

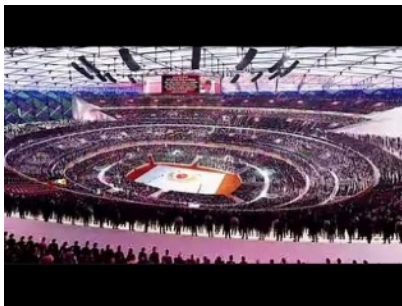
2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 — What Kind Of Church Did Paul Boast About?

September 8, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! This morning, we start a new series in the book of 2 Thessalonians. I want to begin with a question.

What does a good church look like? What kind of church would make the apostle Paul proud? I did a little search online to see what churches brag about. What makes them feel significant? One of the things churches like to boast about is their size. The size of their congregation and the size of their facilities.

The largest church building in the world is under construction. It will seat 120,000 people. It is the Hand of God Cathedral in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. I didn't expect Nigeria to have the largest church building in the world.



The second-largest church building in the world is also under construction. It is called the Ark. It will seat 109,345 people. Where do you think it is located? Lagos, Nigeria.

Construction is completed for the third-largest church building in the world. It is called the Glory Dome and seats 100,000. Where do you think it is located? Abuja, Nigeria.



Nigeria dominates the mega-church market. That is not what I would have expected.



Thirteenth on the list of large churches is Lakewood Church with Joel Osteen in Houston, Texas. It seats only 16,000 people, which is small compared to the others.

Is this the kind of church that impresses God? Is a big building filled with people what would put a smile on the face of the apostle Paul? This brings us to our text. Today, we are beginning a study of the book of 2 Thessalonians. This is the second letter Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. As soon as we get to the text, we find it is a church that Paul was proud of. He boasted about them.

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God... 2 Thessalonians 1:4 (ESV)

Paul told everybody about the church of Thessalonica because he was so proud of them.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right,... 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)

Not only was Paul proud of them, but he thanked God for them.

What was it that made Paul so proud of the church of Thessalonica? What made him thank God for them? It wasn't the size of their building. They probably didn't have one. It wasn't the size of their membership. They were small. It wasn't their music. It wasn't their pipe organ or electric guitar. Neither of them were in existence.

The answer to the question of what kind of a church is the apostle Paul proud of is found in the opening five verses of this book. That is what we will look at this morning.

After all, we want CrossWinds to be the kind of church that the apostle Paul would be proud of. We want to be the kind of church the apostle Paul would be thankful for.

Let's read the opening five verses and begin our study.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 2 Thessalonians 1:1–5 (ESV)

Before seeing the characteristics of a church that the apostle Paul would be proud of, since it is a few months since we finished 1 Thessalonians, let's look at verse one and use that as an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the background of 1 and 2 Thessalonians in our Bible.

Background

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Thessalonians 1:1 (ESV)

Paul is the author of this letter. He has 2 fellow missionaries with him. Silas is also known as Silvanus. Silas was the Jewish name. Silvanus was his Roman name. Young Timothy was also with them. While Silvanus and Timothy were with Paul, Paul is the author of this letter.

Was this letter a group project?

I should briefly mention that the inclusion of Paul, Silas, and Timothy in the front of the letter gives some the impression that the letter was written in a round-table style, with everyone throwing out ideas and Paul writing them down. This

round-table authorship view is further encouraged by the use of the plural pronoun “we” several times in the book, giving the impression that there is not one author but three authors.

I do not think this was a group writing project. Paul was the singular author. Two times in 2 Thessalonians, he shifts from the plural to the singular, reminding us that he is the one who wrote the letter.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 2 Thessalonians 2:5 (ESV)

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. 2 Thessalonians 3:17 (ESV)

When we see the use of “we” in this book. It is not a literal “we” but a literary “we.” It shows that Paul has the support of Silas and Timothy in what he is saying, even though Paul is the singular author of the letter.

Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, and he was there for some time. Silas and Timothy were with him when Paul planted the church. They were with him when he wrote the 1 Thessalonians and when he wrote 2 Thessalonians. The Thessalonians knowing Silas and Timothy were aware of what Paul wrote and were supportive of what he said was important.

