

249 Trials and Glories - II Thessalonians Chapter 1

In Acts 17 we read of Paul and his companions arriving in Thessalonica for the first time with the Gospel – into a great port city and seat of government in Macedonia with the familiar Grecian mix of idolatry, trendy debate and immorality. As usual Paul went straight to the Jews, on three sabbath days, to convince them from Scripture that “this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (vv 2-3). Again as usual in such cities, some believed (v 4), but in this case many Jews vehemently rejected this Good News and provoked a violent riot (vv 5-9). We read that “the brethren” – that is, the very new, still very ignorant believers in Christ, “immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night” (v 10), for they had no illusions over what the local Jews might attempt the next day.

In view of this background, of all the Christian fellowships that came into being by the Holy Spirit through Paul’s ministry over the years, this one at Thessalonica had a special place in his heart: he hardly knew them, he had had to depart suddenly, and the risk that they would “fizzle out” was very high. In his first letter to them he teaches, encourages and prays for them. In his second, shorter letter, which we now consider this time and hopefully in two further Reflections, Paul knows they are greatly suffering for the Faith as well as confronting other dangers.

Life had become tough for this little Christian community because, as so often happens when Jesus Christ is being faithfully followed, its members found themselves in direct contradiction to the prevailing beliefs and lifestyles. Isn’t this precisely what we are finding today, in whichever country we are living? In Chapter 1, after the greeting, Paul immediately thanks God for the Thessalonian Christians, for their faith, for their love for one another, and for their “patience and faith” in all the persecutions and tribulations they are having to endure (vv 3-4).

The Holy Spirit then explains through Paul that their endurance in these trials demonstrates that they are indeed “worthy of the kingdom of God” (v 5), (because if their faith had nothing to it then no opposition would be aroused). The time will surely come when God will righteously judge their adversaries and grant rest to His suffering people (the Greek word used here for “rest” emphasising a sure release from hardships), “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven ...” (vv 6-10).

Just so for us today. For those in Christ, a time of rest and relief from suffering, in whatever form we experience it, is divinely promised – fact. The second fact specially relevant here is the certainty of future divine judgement upon all human wickedness, which is surely a powerful weapon we are to use in these sinful days as we seek to hold forth the Good News. Isn’t it true that most folk haven’t a clue or a care that one day they will stand before their Creator? Please God, in the face of this stark reality, many may have the sense to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, for He alone is the means of our salvation (eg., Acts 4.12).

There follows in verses 11-12 a great corporate, constant prayer for these faithful, battered Christians at Thessalonica. They pray that God would count the Thessalonian Christians worthy of their calling (v 11a), a reminder that we too are

indeed called of God – extraordinary in itself – and that our lives, yielded to the Holy Spirit, should truly display the many fruits of obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ (egs., James 2.14-26 / I Peter 1.13-16 / Philippians 2.12-13), even when, and perhaps especially when, the going is tough.

The prayer continues, that God will “fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power” (v11b). Thanks be to God, each of us is, and all of us are, “a work in progress”, as clay in the hands of the divine potter. We do well to remember that in our getting along together! (egs., Ephesians 4.31-32 / Colossians 3.12-15).

The climax of this wonderful prayer is very simple – “that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him”. We need to “get this”! - that ordinary fallible saints like us can bring glory to the Lord Jesus, and that we ourselves can even be “glorified in Christ”, in the sense of being fulfilled and blessed (v 12a / and eg., Romans 5.1-6). All this is being achieved solely by the grace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v 12b).

Trials? – a probable Yes, for a time: glories? – a certain Yes, for both now and eternity.

So we can close this time with the same prayer, lifted now on our own behalf, “O God our Father, may the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, your Son and our Saviour, in whose name we pray, be always glorified in us. Amen, let it be”.

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