

Introduction: Paul knows what it is to suffer for the Gospel and to lead believers like the Thessalonians through the afflictions which 2 Thessalonians 1:4 describes: *“Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.”* Such a suffering messenger of the Word (like King David before him – see Thursday’s notes) needed the prayers of the church, and indeed asks for them in 2 Thessalonians 3:1. All this is to teach us that the harvest of souls alluded to in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 3:1 is a costly harvest, in which the church must not only “send forth harvest workers,” but must support them by prayer. May we learn in this week’s Bible notes what it is to work alongside our hard-working Jesus, who is the Lord of the harvest and the great Intercessor for the harvest’s success.

Monday: read 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 3:1 and John 12:23-33. We ended last week’s notes marveling at 2 Thessalonians 2:13, where God chooses the Thessalonians as the *“first-fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”* By choosing them as first-fruits, God was pledging that the Thessalonians would be safely gathered up when Christ returns, as Matthew 24:31 promises. Such is our hope as well! For, in answer to Paul’s prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:1, the Gospel has indeed spread to us, and by grace we have honored and received the Good News for the salvation of our souls!

Meditate and Pray: Let us honor the saving power of the Word of God, which has spread beyond the Thessalonians or the Jews of Paul’s day – even unto the ends of the earth! After all, Jesus did not die just to draw the Thessalonians, or us, to Himself. His harvest is meant to be much bigger, as John 12:32 indicates: *“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”* Hallelujah!

Tuesday: read 2 Thessalonians 3:1 and John 12:27-33. As we grow in our appreciation of Paul’s prayer-request in 2 Thessalonians 3:1 for the message of the Cross to progress through every nation on earth, we discover how hard this message was for Jesus Himself to spread. Almost in the same breath as He declared that He would draw men and women from every tribe, tongue and nation to Himself, He felt the pangs of what such a Gospel-spreading work would cost Him. In John 12:27, He was troubled and overwhelmed with the prospect of mounting that Cross from which He would begin the harvest. Verse 27 even records for us how Jesus’ human soul at first shrank from the prospect of His terrible death for our sins: *“And what shall I say? ‘Father save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”*

Meditate and Pray: Let us never forget that Jesus’ heart and soul were troubled, agitated, disquieted and perplexed at His upcoming conflict with death. As B.B. Warfield wrote in an article entitled, ‘The Emotional Life of Our Lord,’ *Behind death, Jesus saw Him who has the power of death, and that sin which constitutes the sting of death. His whole being revolted from that final and deepest humiliation, in which the powers of evil were to inflict upon Him the precise penalty of human sin.*

May God always grant that we fit the description of saved sinners from hymn # 297, who can never forget the sufferings of Christ:

*All hail the power of Jesus' Name! Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all.*

*Sinners, whose love can ne'er forget the wormwood and the gall,
Go spread your trophies at His feet, and crown Him Lord of all.
Go spread your trophies at His feet, and crown Him Lord of all.*

Wednesday: read 2 Thessalonians 3:1 and John 12:23-24. As the patient, sacrificial Savior-Farmer who would die in order to bring in the harvest of saved souls into the granaries of Heaven, Jesus knew what it meant to plant the seed of His holy, sinless life in the ground of His death on the Cross. As He says in John 12:23-24, the hour had come for Him to lay down His life in the soil of death, with the confident expectation that from that solitary sacrifice would spring many seeds of salvation in the lives of men. Fruitful death, indeed! Just as Israel of old offered up to God the first-fruits of their wheat harvest in Leviticus 23:15-17, so Jesus would offer up His body as a pure seed of wheat in order to produce the “wheat” of salvation in our lives! Out of His John 12:24 seed would come into our lives “loaves” of bread made with yeast (Lev. 23:17) symbolizing, not the high holy days of Israel’s Passover (which were observed with unleavened bread), but our everyday lives offered up in grateful service to the One who made us part of His “loaf.” As 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 puts it:

*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?
And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf.*

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus that by faith we can all share fruitful fellowship with Christ. Just as He spread the message of His Cross to all nations through the sacrifice of Himself, so we have the privilege of entering into His sufferings and seeing fruit arise in others through our witness. May the Lord give us courage so to do, even as Isaac Watts’ hymn # 573 challenges us to do:

*Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?*

*Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?*

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.*

Thursday: read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 and Psalm 20:1-5. Along with his fellow-workers Silas and Timothy, Paul suffers for his Gospel labors at the hands of those the King James Version calls “wicked and unreasonable men who have not faith.” Paul is speaking about his own kinsmen, the Jews, who in terms of human, cultural and spiritual antecedents *should have had* faith, but who turned their backs on all they were given by God in order to persecute His

servants, such as the Apostle Paul. The Thessalonians, indeed, knew first-hand how Paul had suffered in proclaiming the Gospel to them. According to 1 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul had declared the Gospel in the face of “much opposition” or literally “many agonies.”

Such sufferings at the hands of his own people remind us of David’s sufferings in Psalm 3-20. Betrayed by his own son Absalom in Psalms 3-4; by his own king Saul for whom he played the harp in Psalms 7 & 18, David finally becomes the object of Israel’s pity and prayers in Psalm 20:1-5, where the whole congregation for the first time takes up the role of intercessors for their servant-king David. Such prayers are exactly what Paul begs for on behalf of himself and his mission team in 2 Thessalonians 3:1. Time and again throughout 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Silas, Timothy and Paul have stepped into the gap to pray for the Thessalonians. Now Paul for the first time asks the church to pray for him.

Meditate and Pray: How seriously do we take our duty of remembering those who take the Gospel throughout the world? Are we needed at our church’s prayer meeting? May the Lord stir us up that we might stand in the gap for the suffering church, even as Paul asks us to do in 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

Friday: read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18. How can Paul be so confident in 2 Thessalonians 3:4 that the Thessalonian church will indeed “hold firm” to the teaching and example which Paul gave them? This seems almost like wishful thinking in the face of some leaders in the Thessalonian church who have not only upset the rest of the congregation with false teaching about Christ’s rumored return in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, but are also literally living in a disorderly manner in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 11. What this means is that these “busy-bodies” had quit their jobs in favor of waiting for Christ’s immanent return and were encouraging the whole church to disregard their work and witness before the world in favor of a more “spiritual” idleness, living off the generosity of those who were still working. This spiritual “loafing” and rejection of making a practical living in this world is in direct contradiction to Paul’s earlier teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 and threatens the very witness of the church before a watching world – a witness in danger of being tainted by disorderly professing Christians “sponging” off society.

Meditate and Pray: *Dear Lord, we ask you for grace to love those who are “walking disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:6, 11 KJV), even as Paul commands us in verse 15 that we are to treat such as our “brethren.” But save us, your church, from disorderly living, since serious damage to our witness before the world can be its bitter result. We all confess our proneness to wander off the clear and orderly path of godliness. When we are tempted to stray, please restrain us in the Name of our faithful shepherd Jesus Christ. Cause us to stand every moment in His preserving grace as it is named for us in 2 Thessalonians 3:18; cause the scepter of His grace to rule us in every situation. Even when we fall, come quickly to restore us... so that we can indeed live the quiet, productive life which will be used by you for the conversion of a watching world. We pray in the Name of our faithful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*