Silas and Timothy

Who were Silas and Timothy? Silas was Paul's faithful partner. He was older than Timothy and probably closer to Paul's age. In Acts 15:22, he is called “a chief among the brethren, a leader.” In Acts 15:32, he is called a prophet. In Acts 16, we see that he was Jewish like Paul and a Roman citizen. He was with Paul in dire circumstances, such as being in jail in Philippi. When you spend hard time in jail with a friend, it draws you close.

Timothy was a young man Paul met in Acts 16. His mother was Jewish, and his father was Gentile. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith, and he was in training to take the mantle of Paul's leadership when he was gone.

Thessalonica

The church of Thessalonica was in the city of Thessalonica, which is in the north of an area known as Macedonia. The main city in the south of Macedonia is Corinth. These cities are located in the modern-day nation of Greece. Thessalonica had a population of



about 250,000 people. It was a large city for its day. It was known as the mother of Macedonia and, at various times in history, was the capital city of the region.

The city was founded by one of Alexander the Great's generals about 350 years before Paul arrived. It was a seaport city on the Aegean Sea. It has one of the few natural harbors on the Aegean Sea that doesn't silt, so it still exists today. This meant it was a city populated by sailors looking for a good time after months at sea.

It was also a major city on the Egnatian Highway, one of the major east-west trade routes from the Orient to Rome.



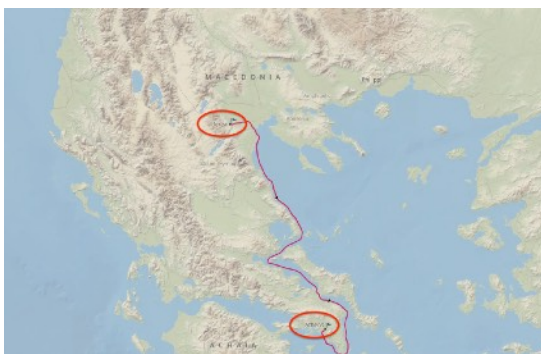
With so many people traveling through the city by sea and by land, it

became a place of vice. It made Los Vegas look like a saint city, not a sin city. It was a city where crime was out of control. Murder was common. Prostitution was rampant and well organized. Archaeologists tell us that pornography was painted on the sides of buildings. It was their version of billboard advertising. Babies were abandoned. The crime was so bad that many of the houses did not have windows as a security measure.

Paul went to the city sometime between 50 and 52 A.D. with Silas and Timothy. He was there for three Sabbaths, but in those three Sabbaths, and maybe in some additional time, God used him to plant a wonderful church. He was then run out of town. He went down the road to Berea and began a church in that city. The book of Acts tells us that when the Jews in Thessalonica heard Paul was church planting



in Berea, they went on a road trip to that town and drove him out of that city, too!



After that, he went to Athens and Corinth, where he stayed for 18 to 22 months. From Corinth, he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, which we have in our Bible. It is only a matter of months, maybe half a year, between Paul's

writing of 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians from Corinth.

2 Thessalonians was Paul's response to a report he received about the church in Thessalonica. We don't know who gave him this report, but when we study 2 Thessalonians, we get an idea of the problems Paul was addressing.

In chapter 1, Paul writes about enduring persecution and God's righteous judgment. It is safe to assume that the persecution of Christians that began at the beginning of the church and followed Paul all the way to Berea had continued or even escalated.

In Chapter 2, we will see there was continued confusion over the second coming of Jesus. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul tried to straighten that out by talking about the rapture and the Day of the Lord, but the confusion was back. 2 Thessalonians hints that there may have been a false letter given to the Thessalonians that claimed it was sent from Paul, but it was not from Paul. This spurious letter left them confused about Jesus' return.

...not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (ESV)

Incidentally, the problem of false apostolic letters was a common problem in the early church. There were false letters being circulated that claimed they were written by apostles or others closely associated with Jesus, but they were forgeries. We have some of them today, such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary.

Later in church history, at the council of Nicea in 325 A.D., you have official lists of New Testament books being published. The purpose of those lists was not to turn the letters we have in our New Testament into Scripture. Those letters were already recognized before 100 A.D. They were to make sure people

were not fooled by false gospels. The council of Nicea provided clarity by identifying the true gospels. This is the problem the Thessalonians encountered. It is one of the reasons that when Paul wrote this second letter, he ended it by verifying the letter as true and telling them to check the handwriting. It was written in his handwriting, so they knew it was authentic.

In chapter 3, we see there must have been a report that Jesus was returning at any time. As a result, some people used that as an excuse not to work, and they became leeches on the Christian community. The issue of Christian laziness dominates the third and final chapter.

With a little background for the letter, let's look at the letter and see the five reasons why Paul thanks God for this church and boasts about them to other churches.

What kind of church did Paul boast about?

1. A Church Of Genuine Christians

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:1–2 (ESV)

This reads like a standard letter greeting from the ancient world, but there are plenty of important things to observe. Let's start with grace and peace. Why does Paul often use that pair in his greetings?

Grace and Peace

Peace—This was the common Jewish way of saying hello and goodbye. In Hebrew, it is the word Shalom. He used this greeting to connect with the Jewish Christians in his audience.

Grace—In the Roman world, when you wrote a letter and wanted to say Hello, the word you used was charein. It means rejoice. It is very similar to the Christian word charis, which means grace. Paul Christianized the Jewish greeting term as well as the Roman greeting term a bit into a greeting that both Jews and Gentiles would appreciate, grace and peace.

Our Father

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:1–2 (ESV)

The next thing to notice is that he called God Father. In the pagan religions of the day, nobody dared call their God Father. Pagan Gods were fickle. They were uncaring. You never knew what they would do. You were to be scared of them. That is not true for Christians. We call God our Father. Jesus even tells us to pray to God as our Father who is in heaven. This reminds us that God loves us. He cares about us. Your father loves you. You can approach him with anything. This should change our picture of who God is and how he feels about us.

In addition, Paul says he is *our* Father. Paul uses the term “our” to emphasize that he is with them. They are in a relationship with God together. Our God is not just a Father. He is our father.

He also says they are “in God our Father.” Think about that. We are so closely connected to God through Jesus that we are in him. We are not distant from God, but we are adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We can not get any closer to God than we are through Jesus.

No other world religion talks like this. No Buddhists are in Buddha. No Muslim has Allah as his father and is so loved by Allah that his identity is in Allah. Muslims are told to fear Allah. Yet, as Christians, we know the truth. God is our Father. Through Jesus, we are in God our Father. This is mind-bending.

God our Father AND the Lord Jesus

Paul speaks about them being in God our Father and the Lord Jesus twice in these verses. In Greek, to emphasize something, they didn't have bold or italics. To emphasize something, you repeat it. That is what Paul did. Paul equates God the Father with Jesus, not just once but twice in this greeting. This may not sound earth-shattering. Take yourself outside of the Christian bubble. This is a remarkable truth. The very son of God took on human flesh forever to die for us and save us forever then to adopt us to be his own brothers and sisters for eternity.

A little later, in this letter, he will further articulate the wonder of what God has done for us through Jesus.

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14 (ESV)

In these verses, he explains the past, present, and future of our salvation.

Our salvation started in eternity past. We were loved by God when there was nothing lovely about us. We are just another rebellious human being, yet God, the maker of all things, chose to love us in eternity past. He chose to save us.

...God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved...

The Thessalonians were the first Christians to be saved in that city, but not the last.

In the present, God worked out his plan to save us in three ways.

...To this he called you through our gospel...

God calls people to himself through the gospel message. When people like Paul shared the truth of Jesus, those whom God chose in eternity past responded in two things.

...through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth...

They believed the truth about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit began changing their lives to make them more like Jesus.

Finally, Paul moves to the future of our salvation.

...so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ...

In the future, as Christians, we are destined to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus' body was raised from the dead, our bodies will be raised from the dead. Jesus' resurrection body was the prototype of our resurrection bodies. Our identity for all eternity is the resurrected Jesus. We will be like the resurrected Jesus. We are adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus. As God the Father pours his delight on his own son, that cascades onto us as Jesus' adopted brothers and sisters. That is why in Ephesians, Paul says we are the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus.

So when Paul writes this greeting to the persecuted and suffering church in Thessalonica, he reminds them of their identity. They are genuine Christians. As such, they can call the God of the universe their father. They are enfolded into

God and Jesus Christ. They are recipients of God's amazing grace. They are not objects of God's wrath, but through Jesus, they have complete peace with God and Jesus. They may be suffering and feel overwhelmed now, but as genuine believers, they are the most blessed beings in the universe. He doesn't want them to forget that in the chaos of their life.

