

The Glory of Jesus Revealed in Us

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Do keep your Bibles open, as Gillian suggested, to 2 Thessalonians. We're just going to spend the next three weeks looking at this short letter from the Apostle Paul. I want to begin, though, by asking you a question.

What were the last three things that you were thankful for? What were the last three things you were thankful for? And for which you explicitly gave thanks to God for?

So I have a quick think. Hopefully it should come to mind quite easily. And, you know, being Thanksgiving Sunday last week, hopefully if you haven't given thanks to God for anything during this week, at least you remembered what you did last Sunday.

But I'm hoping that there are things that you've been thankful for through the week. It may have been small things or big things. Things that only happen once or things that are constant in your life, like family or loved ones or, you know, friends.

But over time, we notice, don't we, that the things we thank God for reveal our priorities in life. They show what we care about, what we desire, what our dreams, our goals are.

[1 : 15] And so I think this is the case with Paul today. When we find at the start of 2 Thessalonians, right after he greets them in verse 1 and 2, Paul thanking God.

And he thanks God for the Thessalonians. So in verse 3 he says, We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more.

And the love of all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches, we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

And so we see what Paul is thankful for. It's for them, but it's for their faith and love. Faith in God and Jesus and love for one another.

But more than that, he's thankful for their faith and love increasing more and more. Not just the fact of their faith and love, but the fact that it's increasing more and more.

[2 : 15] And Paul says that he ought to always thank God for these things. Rightly so, he says. Meaning that while there are other good things to thank God for, their increasing faith and love are essential thanksgiving items.

So essential, he feels the need to boast about them to the other churches. Now of course, Paul can only thank God for these things because they actually exist.

They're actually present in the lives of the Thessalonians. Can't thank God for things that are not there, right? But let's consider now, what actually does it mean to have increasing faith and love? How do we tell, for example, when our own faith is increasing? Now I don't think it's so much that, you know, when you have increasing faith, you are more and more heroic with how you live out your faith.

Nor do I think it's about believing more and more things about God, as though you only heard half the gospel, and then now that you hear more, you're believing more.

[3 : 22] No, this is not a head knowledge thing. Neither is it about your bravado. Rather, this increase in your faith is about your maturity. It's related to what Paul calls their perseverance of faith.

You see, as they were facing more persecutions and trials, and their faith was tested, but they persevere, that results in their faith increasing.

Their resolve to keep following Jesus is strengthened. So let's think in terms then of what that may look like for us.

Now we will obviously face different types of trials and persecutions to the Thessalonians, but as Christians, all of us will have our faith tested.

That's how faith grows, actually. So let's say you were a young Christian, and your heart was full of joy. You know, you had just realized your sins are forgiven in Christ.

[4 : 24] You now have eternal life. Wonderful. But then sooner, rather than later, soon, your faith is tested. For example, you soon realize that following Jesus may put your promotion at work at risk.

You know, you have to say no to certain things now, to what your company may ask of you. And so you wrestle with that decision. You decide, at the end, nope, yep, I'm going to honor God and put that ahead of my own personal ambition.

And so you do the right thing by God. Now it doesn't matter whether the promotion that did happen or not, it did cost you or not, but as a result of your obedience to God and the testing of your faith in that situation, your faith grows.

It increases. And so the next time something similar occurs, you know, you don't need to wrestle so hard with that decision anymore, do you? Your faith was tested in the past, you chose the right thing, and God came through for you, faithfully preserving you, even though you may not have got the promotion.

And so you know how to do the right thing again. Now let's say a bigger test then comes along. This time is not just your promotion at risk, but maybe the job itself.

[5 : 48] But because you've learned to trust God in the small things, well that helps you to trust Him in a bigger situation now, doesn't it? And so as a result, your faith increases yet again.

And so can you see how this increase in faith works? Have you seen it happen in your own life? It's when your faith is tested, but you persevere, whether it's trials or suffering, that that's when it grows, isn't it?

It becomes more mature. And that's God's way of increasing your faith. Actually, it's hard for your faith to grow unless it's tested.

Now that's related to the idea of loving one another as well. Because say, this time now, you're being asked to love by forgiving someone. Okay?

Forgiveness, I hope you realize, is an act of love. You love someone by putting, not putting their wrongs against them. But say someone teases me, and I don't like it, you know?

[6 : 56] And I say, you're mean to pick on me and my boldness. Now I don't know whether the person has said sorry. Still no sorry, but that's fine.

But I go, it's fine. I forgive you. Yep. And you know, that was a small act of love by me, wasn't it? Because face it, being teased about being bold, it's actually, shouldn't be a big deal, should it?

It shouldn't. I'm telling you, it's not. But because you've learned to love in small ways, then when something more serious comes along, and you know, let's say now, my integrity is being questioned, that someone accuses me of preaching for selfish reasons, that's a more hurtful accusation, isn't it?

than being teased about my boldness. But hopefully, because I've practiced love in a small way, in the past, it helps my love to increase, when it comes to forgiving, in a bigger way.

