

THE CHURCH THAT GOD IS PROUD OF

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

I hope in years to come, God can say of GCF what Paul says about the Thessalonian church: *We ought always to thank God for you . . . because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*

This is the church that God, not only Paul, can be proud of. Like the Philadelphian church, this was a church of suffering people. In one sense, everything we learn about the Thessalonian church is like a detailed explanation of what the Philadelphian church was. And in all its struggles, there were four things that not only survived, but thrived, in the midst of suffering. The church God is proud of has . . .

1. A FAITH THAT KEEPS GROWING.

³ We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

- Faith is the vertical response to God's love: confidence in God's care.
- Contrary to what many think, suffering destroys only false faith (Matthew 13:20, 21). Suffering never destroys true faith but builds it up.

2. A LOVE FOR OTHERS THAT KEEPS INCREASING.

- Love for others is the horizontal expression of God's love.
- How can love for others increase when people are suffering? It happens when we lend our strength to each other, when they are transiently weaker than us. When people are struggling around us, we can either criticize or ignore each other to death, or we can help each other till the time comes when we need that help ourselves.

3. A HOPE THAT KEEPS ENDURING.

⁵ 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. ⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you 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. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ 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.

- All suffering is intended to make us worthy of heaven—our long-term holiness is much more important to a God who loves us, than our short-term comfort. (v. 5)

Suffering is often the means of working out God's eternal purpose. It develops qualities of character. It teaches valuable lessons. The very afflictions which the world heaps on the believer become under God the means of making him what he ought to be. Suffering, when we have come to regard it in this light, is not to be thought of as evidence that God has forsaken us, but as evidence that God is with us.

- No evil will triumph in the end: those who spurn the gospel will in the end be brought to ruin (vv. 6-9).
- The suffering of God's people will be rewarded in the end (v. 10): Jesus comes "to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."

4. A LIFE THAT KEEPS SERVING.

¹¹ With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. ¹² 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.

- Through God's power, every Christian keeps serving because:
 - 1) God enables us to fulfill every good purpose.
 - 2) God enables us to accomplish every act prompted by faith.
- The outcome of all this, is that God is glorified in us, and we in Him.

Final Thoughts:

As we celebrate 38 years of God's faithfulness to our church, we long to be a church that makes God proud. A church that has faith, hope and love will be filled with members who keep serving inside and outside the church. So these three exist – faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these – because it started everything – is love. God so loved us that He saved us. Our proper response to this love is a faith that keeps growing, love for others that keeps increasing, and a hope that keeps enduring suffering. This is what prompts our serving. May the Lord find us faithful.