as holy, sacrificially willing to suffer hardship for the sake of Christ, the very power and presence of God among His people becomes evident and undeniable! The light shines bright and burns the conscience. And they either resist with persecution or they bow to the Light themselves! Let us live that kind of a witness, brethren! And let us pray for God to make us worthy of such a calling!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25