A church that Paul would be proud of today is not a church with a big building. It is a church with genuine believers who know they were loved by God before the foundation of the world. God saves them through the gospel message alone and the power of the Holy Spirit. They have their eyes fixed on eternal glory with Jesus.

Are we a church Paul would boast about? Am I a Christian that Paul would boast about in that my identity in this world is found in Jesus alone?

2. A Church With Growing Faith

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly,... 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)

The phrase "ought always" is a translation of the Greek word *opheilo*. It means to be under deep obligation. It isn't something you choose to do or not to do. It means you are bound by it. You must accomplish it. This is why Paul follows it up by saying, "Brothers, as is right." In other words, Paul says he must thank God not just for their genuine faith but for their growing faith. The question is, "Why?" Why does Paul feel compelled to thank God for their genuine and growing faith?

Anything good in us comes from God at work in us.

Whatever you are, it's because of the work God has done in you. If you have skills on a football field, God gave you those skills. If you are academically bright and can solve problems or do well in business, God should get all the credit for that, not us. He gave you your intellect.

God definitely gets all the credit when it comes to our salvation. The only thing we contributed to our salvation is the sin from which we need to be saved. God is the one who chose to save you. God is the one who has been gracious to you. God is the one drawing you to himself. Paul doesn't credit himself for being such a good evangelist. He doesn't credit the growth in the Thessalonians faith to them and claims they are smart Christians. God is the one he is obligated to thank for the spiritual growth in their lives.

Notice what Paul is thrilled about. It is that their faith is greatly enlarged. Their love for Jesus has grown. Their love for their Bible has grown. Their love for obeying God has grown. This is why Paul is proud of this church. It doesn't say he is giving thanks to God for the size of their building, for the worship band in the church, or the stained glass windows in the church. It is the growth of their faith and trust in Jesus.

If you think about this in the context of the beginning of the church and 1 Thessalonians, this makes good sense. Paul was only in the city of Thessalonica a matter of weeks before he was driven out of the city by the Jews. The baby Christians who remained in the city were experiencing great suffering for Jesus. Paul was worried about their faith so he sent Timothy to encourage them. We

read about that in 1 Thessalonians. Timothy returned with an encouraging report, but Paul still prayed for their faith amid much suffering for Jesus.

In this second letter, Paul is thrilled that amid all the suffering and persecutions, their faith was not dying. It was growing abundantly. In Greek, Paul uses a compound word that reads hyper-abundantly to describe their spiritual growth. From this, we get a principle we must remember.

Persecution destroys false faith, but it grows true faith.

The authenticity of our salvation is revealed when it comes to suffering for Jesus. We will either fall away from Jesus or grow close to Jesus when we go through hard times. We can not stay the same.

Look what Jesus says about this.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. Matthew 13:20–21 (ESV)

Jesus says there will be people who follow him, but they have fake faith. We know that because they will fall away during suffering or persecution.

True faith is different. It is indestructible. The reason true faith is not destroyed in times of suffering is because the source of true faith is not from us; it is from God drawing us to himself. As we saw earlier, the Thessalonians were genuine Christians. When the heat of persecution was turned up, all it did was to get them on their knees more. They called out to God more. They read their Bibles more. They repented of sin more. Persecution always drives a true believer to whom? To God!

Paul discusses this in 2 Corinthians 12 with his thorn in the flesh. We don't know exactly what it was, but it caused him suffering. Look what he says.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:8–10 (ESV)

Paul asked God to take away a particular area of suffering from his life. He asked God about this three times. God chose not to answer that prayer but instead told him that God's power in him would be made perfect in his weakness. The weaker Paul became, the more he learned to rely on God instead of himself. Paul generalized this as a principle. When I am weak, then he is strong. This is why, as a believer, it is ok to face weaknesses, insults, hard times, persecution—like the Thessalonian Christians, and calamities (which means great distress). The weaker we become, the more we are driven to Christ and the stronger he becomes.

Trials, persecution, and suffering lead to false Christians' falling away, but God uses difficult times in our lives to grow the faith and maturity of genuine Christians.

It is hard for faith to grow without difficulty, persecution, troubles, trials, and stresses in life because otherwise, God has no opportunity to draw you to himself and display his love, mercy, and care.

If you are a young adult or a young Christian, expect trials and suffering in life. They will not come because God hates you but because God loves you and is using them to mature you in your relationship with him. The more difficult life becomes, the greater your confidence in Jesus and love for God will become.

Genuine Christian faith always grows in times of persecution. Christians are purified in times of difficulty.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)

Peter says that trials prove the genuineness of our faith because instead of falling away from Jesus in them, we draw closer to Jesus during them. How we respond to trials reveals if we have fake faith or genuine faith.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

James tells us how God uses trials in our lives. He uses them to mature us spiritually. He uses them to make us perfect and complete in our faith.

In our world, it is easy to have a wrong view of suffering. Nobody likes to suffer, nobody likes persecution, nobody likes calamity, but we need to know God promises to mature us in them. For that, we are thankful.

This is why Paul is proud of this church. Their suffering revealed the authenticity of their faith, and God used that suffering to grow their faith super abundantly.

3. A Church With Increasing Love For One Another

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)

Not only was their faith growing, but their love for one another in the church was increasing. When we talk about love, please don't think of it as some

kind of emotional warm and fuzzy feeling. This is talking about practical love—the kind of love where people make sacrifices for one another, care deeply about one another and speak the truth to one another.

If we look at this in light of 1 Thessalonians, we see that in his first letter, Paul was concerned about the Thessalonian's faith and love for one another as they suffered for following Jesus. He sent Timothy to them to check on them. Timothy returned and reported their faith and love for one another were intact.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 1 Thessalonians 3:6 (ESV)

While their love for one another was intact, look what Paul prayed for them in his first letter.

and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 1 Thessalonians 3:12 (ESV)

Paul prayed that their love for one another would grow even more.

As Paul begins his second letter, he has heard back about this church. His prayer is getting answered. Their love for one another is overflowing. Paul uses some very descriptive language in the Greek to emphasize this.

Here is what we find. In persecution, hostility, suffering, and difficult times, like the flood or COVID, those with fake faith will find it difficult to love one another, make sacrifices for one another, and bear the burdens of others. They become so preoccupied with their pain that they can't think in a compassionate way about the pain of others. Genuine faith is different. In genuine faith, when a brother or sister is suffering, we feel their pain and are eager to love them and bear their burdens.

Jesus said it this way.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34–35 (ESV)

A few years ago, my mother passed away from cancer. Cindy and I still look back on those days and feel choked up in our hearts because of the love we experienced from the church. So many people sent cards, made meals, helped with airline tickets, and others even traveled to Pennsylvania to be at the funeral.

I think of the flooding in Spencer and the suffering of members of the Spencer campus who lost so much. We started a flood recovery fund and many of you gave to it. You gave over \$91,000. All of it has gone out to help people have a place to live. This is the kind of love Paul is writing about, the kind of love that the Thessalonian church had for one another. When someone was suffering, they loved one another and cared for each other.

God doesn't evaluate a church by its external features, the size of its building, the style of its worship, its cleverness, or social prominence. A church to be proud of is filled with genuine Christians whose faith in Jesus is growing, especially in times of suffering. Their love for one another is increasing, and it is shown in practical ways, especially when life is hard.

We have to ask ourselves if Paul was not just to evaluate CrossWinds Church, but if he was to evaluate my life, what would he say? Could he give thanks to God for my growing faith in hard times and my ever-increasing practical love for my brothers and sisters through Jesus?

4. A Church That Endures Suffering

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. 2 Thessalonians 1:4 (ESV)

We see another reason why Paul is proud of this church and boasts about them. It is because as they face constant opposition for Jesus, they are persevering.

Paul uses two words to describe what they are facing. One is persecution, the other is afflictions. In Greek, the word for persecutions is a rare word. It is only used five times in the New Testament. It refers specifically to suffering for no other reason than you are a Christian. The second word, afflictions, occurs 24 times in the New Testament. It is a more general term for difficulties. Paul puts these terms together for rhetorical effect to emphasize the variety of suffering they face, which have gone on a long time, yet even as new Christians, they have persevered in Jesus.

As seen in Acts 16, the Jews of the city were jealous when some leading men and women of the city left the synagogue to follow Paul and learn more about Jesus. They hired wicked men from the market to set the entire city in an uproar. They accused Paul of saying there was another king besides Caesar, a king named Jesus. They accused Paul of starting an insurrection. It was a lie. It was misquoting Paul. They misrepresented him. Thessalonica was a city that survived on favors of Rome, so accusing Christians of being revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow Rome brought a lot of opposition.

When discussing the persecution the Thessalonians experienced, we should clarify what it was like. There is major-league persecution of Christians

where they were thrown to the lions. They were covered in tar and set on fire. They were beheaded. While that sometimes happened, that is not the persecution the Thessalonians experienced.

The persecution they experienced is similar to the kind of persecution most of us experience. It was harassment, social ostracization, and sometimes spontaneous acts of violence.

[...and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9b \(ESV\)](#)

They turned from idols to serve God. They didn't go to idol feasts to worship idols by drinking and partying anymore. When they didn't get drunk with their old friends, their old friends began looking down on them and despising them. When bad things happened in culture, people liked to blame the Christians. Christians became the cultural scapegoats, the laughing stock.

This makes this passage more relevant to us. Today, most of us will not be fed to a lion for following Jesus, but if we choose not to go to a party because we are not involved in that kind of lifestyle anymore, we will take the heat. When we are loyal citizens of our country but when we say the answer to the problems in the world is Jesus, not the candidate in the next political election, people are not fond of that.

What made Paul proud of this church was that they were willing to suffer to follow Jesus, even if that suffering didn't go away. This long-term suffering impacted their businesses, as people didn't buy from them. It impacted their lives when friends spoke poorly about them or avoided them.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, are we willing to suffer for bearing the name of Jesus? We probably won't be thrown to the lions, but we will experience constant low-level suffering where the world thinks the worst about us, our bottom line may be impacted, and our social popularity is not what it used to be. This was another quality of this church that Paul loves about them: their endurance in suffering for Jesus. It is not the size of their building or their programs, it is their willingness to be faithful to Jesus and suffer for Jesus.

5. A Church With A Future Mindset

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 2 Thessalonians 1:5 (ESV)

In this verse, we dip our toe into next week's message on God's righteous judgment. What is Paul saying in this verse.

He says the fact that you, Thessalonians, are suffering for nothing other than your faithfulness to Jesus is plain and clear evidence that God is righteously chastening you so you will be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God. You are not suffering because you are bad people. You are suffering because you are God's people. You are different from the rest of the world, so expect the world will not embrace you. It will hate you because it hated me. Since you are Godly and antithetical to the culture, you are suffering for the sake of God's kingdom. God is using that suffering to purge, to prune, to clean to correct, to make you a holy and righteous people who love Jesus and have their eyes fixed on Jesus.

Paul reminds them they were suffering because they were kingdom people, but God was using all the suffering they went through to purify them of sin, to draw them closer to Jesus, to draw them closer to one another and to fit

them for eternal glory. Their suffering for Jesus was not evidence that God abandoned them. It was evidence that God loved them and used that suffering to draw them closer to Him as he prepared them for their future glory.

I ran across a quote by Leon Morris that says this well.

The New Testament does not look at suffering in quite the same way as most modern people. To us, it is in itself an evil, something to be avoided at all costs. Now while the New Testament does not gloss over this aspect of suffering, it does not lose sight either of the fact that in the good providence of God, suffering is often the means of working out God's eternal purpose. It develops in the sufferer's qualities of character. It teaches valuable lessons. Suffering is not thought of as something that may possibly be avoided by the Christian, for him it is inevitable. The Christian must live his life and develop his Christian character in a world that is dominated by non-Christian ideas. His faith... is to be manifested in the fires of trouble and the furnace of affliction. And not only is it to be manifested there, but in part, at any rate, it is to be fashioned in such places. The very troubles and 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. — Leon Morris

Conclusion

We all want to be part of the church that God and the apostles would be happy to boast about. Paul didn't boast about the size of a congregation or the size of a building. He didn't boast about the style of the music or the political impact a church made.

He boasted about five things.

1. The Genuine Conversion Of The People In The Church
2. The Growing Faith Of The People In The Church
3. The Increasing Love For One Another In The Church
4. The Perseverance In Suffering Of The Church
5. The Kingdom Mindset Of Those Who Suffer In The Church.

Our prayer at CrossWinds is that we would be that kind of church, and it would begin with God making us that kind of people.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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