And as a result, my love for others increases. So that again, is how God increases our love, doesn't he? Now of course, Paul's not just talking about individual Christians, he's talking about the church as a whole as well.

[8 : 19] And that's right as well, isn't it? Because as we grow, numerically as well, then the love among us should also multiply, as our relationships, the number of relationships, that we have in this church, increases.

Or it may be that, it starts out by the leaders showing love, but because of their example, others follow as well. And so, our love, collectively, increases more and more.

Or, it may begin, for example, that our love is shown in practical acts of kindness. But then, as our faith grows, it extends to more radical acts of love, that of involving, sacrificially laying down our lives, for one another, and for others.

And so, the picture here, we see of an increasing faith, and increasing love, is a picture of, what a healthy church should look like. And Paul is thanking God, that the Thessalonians, are a healthy church.

They are healthy, even though, on the outside, it may look like they are suffering, and under persecution. But no, Paul gives thanks, for the essential things, the things that really matter, and that is their faith increasing, and their love for one another, growing more and more.

[9 : 37] Now, Paul goes on to give another reason, why he is so keen, to give thanks, and boast about the Thessalonians. And he talks about them, in verses 5 to 10.

So, why is Paul so thankful, as well, for their increasing faith and love? Well, he says, verse 5, all this evidence, meaning, it shows, or is proving something, well, what does it prove?

All this evidence, all this is evidence, that God's judgment is right. And as a result, you will be counted worthy, of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

It shows, doesn't it, that God's judgment is right, that God is just. He will pay back trouble, to those who trouble you, and give relief, to those who are troubled, and to us as well.

This will happen, when the Lord Jesus, is revealed from heaven, in blazing fire, with his powerful angels. He will punish those, who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel, of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished, with everlasting destruction, and shut out, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory, of his might.

[10 : 42] On the day, he comes to be glorified, in his holy people, and to be marveled at, among all those, who have believed. This includes you, because you believed, our testimony to you.

Now, have you read, my newsletter this week? I tried to explain, the importance, of this idea, of the day of the Lord, which Steph introduced, at the start of the service. This is a key part, of Old Testament prophecy.

And we saw that, in our reading today, from Zechariah, one of the passages, that talks about it. This day, is talked about, in the Old Testament, as some, time, a day, when God will come, and visit the earth, decisively, to take action.

And on that day, the Bible says, all evil, will be judged. On that day as well, there will also be, salvation, for God's people.

For those, who belong, to God's kingdom. Now, as Christians, because we, know of Jesus' death, resurrection, and promises, we know that, this day, will now be fulfilled, when Jesus, comes again, for a second time.

[11 : 56] And this is what, Paul describes here, in these verses, that at Jesus' second coming, he will be revealed, from heaven, with blazing fire. There will be, eternal destruction, for some, and glory, for others.

So this, moment, when it occurs, it's going to be, actually, a high stakes, moment, in history. And friends, if you believe, in God's word, this moment, involves, you.

If I were you, I would want to know, wouldn't I? Where I stood, as far as this moment, is concerned. What awaits me?

Is it glory, or destruction? It's a world of difference, isn't it? And if you're here today, for the very first time, hearing this, then let me urge you, take this, take these, take these words, in this passage, seriously.

Work out now, whether it's true or not, and decide, what you're going to do with it. Because the moment, when it occurs, is too late, for that decision. Now, we've seen, similar situations, in history, and in life, regarding these kind of, high stakes, moments.

[13 : 17] I recall last year, if you remember, when people were evacuating, Afghanistan, there was a frantic rush, wasn't there, at the airport. People trying to get on, to the last, flight out of Kabul.

Getting those last seats. Now, for these people, that was for them, a life and death, kind of situation, isn't it? And I wonder, you know, imagine, how you would have felt, if you were in that situation.

Pretty, hairy stuff, isn't it? Whether you got onto, that plane or not. Now, there are other, perhaps less serious, type of situations, in your life, perhaps.

Some of you, may have just finished, year 12. Some of you, last year, or the year before. And you put in, your preferences, as to where you want to, go for uni, or whatever.

That's that, sort of knot in the tummy, isn't it? For some of us. When we sort of, I don't know, you don't open letters now, do you? You do online stuff, yeah. Where you press, and you log in, and you work out, whether you got, your preference or not.

[14 : 22] Isn't it? Some of you, perhaps, might be eager, to buy those tickets, to the grand final, or you know, I don't know, Justin Bieber concert, or something like that. And you know, you had to, and I know you do it online, but you know, let's say you had to line up, overnight, you know, at the box office, and there you are, you know, inching to the front of the queue, you know.

There's a sense of trepidation, isn't it? You're hoping that you're not going to get to the front of the queue, only to be cut off, isn't it? For that shutter door to be roped down and said, sorry, sold out.

No, you want to be on the right side of the queue, isn't it? To get those tickets. Now, all of these examples really pale by comparison when it comes to the day of the Lord.

But sadly, I feel like for many of us in the West, particularly those of us who have had a Christian heritage, many of us don't seem to be two-faced by this impending reality, do we?

Because how else do we explain the casualness almost to our own mortality? That we, you know, we go to funerals sometimes even, and people just talk about, yeah, had a good life, let's celebrate that.

[15 : 39] And you know, death, yeah, it's a bit blasé, almost. I don't know why there's this casualness. I guess it can only either be that they don't believe this day is coming, or else, they're pretty confident that they'll be okay when it does.

Maybe they're banking on the fact that as good, decent people, they'll be safe. But you know, if you treat this as God's word, then verse 8 says that God will punish those who do not know God, or obey the gospel.

And sure, we can debate about those people who haven't heard about the gospel, but for those of us who have, it's not about how good we are, is it? But how we respond to the gospel, to the message of Jesus, whether we obey it by putting our trust in Jesus, by looking to him and his death on the cross, to save us from that judgment.

And so you can see why Paul is so thankful for the faith and love of the Thessalonians. Because it shows that their faith is genuine.

It shows that they're counted worthy of the kingdom of God. Which doesn't mean that it's their own efforts that earns them a place in God's kingdom. No. Rather, Paul is saying it's their perseverance of faith, those expressions of hanging on, and loving one another in the midst of trials, that shows that they truly believe the promises of the gospel.

[17 : 16] They're not willing, are they, to give up on that faith, even though they're suffering. And that external expression of faith actually shows what's really going on in their hearts.

So, it's a bit like when you receive a gift from someone, right? The gift itself merely expresses a person's love. The love itself is not the gifts, right?

But the gift actually shows what the person's intention is, what's in their hearts. And so that's why sometimes when someone buys you a wrong gift, let's say, you know, they buy you a box of chocolates, even though you're not lactose intolerant, kind of thing.

You know, you don't begrudge them the gift, do you? Like, you can't eat the chocolate, although, you know, maybe you eat and then suffer for it. But, but you appreciate it anyway, right?

Why? Because you know it's the thought that counts. Right? It's their love shown in that gift that really matters. And so likewise, our acts of faith and love, our expressions of faith, it's not really the thing itself, but what it does is it shows what's going on in our hearts.

[18 : 30] That we truly believe the gospel and therefore, we're part of God's kingdom. But when the day of the Lord comes, all of that, whatever is in our hearts, will be revealed.

And God's judgment of each of us on that day will be proved right. Because he will know whether we truly believe the gospel or not. And so Paul says to the Thessalonians and to us, don't think God is unmoved by those who suffer for their faith.

It may be that he's not done anything. He's allowed you to continue in that suffering. But verse 6, he says, he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well.

But notice when that happens. Not right now, is it? Not immediately. But when? When the Lord is revealed from heaven.

That is, when he comes again for a second time. And so for us as Christians, we ought to long for his second coming, shouldn't we? We should be saying, come, Lord Jesus.

[19 : 41] That should be part of our, almost our psychology as we look at life and as we approach life. A deep anticipation. Not that we sit at the door and just wait for him to come.

But that as we go about our lives and our days, as we decide what we do with our lives, that actually, the specter of the second coming should be a big factor, isn't it?

in determining what we do or don't do. What we prioritize in life and what we forego. Why? Because we are anticipating Jesus coming.

And when that day comes, Paul says, all injustice will come to an end. You know, there is a lot of attention, isn't it, in society, across the world, with justice.

People are big on justice. They want to achieve justice. But let me say, even though that's a really good and noble pursuit, all forms of human justice now is temporary at best.

[20 : 41] Wrongs will only be finally put to right when Jesus comes. Only then will all wickedness be punished. But better than that, that will also be a time when Jesus will be glorified in his people.

And remember that Old Testament Zechariah reading? It talks both of judgment and blessing as well, isn't it? And that's what the day of the Lord is.

It's not all about judgment. There will be blessing as well. And there will be blessing for God's people. And so, Paul says in verse 9, that yes, the wicked will be shut out from the Lord's presence, but on that day Jesus comes, he says, he'll also be glorified in his holy people.

And marveled at among all those who have believed. That's all those who have persevered in the faith. That's us if we persevere in the faith.

And so, imagine yourself on that day, at that moment, when the Lord Jesus finally comes. Here he is, your savior, your king, and he finally comes in glory.

[21 : 52] Imagine that day when he descends with his powerful angels, victorious, in fact, I just saw last night the army, the Ukrainian army coming into Khezson, right, and the Russians have retreated and the city has been liberated.

Imagine those citizens, they've just come out, you know, and they were sort of giving them a hero's welcome. There was this guy on a bike, sort of a burly guy, and he was just so happy.

I knew they would come one day for us, you know, not doing that, but you know, his tattoos, but he's been sort of bunkering down for nine months, waiting for this day, but he knew that would come.

Well, what about us as we wait for this certain coming of the Lord Jesus? That would be even more glorious, wouldn't it? Because on that day when Jesus comes, yes, there will be judgment, there will be fear, but for God's people, he's going to come with open arms to welcome us into his presence, to welcome us as he's glorified in his people.

We will share in that glory. It's Christ's glory, but we will share in it. I don't know about you, but that's great motivation for me to hang in there with my faith, no matter how hard it is, right?

[23 : 05] No matter how much the world is saying, stop, give up, don't follow Jesus. No. I know the day is coming, and when that day comes, I want to be on the right side of history.

I want to be on the side of glory and not judgment. And that is all your opportunities as well. If you are here and you have not believed in Jesus, then this is your opportunity to find out about the gospel and believe.

But if you already believed in the gospel, well, this is your opportunity to reaffirm your commitment to persevere in that faith. And so Paul ends in verse 11 and 12, and how he ends this section is to continue to pray for the things that he's already given thanks to God for earlier.

They're essentially the same things, aren't they? If you read in verse 11, with this in mind, that is with the mind of Christ coming, with the thought of Christ coming in mind, we constantly pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.

There you go. Faith and then deeds of love. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 29] What Paul has in mind here, of course, is that they will stick it to the end. They will prove God's calling to be true. That's what worthy of his calling means. not by having to prove their worth but by persevering and therefore confirming God's work in their lives.

And Paul realizes here how challenging that life can be. Not just for the Thessalonians but for us as well. Now you see that the Thessalonians actually desired didn't they for goodness and faith.

They wanted to do this. They longed to do this more and more. And yet where will their strength to do that come from? From God. And that's why we need to praise in it.

Because it's not up to us and our strength but God's power working in us that will bring all this to fruition. Isn't it? And Paul knows doesn't he how easy it is for us as Christians even when we have the desire to be discouraged to be disheartened.

We know ourselves don't we? How easy one or two things in life can derail us to make us afraid to make us anxious to be tempted to give in and to give up the faith.

[25 : 48] And so Paul prays. He knows that we all need God's power. And you know at the heart of prayerlessness when we fail to pray it's really a sign of pride isn't it?

because we become cocky to think we can depend on ourselves to do all these things for God but without God. But when we pray what we do is trust God don't we?

To bring to fruition all our God given desires for goodness. And God will not disappoint. Why?

Because he's the one that put those desires in our hearts in the first place.

And so when he does that of course he will bring it to fruition. But the other motivation that Paul talks about in those verses is that as we bring these things to fruition we bring the glory of the name of Jesus.

We bring glory to the name of Jesus. So yes earlier he has talked about the promise that when Jesus returns his glory will be revealed in us at that time. But even now when we remain faithful to him the name of the Lord Jesus is being glorified in us.

[27 : 05] Right now as we are faithful we actually glorify the Lord. But it's a different kind of glory isn't it? Because when Jesus comes again that kind of glory is blazing kind of glory.

But the glory now is a bit more veiled hidden almost visible only through the eyes of faith. It's the glory that we see in humility or patience.

grace. It's the glory that comes through with sacrificial love. It's actually the glory of the cross isn't it? You know when you look at Jesus and what he's done for us on the cross what is it that makes us admire him?

What is it that draws us to him in love? It's the fact that he's our servant king isn't it? He's not our pompous king but he's our servant king.

His glory is found in the way he came to serve rather than to be served. How he came to give his life as a ransom for many rather than to demand things from us.

[28 : 11] How even though he was rich he became poor for our sake. And so that's the glory that is seen in us when we persevere and obey and love him in this life.

Humble, dependent, increasing in faith and love to one another. That's the glory that is seen in us now because it's the same glory that Jesus showed when he was on this earth.

But the day will come when Jesus returns when this muted glory, this muted flame will burst into a blazing fire. Then we will bask and marvel in that glory of Christ, that which we will share with him for all eternity.

So I hope today that we've reading Paul's word been encouraged to keep persevering in this faith, to keep increasing in love for one another because we're holding on to that vision that despite suffering and trials now, one day God will count us worthy of his calling.

He will have given us the power to persevere when Jesus is revealed in his glory. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for giving us the power to keep trusting in Jesus, to do what is right in love and faith.

[29 : 34] Help us to endure suffering knowing that you will vindicate those who believe in your son, Jesus. Please have mercy on all of us so that many will be prompted to repent and escape the judgment on the day of the Lord.

We long for that day. Come, Lord Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen.