

2 Thessalonians-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

The Church (1-2) – It's one thing to speak of "all God's people" – those for whom God has eternally love and purchased in Christ – but what evidence is there that it's more than an abstract (innumerable and invisible)? Is it not the local, historically-visible church ("of the Thessalonians")... God with and among us in real time and space? This is, for the Christian, mutual encouragement, hope and perseverance in belonging. A *Growing Faith* (3-4) – Not only does the Greek plural '*adelphoi*' refer here to men and women ("brothers & sisters") in God's growing family, but what else is affirmed as 'growing'? Their faith... never static but an increasingly robust trust in God, love for one another and perseverance in persecution. "*Spiritual growth depends on two things: first a willingness to live according to the Word of God; second, a willingness to take whatever consequences emerge as a result.*" (*Sinclair Ferguson*) Is this true of me? An *Enduring Faith* (5-10) – Faith is not a fragile thing (maybe as the Thessalonians might suppose); and suffering is not always as it appears (i.e. mere evil). Rather, it is the good and powerful providence of God working out His eternal purposes in the world, in the church, and in our lives. To this, we have been appointed (1 Thess.3:3). But relief is coming – "*wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight.*" (C.S. Lewis) God's holy and just retribution, in part now and in full on the last day, has two sides: for the afflicted believer, hand-delivered rest; for the unbeliever, eternal destruction. A *Worthy Faith* (11-12) – So where does the power come from that we might be found, now and in the end, worthy? And for what ultimate purpose?

Chapter 2

No One Left Behind (1-12) – Confusion persisted about the '*day of the Lord*'. The difficulty here is that Paul is writing only to supplement his oral teaching while he was in Thessalonica, and now we're left trying to fill in the gaps. Tenderly but firmly, Paul reassures them (us) that no one will be left behind; Christ has not yet returned but He will, and for the purpose of gathering the elect of God to Himself (our hope). So even while things may look almost apocalyptic, there remains always a divine order (our confidence). Now the source of deception and chaos in the world is Satan himself, an imposter and currently restrained by God (our preservation). But the Lord Jesus will come to strike the death blow upon all His and our enemies (our justice). As we hurtle toward that 'day', the unbelieving and rebellious will only become more of what they already are – exposed unto condemnation (our clarity). So *Stand Firm!* (13-17) – Almost out of breath (crazy run-on grammar in Greek, 1-12), Paul explodes again but in a prayer of gratitude and praise over the doctrine of election now obvious among the Thessalonians (and all believers)! He leaves no doubt, to their and our great confidence, of God's sovereign choice; of God's determined love; of God's transforming power by Word & Spirit; of God's effectual and irresistible calling; and of God's ultimate end – glory! (Rom.8:29-30) In this and because of this we stand firm in the truth, anticipating every day His comfort and power in directing our steps.

Chapter 3

God's Faithfulness (1-5) – The story unfolding (then & now) is always about God's will & plan, both in the advance of the Word and to His own honor and glory. Midst all the swirling challenges, we forget this; but God does not. His faithfulness to His people establishes and ensures the progress of the church along with our particular role therein. But note, it's always about the condition and direction of the heart. May God do in us as just as Paul prays! *Shoe-leather Theology* (6-12) – What does it look like to 'walk it' rather than merely 'talk it'? (James 2:14-26) This very question certainly precludes "idleness." The gospel life, as modeled by Paul (and Christ), is no spectator sport: work hard, provide for your own, be the first to grab the check, sacrifice oneself toward alleviating others' burdens, and avoid always being the center of

attention. In this way, the gospel is adorned in our neighborhood, peace is experienced in the church, and God is pleased. *Church Discipline* (13-15) – Discipleship is hard work, but we must not grow weary because others' lives, their salvation and sanctification, are at stake. Prov.27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..." But the goal is never to "shame" another. There is a difference between "shaming" (to belittle, punish) and being "ashamed" (hating sin, moved toward repentance and restoration). *Personal Benediction* (16-18) – Paul knows about real life, the chaos and calamity, the wearisome work, the threats and opposition, the need to just put bread on the table... and in all this, he knows our tendency to turn on each other. "*Peace from the Lord of Peace!*"

-Reflecting on 2 Thessalonians-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 2 Thessalonians. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 2 Thessalonians before we move forward?

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14.6