

Timid Christian, Gain Perspective

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[0 : 0 0] Let's open up to 1 Thessalonians chapter number 2. We're going to be getting close to the end of this chapter. And tonight, I want to take you to a passage of Scripture that is written to encourage and to comfort and to strengthen.

Comfort is a huge theme of 1 Thessalonians. These people, they are young Christians. They are persecuted. They're being attacked. Paul only spent three weeks with them.

And he's writing to young, fearful, timid Christians. And he's going to help them. And tonight, he's going to help them by giving them perspective. And, you know, we need that when things go wrong.

Sometimes we lose our bearings. And we need some help to get a hold of where we are, what's true, where can I stand, and how can I move forward. Because otherwise, we tend to go in wrong directions.

Me, I tend to go in one of two directions. Either I throw myself a pity party. Anyone else good at doing that? Right? You got the balloons from Miguel? Okay, we're on the same page. We can pull up the balloons.

[1 : 0 4] We got the pity party cake. And it's like, I'm all alone and nobody cares about me. Right? We can go that direction. Or we can go to the direction of blaming yourself. I can blame myself.

Where did I go wrong? I certainly must have made a mistake somewhere along the way. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here. You ever done that? Right? It's like, man, you know, somebody's to blame.

And it's either me or it's someone else or maybe it's God. But we need some help. Because sometimes in a broken world, there are bad things that happen, even tragic things that happen that were not our own fault.

And Paul's writing to some people who were following Jesus. Right? They're following Jesus. They love God's word. They are trying to love one another and spread the gospel.

They're trying. In fact, they were examples. In chapter number one, we found they were examples to many other believers of being faithful people. So why is all this bad stuff happening?

[2 : 0 4] Why are they being attacked? Why are they being persecuted? Well, you know, there's truly nothing new under the sun. There's nothing new under the sun. The struggles that these Christians had, other Christians had before them, and many other Christians have had after them.

And we might even run into them today. That's not to discount the struggle and to discount our pain, but it's to give us some comfort that we are not alone in this. Christians come from a long heritage of faithful people who believed God's word and who have many times suffered because of it.

Right? And in our day, I'm not sure if we, and in our day and in our location, I'm not sure we can claim the kind of suffering that these people faced. But we need to know about this just as well because when we're in a battle, and we are every single day, we're in a spiritual battle, we need some perspective.

And there's two things that Paul's going to point them to. We're going to take it in three parts. Somehow I have two things in Scripture and three points. Maybe we got some problems here tonight, but we'll make it through, all right?

Here's what it boils down to. God is working in your life. God is working in your life. And in Christ, you're not alone, all right?

[3 : 19] You're not alone because you have Christ, and you're not alone because you have brothers and sisters in Christ. And so let's pray. Let's ask God to help us, and we'll jump into 1 Thessalonians 2. Father, we come to you this evening.

Lord, we thank you that you are our Savior. You're the one who defeated death. All of our lives should be lived for you because you are worthy of it. Lord, thank you for all that we've heard and all that we've sung tonight.

God, I pray as we come to your word that you'd help us, give us perspective. When we get caught off guard, when we're scared, when we're frustrated, when we're sometimes timid, and we don't know where to turn, Lord, may we turn to you.

Praise things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read 1 Thessalonians 2 and 13 down to 16. We're just going to take a little bit of a shorter passage of Scripture tonight because this is going to really help us.

The Scripture says this, There's some good stuff there, is it not?

[4 : 27] God's word came to them. It's true, and it's effective. It works. It changes our lives. We're going to talk about that for a bit. Verse number 14. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus.

For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us, and they please not God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins all way, for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

And so he highlights for them the fact that along with them, along with many other churches, many other assemblies of Christians, we're following along in this path.

So first thing that you have on your outline that I'd like to highlight for you is this. Look back because Jesus saved you. Look back because Jesus saved you. Especially the Thessalonians, right?

Think about this with me for a second. Again, three weeks with the guy who told you about Jesus, right? Three weeks of being in a church where they have, the Apostle Paul has come and he's preached to him.

[5 : 44] Three weeks. And then that's it. Was it a phase? No, it wasn't, right? Because they had heard the gospel, they'd received the gospel, and the gospel had changed their lives.

But there are times, I don't know if you've ever had these times in your life, where you come to the Word of God, and you might even be discouraged, you might be frustrated, but you might even question like, hold on a second, do I really believe all this?

You know, I have, this is not the same thing, but doing, when I'm, you ever been working on something on your computer? Maybe you're trying to put a PowerPoint together, or, you know, sometimes when I'm doing the design stuff, I'm looking at a word, and if you look at a word long enough, you start second guessing and wondering if you even spelled it right in the first place.

I was looking at the word vision for our anniversary service. Vision's 18th anniversary. Did I spell vision right? Like, V-I-S-I-O-N. Oh yeah, that is right, right? You can second guess.

And so what he's dealing with is some people that are like, hold on a second, is this real? Is this true? Because we believed this message, and now many bad things are happening to us, so hold up a second, is it the real deal?

[6 : 54] And he's like, yes, it is. It's God's word. It's true. That's the second thing. Remember, it's truly God's word, because Paul comes to them, he delivers the message, they receive it as it is God's word.

You know, Brother Travis preached a message a number of weeks ago about God's word and you. If you want to go deeper on this idea of the truth and the power of God's word, go back and listen to that, because that was a very good message.

Now, let's also go to 2 Peter chapter number one. As I was thinking about this idea that this really is God's word, there's a passage that came to mind about how Peter writes, and he says, listen, that message that you heard, it wasn't a story, it wasn't made up.

Listen to these words. 2 Peter, we get over to chapter number two, and I want to read from 16 down to 19. Look at this with me. It says, oh, goodness gracious, that is 2 Peter chapter two, verse number 16.

I'm looking at the wrong thing. Oh, one, that's it. I got it wrong in my notes. Here we go. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

[8 : 11] For he received from God the Father honor and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

That might be a phrase that you would underline your Bible if you haven't already. In verse number 16, he says, we have not followed cunningly devised fables. That message that was taken to the Thessalonians by Paul, it wasn't a story.

It was God's truth. It was God's word, and it changed their lives. That's the second thing he reminds them of. Remember, it's really, really, really God's word, and remember, God's word changed you.

That's your fourth blank there. God's word changed you. And see, this is an amazing thing, right? Because it's one thing to say, okay, yes, I know this is true.

I know that this is God's word, but I remember as a teenager, right about the time when I got saved a little bit afterward, I always wondered, did I believe right?

[9 : 12] Right? Did I do this Christian thing right? Like, I know that this is true, and I think it's true, and it's like, yes, it's true, but sometimes it doesn't always feel like it, right?

Or there might not always be immediate fruit within our lives of like, yeah, I'm a totally different person. Or maybe you got saved at a young age, and it's not like you have one of those dramatic stories.

I was out doing this, and doing these things, and doing drugs, and doing all these things. I was doing all these awful things, and then, man, God saved me, and my life was changed forever. You might have the story of, I grew up, and I heard the scripture, and I heard the gospel, and I believed it.

Right? You might wonder, did this work? Right? Did I do it right? And he writes them and says, yeah, it really changed you, because that is the nature of God's word.

Those two words, it effectually worketh. The idea there, it worked then, it worked in your life then, it's working your life now, and it will continue to work in your life.

[10 : 12] It works. It changes lives, because these words, they're not a story, right? They're not made up, and they're not mere words. They are powerful words.

They are words that are sharp, and they cut into our hearts, and they work in our lives. Let's go to Hebrews chapter number four. If you're there in second Peter, you can turn back a few pages in your Bible to Hebrews four.

It's a verse that many will be familiar with, but it's so good to remind us of the fact that these words, they're unlike any other. What does it say? For the word of God is quick, it's living, it's powerful, it's sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

There's no other book like this. There's no other message like the gospel that changes people's lives. And so he says, listen, that message, it was true. In that message, it did something in your life.

And he had, their testimony was a proof, and it should have been an encouragement to them that, yeah, this was the real thing. This is the real deal. And me following Jesus, I'm going the right way.

[11 : 25] You know, one of the things that I think is so amazing is that, is the way that God's word works in our lives and the way that the Holy Spirit is a witness in our hearts that we're the children of God.

You know, one of the things that, that should be an encouragement to you is that in your life, God is doing things. God is working.

God is changing you. God is sanctifying you. He's leading you. He's guiding you. Have you ever had a prayer answered? He's working. There are many things that you should look at even in your own life and say, no, this is real.

I have evidence. One of the greatest evidences of this Christian thing is changed lives. And it's wonderful that we can look around, right? We can look around in this room and you know stories of changed lives.

You can also look into your own life and say, man, I know that God has changed my life. Now, let me pause here for a second because you also might, there's also portions of Scripture that would say you should do that same inspection to see whether or not you are in the faith, right?

[12 : 34] Because we can also do Christian things and act in Christian ways and say Christian stuff but not be in the faith. So we ought to look and say, man, am I a believer?

Has God's Word changed my life? Because that is the nature of God's Word. When we believe it and we trust Him, He does work in our lives. So how's your memory?

How's your memory? When we look back and we say, man, Jesus saved me. Does that give you any courage? Does that give you any comfort? I think in the Scripture, the idea is that, yeah, it should.

It should give you courage. It should give you comfort when you're going through hard things because, you know what? He has worked. How has He changed you? Here's some things to think about, even real practical. How has He changed you?

And I love writing stuff down. I make way too many lists. But I think it would be worth doing for you to look at your life and say, how has God changed me?

[13 : 29] How has God moved in my life? I used to think this, but now I think this. I used to believe this, but now I believe this. I used to do this, but now I do that. You might even look and say, hey, how has God used me?

Right? Because what does God do with His people? He produces fruit in our lives and He uses us in His work. And that's a wonderful thing to rejoice in, where we can look and say, man, you know, there's days where it's like I'm hitting the wall and I'm not sure all of this is worth it.

It's like, I don't know if I should even go on. But we can look back and say, man, God has done some things in my life and through my life. You know what? It really is worth following Him because this whole thing of faith, the faith, the Christian faith, it is real.

You know, answered prayers. Someone here at this church shared a story with me or an illustration of what answered prayer is like. Said in, I believe it's in Ireland, Ireland or Scotland, I can't remember exactly, but somewhere over the ponds on one of those islands, forgive me for not having more specificity, they had something called cairns or cairns and there were piles of rocks that would help guide you through a valley when the mist comes in or it's, you know, the visibility is low.

You could see those piles of rocks over the mist and it would help guide you as you were along the way. And he said that prayer, his testimony was, prayer in his life has been like a series of those cairns or cairns.

[14 : 56] I should have looked up the pronunciation there. Looking back, saying, this is where God has guided me and looking forward, saying, you know what? I know there's some more coming that God is going to use to guide me on.

Look back. Jesus saved you. He's working your life. Second thing, look around. You're not alone. Look around. You're not alone. That's your next two blanks. Look around. You're not alone. Let's look at verses 14 through 16.

He says, he says this, for ye brethren became followers of the churches of God, which in Judea are in Christ Jesus. For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.

Now, I want to pause there for a second and start to share, to walk through, let's walk through this together. He's saying, when you became Christians, you entered into a, you were the continuation in a line of other churches who have been following Jesus, right?

The, the, the, on the day of Pentecost, there's thousands of people that got saved and that church in Jerusalem, it grew and it flourished and then persecution came and believers went other places and persecute, and churches grew and flourished and persecution came there.

[16 : 13] Now, think about the person who's writing this. That's the Apostle Paul, right? Formerly named Saul. Saul was one of the main perpetrators of that persecution. When there's Christians flourishing in one place, before he got saved, he's like, I'm going to go over there and attack them.

It says he was like, he was like a wild beast. He's like going after these Christians and says, listen, what you're facing, what you're facing is not unusual. That's your next blank.

What I face is not unusual. We're part of a great family of faith. Following Jesus, just following Jesus, living the Christian life, there's a lot of things that are just common to the Christian life and he says, you know what?

Persecution is one of them. Hard times is one of them. Tribulation, that's, that's just kind of table stakes. Like, that's going to happen in the Christian life. But he says, listen, you're following in those same footsteps.

What's happening to you is not unusual. It's expected. Let's continue reading. For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.

[17 : 20] And then he's going to expand upon the things that the Jews in Jerusalem and in Israel, what they had done to oppose the gospel. He says, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us and they please not God and are contrary to all men.

That last phrase really sticks out to me. They're contrary to all men. They are against the gospel. They're against Jesus and they're contrary to everybody.

Right? They are attacking everybody. It's not just like the Christians in Jerusalem got attacked or the ones in Antioch or other places were persecuted.

But he says, even in Thessalonica, they are just against anybody who would share the gospel or anybody who would receive the gospel. They're contrary to all men. Forbidding us, verse 16, to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved to fill up their sins all the way for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

Saying, look around, listen, you didn't do anything wrong. You are in the middle of a spiritual battle. And when light shines in a city, darkness wants to do something to stop that.

[18 : 30] He says, that is just the nature of the Christian life. So the important thing here is that we would not get caught off guard. Right? Because what does the devil want you to think? He wants you to think, you're all alone in this. The place that you find yourself, nobody's ever been there before.

Nobody can understand what's going on. Because when we get isolated as Christians, we're withdrawing from the strength that should be gained from our brotherhood in Christ. Right?

There is a strength and a confidence and there's love and there's comfort and there's encouragement. There's so many things that come from our relationship with other believers. And we start thinking, we're all alone in this.

Right? We start throwing that pity party and it's like the devil has us right where he wants us. Having us discouraged, having us give up, having us go back and say, this isn't worth it.

Right? We can look at the power that those who would oppose Christ have. Right? You look at somebody who they don't believe in Jesus. They don't love God.

[19 : 28] They live perhaps an immoral life but it seems like they have everything together. They're not worried about anything and they can do whatever they want to make your life miserable. That's the persecutors.

Right? They're the ones that seem like they're in charge in Thessalonica. We can look at that and say, man, if they have this strength and they have this power and they have this authority then what have we done wrong?

And we can even sometimes envy that. It's like, man, I wish I could tell them what for. Right? I wish I could make them do what they should do. I wish I could make them stop.

I wish I could do all these things and it's kind of like what happens in Psalm 73 when the psalmist looks and he says, I saw the wicked. I saw their strength. I saw how they seemed like they had no pain.

They had no problems. They had nothing wrong and I envied it. That's what the psalmist says in Psalm 73. I envied it. I wish I had what they had. But Paul's right to them.

[20 : 29] He says, listen, they don't please God. Did you pick up on that? In verse number 15, he says, they've killed the Lord Jesus.

They killed their own prophets. They persecuted us, being Paul and Silas, their crew, and they please not God. Don't forget, what pleases God? People who come to him by faith.

And these, even though they might have power, they might have authority, they might be able to go freely and do whatever they want, they don't please God. They don't please God. They're not doing God a service.

They're not honoring God. Don't forget that. You know, before we go on, I do want to highlight one other thing that just kind of strikes me about this idea of not being alone as a church, as a congregation, or as Christians.

You know, in other places around the world, and we've been fortunate to have many visitors from other nations who have talked about different customs. It reminds me of what Pastor, was it, Vitaly Yurchenko told us about the church in Ukraine.

[21 : 31] At the end of the service, they stand up and say, does anyone have greetings? Is that right? What is Brother Sam? I think he's teaching in Awana. I hope I'm remembering this right. It said, who has greetings? And people who are visiting or have been displaced from other churches, that are like, yeah, there's greetings from this church over here, there's greetings from this church over here.

That's a sense of, we're in this together. We're in the same boat. We're following the same Savior. I think it's sometimes, you know, we can get, maybe in our context, we can get thinking more in terms of competition of like, okay, let's see what they've got going over there.

Maybe if we do what they have, maybe we'll have, you know, the tents or buildings or whatever things. So that's, you know, that's a vice of preachers. It's like, hey, let's go find out what they're doing and let's try to copy and do it here. But there can be that sense of competition or like, you know, who has the better stuff or who has the more things going on.

It's like, but we should realize that if we have two gospel preaching churches that are orthodox in their faith, we're on the same team.

We're in this thing together. And when it's, when it all falls apart in persecution like other believers in different parts of the world right now are facing, we need one another and we're going to need that encouragement as well.

[22 : 45] Maybe we should start thinking differently about other churches, other Christians. We are partners in this thing. Finally, look up, the king is coming. Look up, the king is coming.

Now, I want to separate this one a little bit and this is where we got three points, all right? Because in the last verse here, verse number 16, he begins to talk about wrath. Wrath is a theme in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that's repeated a number of times.

In 1 Thessalonians 1, chapter 1, verse 10, it talks about wrath, how Jesus, we're looking for Jesus to return. He has delivered us from the wrath of God. Here he's going to talk about people who've not been delivered from the wrath of God.

There, he talks about the Jews and their rejection of Christ, right? The fact that they killed Jesus, the fact that historically, they had killed the prophets, right?

The prophets in the Old Testament, they were the ones that came to Israel when they were sinning and rebelling against God and said, hey, I'm going to tell you what is true.

[23 : 46] I'm going to tell you what is right. I'm going to call you back to God. But oftentimes, they killed the prophets. He says, they've done all of these things. They opposed Paul. They opposed the spread of the gospel.

And he says, here's what's happening. God does not ignore this. Would you look at verse number 16? Forbidding us, this is talking about the Jews of that day, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved to fill up their sins all the way.

For the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. Think about that for a second. What is the purpose of that verse? Why is that even there?

Is it, they're trying to, they're going to have a party and say, hey, our opponents, our enemies, they're going to be burnt up one day. I don't think that's the idea. I think this is a bit of a, this should be a heavy verse.

It should be a sad verse to say that there are those who have turned away from Christ. There are those who oppose Christ. And the more they oppose Christ and turn away from Christ, you notice what it said there?

[24 : 50] That they fill up their sins. It's like they're piling on sin upon sin, rejection upon rejection. And one day, even though right now, even in their day, these people who oppose Christ, they're in power.

They're in authority. They can go up before the government rulers and have the government leaders and have Paul and his crew kicked out of Thessalonica. Right? They have that authority, but what's happening?

They're filling up their sins. And one day, wrath comes upon them. Here it says, for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

It's kind of interesting where it's like present, right? The wrath is come upon them. God's wrath is upon them. It is upon those who reject the gospel. And we know that from other portions of Scripture.

That those who have not believed in Christ, they are under the wrath of God. It's not a comfort. It's not a reason to be happy or to be vengeful. It's a reason to be sad, right?

[25 : 52] Because there are those who have rejected Christ and they will face the just wrath of God. It is a warning. That's your next blank. It's a warning.

To reject God, to reject His Word, means to invite wrath upon your life. But I think there's a second thing here that's a little, that's, that is in here as we think about this.

As we think about the Savior who is coming, He's going to return. He has delivered us from wrath. It is a comfort, right? That the fact that, that believers, if you're a believer, you've received the Word of God.

Christ has changed your life. God's Word is working in your life. And on that day of wrath, it's not going to be upon you. It's not going to be upon you. And the just God is going to do what is just.

He's going to do what is right. I do want to take you to one more passage. Let's get this up on the screen. Psalm 10, 17 to 18. You know, we see this a lot of times in the Old Testament. Here's where this idea of the comfort of this comes in.

[27 : 00] Right? For those that are afflicted, for those that are oppressed, for those that have just been crushed by the wicked, listen to what this says. Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble.

Thou wilt prepare their hearts, thou wilt cause thine anything to hear. And in verse number 18, look at what he says, to judge the fatherless and the oppressed that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

That's a comfort. If you got people in your town who are attacking you because of your faith, that's a comfort to know that God hears our cries, He will do justice, and one day, the man of the earth, He will no more oppress.

He will no more persecute. He will no more attack. God is not paying, He is paying attention to us, and He is paying attention to the persecutor, and He will do what is just.

So as we close out this evening, is there something in your life that even right now it has caught you off guard? You didn't think things would be this difficult? You didn't think that you'd have to face something like this, whatever this is in your life?

[28 : 09] Friends, know that we are in a spiritual battle. That is the nature of our Christian life. We're soldiers in God's army. We've got to put on the armor because we have an enemy who's attacking us, and he's relentless, and he's not going to let up, and we live in a fallen, broken world.

It is hard. The things that we face are common to Christians of all generations, and that's why we need to go back to the foundations. Can we go through those one more time?

Look back. Jesus saved you. Look back. Get some perspective. Look back. What has he done in your life? He saved you. Look around. You're not alone. You have a church body that is full of people who've been through lots of things, and they've followed Jesus for many years.

I don't know what the, if we calculated the collected years of following Jesus in this place, it'd be a lot, and it'd be an encouraging thing, right, because there's much that can be drawn on in the church and also in other churches.

Look around. You're not alone. Look up. The king, he's coming back. He's coming back, and he will do justice. He will make things right. There might be things that won't necessarily be made right in our lifetimes.

[29 : 16] We want things to be fixed, but on that day, when he returns, things shall be made right. So would you bow with me as we close out?

You might even say that, hey, things are pretty good right now. Things are going well, and I'm sure glad about that. Maybe this would be a day that you would encourage someone else.

You would step into the hurt and the frustration, the difficulty that your brother or your sister in Christ is facing, and that you'd strengthen and you help them. And remember these things.

Remember this perspective, because one day you might just get knocked down, and you're going to need to remember what Christ has done, what he has available for you, and what he will do in the future.

Father, we come to you this evening. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the perspective that it gives. Lord, I'm so encouraged knowing that your word is truth and that it does work in our lives.

[30 : 13] God, I pray you'd strengthen your people this evening. Give them perspective. You're God. You're with us. You're working in us. You've put others around us. Lord, I pray that we would draw upon the resources that you've made available to us.

We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen.