

Enduring Trials in Light of Jesus' Return: More than Hello

2 Thessalonians 1:1-2

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*The Lord's Day Morning
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If you'll turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Thessalonians, we'll begin together a new series. We've been working together through 1 Thessalonians for a number of months and we concluded that study last Lord's Day, and so today we take up the greeting that we find here in this little letter of 2 Thessalonians.

Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians for a variety of practical, pastoral purposes. Among them to counter some confusion that had been fostered by those who were teaching that the day of the Lord had already occurred. When you get to chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, you will see Paul addressing Christians in the church there in Thessalonica who had been troubled by that teaching. He also wrote this little letter to strengthen those who were experiencing unremitting persecution. From the time that this congregation existed, it experienced public persecution, not simply from the Jewish people who were increasingly antagonistic towards the Christian message and missionaries and to Christian members of local congregations, but especially from the public. The Roman public was very antagonistic towards Christians. And for the next three hundred years, to be a Christian in the Roman Empire was to court some kind of persecution. If it wasn't an outright attempt to exile you or your family or even to martyr you, there was a constant and regular subtle economic oppression and marginalization that these Christians faced, and so Paul is trying to prepare these Christians in this church for that. He also wanted to deal with the problem of some who, in light of the teaching of the second coming, had failed to work and provide for their families and so he gives them exhortations in that area that become part of an overall understanding of work that is important for every Christian.

So in the course of doing these practical things, Paul teaches the Thessalonians how to endure trials and to live life in light of Jesus' return. And as we read God's Word this morning, I want you to be on the lookout for four things. First, I want you to see what Paul says here about the Father, and he repeats this phrase twice — in verse 1 and in verse 2 — and he draws our attention to the Father. Secondly, I want you to see what Paul says about the Savior. And again, he

repeats these words about Jesus twice, once in verse 1 and then again in verse 2. Then, in verse 1, especially in this interesting phrase, “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” I want you to see what Paul teaches us about our status, where we are situated or located, what privilege we enjoy as believers united to God through Jesus Christ. And then fourth, I want you to see what he says, and we see this especially in verse 2 in this, again, interesting phrase, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” I want you to see what he says about the source or the supply of the strength that we need for the living of the Christian life. So what he says about the Father, what he says about the Savior, what he says about our status, and what he says about the source or supply of our need.

Well let's pray before we read God's Word.

Heavenly Father, thank You for this, Your Word. Work it deep into our hearts. Open our eyes to behold wonderful things in it. Apply this Word in ways that even I could not have anticipated that the Holy Spirit would use this Word, specifically in the lives of individuals who come here in different circumstances, with different challenges and sets of needs, but Your Word, O Lord, is profitable for reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. It is powerful and it is able to discern the deep things in our hearts. And so we pray that You would do all of these things by Your Word in us - that You would instruct us, that You would correct us, that You would equip us for the living of the Christian life by Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

This is the Word of God. Hear it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 1 and 2:

“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.”

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Today, we are going to study the opening of a letter, the greeting, the salutation, and that's not something that we usually do. Usually, when we get a letter, we don't ponder the initial words of greeting because there is a standard form that almost everybody uses and we rush quickly into the content of that letter. The only time that we typically pay very close attention to the greeting and to the conclusion is if we have gotten a letter from a boy or a girl or a man or a woman who we really want to know how they think of us, and we pay very close attention then to the greeting and to the conclusion. You know, if you get the letter and she says, “Fondly” at the end, your heart kind of sinks; you were hoping for more than “Fondly” at the end of the letter! Maybe your relationship is going to have to develop a little bit more before you move beyond “Fondly” at the end of a letter!

Well again, you could skip over these words of greeting and think they're just pro forma, they're just standard form. And indeed, Paul uses something of the normal format that would have been used in letters of the time. But when we look at these words of greeting and salutation, we quickly find that they are more than just a hello. Just as Paul's pastoral counsel in this little letter, and it only has forty-seven verses — three chapters, forty-seven verses — just as Paul's pastoral counsel in this little letter is suffused with truth about God, it's profoundly theological, so also are the greetings that Paul gives, in these two little verses, chocked full of deep truth that is important to the living of the Christian life, and especially to helping us know how to endure trials. And so I want to look at four things that we can learn from these words of greeting that Paul gives us at the outset of 2 Thessalonians.

BEHOLD YOUR GOD

And I want to begin with what he says to us about God. He asks us, in verse 1 and verse 2, to behold our God. And he says something very specific and important about Him. He tells us that God is our Father. Now this is just a little bit different from 1 Thessalonians. If you'll turn back, probably in your Bibles just one page, and look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1, you will see Paul say to the church of the Thessalonians exactly like he says here in your ESV - although the Greek is slightly different it means the same thing; he's writing to the church of the Thessalonians — he then says, “in God *the* Father.” But if you look at 2 Thessalonians he says, “in God *our* Father.” And then he repeats that again in verse 2 — “from God *our* Father. Now Paul is pointing to you a very important truth about God. He's asking you to behold your God and realize that He is your Father. The God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is our Father, He is your Father, and He is especially concerned to point out this in the phrase, “in God our Father.”

In the phrase in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1, “God *the* Father,” particularly draws attention to the unique relationship that Jesus has with the Father. The Father is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is His Son, and as such, it especially draws our attention to a truth about the triune God. Paul will later in this passage, just like he does in 1 Thessalonians, mention the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and so he speaks of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But when he speaks of “God *the* Father” in 1 Thessalonians, it especially draws our attention to something about God, the triune God, and especially about Jesus' relationship to the Father. But when he says here, “God *our* Father,” he's doing something that the Old Testament did with Israel and that Jesus did when He was teaching His disciples to pray.

In the Old Testament, Israel collectively, the people of God, had the privilege of approaching the God who was the Maker of heaven and earth as *our* Father, because the children of Israel are collectively the people of God. They are His

children. That's why they're called the children of Israel; they're His children, and they have this unique privilege of saying, "Our Father" to God. Well the Lord Jesus Christ applies that to His disciples when they say, "Lord, would You teach us to pray?" He says, "You pray this way: Our Father which art in heaven" because of the unique privilege we have of addressing God as Father. And the apostle Paul is wanting to hold that before our eyes here just like Jesus did in the Lord's Prayer as He was teaching the disciples to pray, Paul is saying, "Thessalonians, ponder who your God is. Behold your God; He is your Father."

This is enormously important. You know, many of you here had good fathers and some of you tell me about them. They were men of character, they were loving, they gave you a good example of work ethic, were good providers, they loved your mothers well. And I love to hear those stories. Others of you didn't have a great experience with your father and you've been left with a void in your heart because of an absence of something that you've yearned for, that you long for in your earthly relationship with an earthly father that just never ever happened. Just this past week one of our elders shared with me a poem that he wrote about his father and it was deeply moving as he complimented the way his father had modeled godly, Christian manhood, the way his father had provided security in the home. He had a real sense of, "I'm going to take care of you; everything's alright." It's very moving to read that. Some of you recognize that and it brings back very tender memories. For others of you, it's a very painful thing to hear about because you lacked that kind of experience. But whether you are in the category of having a great earthly father or whether you are in the category of having a not very good earthly father, all of you have a heavenly Father who is quite matchless.

And the apostle Paul wants you to contemplate that. If you had an earthly father who was good, he is but a pale reflection of the heavenly Father. And if you had an earthly father who failed you, then you have a heavenly Father who is not like that at all and in every way that you have been failed, He will never fail you. And so the apostle Paul wants us to contemplate who our God is. He is our Father. And that's the first thing that Paul draws to the Thessalonians' attention.

BEHOLD YOUR SAVIOR

But the second thing he does is he draws our attention to the Savior, Jesus Christ, and to His incomparable person. So from beholding God our Father, he then — and again, twice you see it in verse 1 and verse 2 — draws our attention to the Savior. "The Lord Jesus Christ," he says in verse 1, and again, "the Lord Jesus Christ" in verse 2. Now those three little words, Lord, Jesus, and Messiah are very important. This is the standard Pauline title that he ascribes to Jesus. He likes to mention that Jesus is Lord and Messiah and there is a world of theology packed in those three words. And I want to think about those three words with you for just a moment. As he beckons you to behold your Savior, what is he

drawing to your attention when he refers to Him as “the Lord Jesus Christ.” Well, Lord was the standard word that was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate the personal name of God. Yahweh or Jehovah we often sing in our hymns or perhaps you remember from your King James translation. And that word, Lord, applied to Jesus, is one of the ways that Paul says Jesus is fully God.

Turn back just a few pages in your Bibles from 2 Thessalonians to Philippians chapter 2, verses 9 and 11. In Philippians 2 verse 9, Paul says that God the Father is going to give to Jesus “the name that is above every name,” and he tells you what that name is in verse 11. He says that at the name that is given, every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus is Lord. Now that clearly is an indication that it is a divine name, the name that is above every name, the name of God Himself that is given to Jesus. This is Paul's way of saying Jesus is fully divine; He is fully God in every way that the Father is fully God, in every way that the Spirit is fully God; Jesus is fully divine. It is an inscription of the God-ness of Jesus. And so that's one thing that Paul means to draw to our attention when he says that Jesus is Lord but there are two more things as well.

He also wants us to understand not only is Jesus fully divine, but Jesus made us and Jesus redeemed us; He is Lord. Just as in the Old Testament Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the Maker and Redeemer of His people, so Jesus is the Maker and Redeemer of His people. Look for instance, if you turn forward one page from Philippians to Colossians, look at Colossians chapter 1 verses 3, 14, and 16. And when you look there, you are going to see Paul telling us that Jesus is the One through whom the world was made and who redeemed us with His own blood. Verse 3 — “We always thank God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” And then he begins to describe what Jesus has done for us. And first of all we look at verse 15 and 16. “He,” that is, the Lord Jesus, “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him.” Jesus is Lord. He created. And every good Hebrew knows that only God created. But not only that, look back to verse 14. What did the beloved Son do? “Through Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin.” And so Paul uses the term Lord for Jesus to remind us that He is divine, that He made us, and that He redeemed us.

Well what about that precious name, Jesus, itself? Of course that word itself reminds us that no one can save but Jesus. When the angel came to Mary and to Joseph and said, “You must name the boy, Jesus,” he explained — why? “Because He will save His people.” Now that of course picks up on the meaning of the Old Testament name. Jesus' name is actually the Greek version of Joshua's name, which means either “God helps” or maybe even “God saves.” And so Jesus points to the fact that Jesus is the Savior; no one can save but

Jesus. It also, of course, points us to the fact that salvation comes from God. We do not save ourselves; Jesus saves us. God provides the way of salvation. He doesn't say, "Do the best you can. Do it on your own. Earn the forgiveness of sin." He Himself provides for in the person of His Son the forgiveness of sin." It also points out that salvation comes through the person and work of Jesus. Think again of how Jesus Himself emphasized this in John 14 verse 6. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." And it emphasizes that Jesus is alone appointed by God as the Savior of the world. Remember what Peter says in Acts chapter 4 verse 12? "By no one else is there salvation, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." Jesus is the name that God has given because Jesus is the Savior that God has given. And so in pointing us to the Lord and Jesus, Paul is pointing us to Jesus' divinity, His creative power, His redeeming work. He's pointing us to the truth that God saves and that salvation is in Jesus alone.

And then in the word Christ, of course we have the Greek version of the Hebrew word that we say in English, Messiah. That is, Jesus is the anointed one, promised by God through the prophets in the Old Testament. And Paul here, beckons us to behold our Savior. Behold your God; He is your Father. Behold the Savior; who is He? The Lord; He is fully divine. He is the creator and redeemer. Jesus, He's the only name under heaven by which a man can be saved. He's the Christ. The prophets foretold that He would come, the anointed one, and save His people. That is your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

BEHOLD YOUR STATUS

And then, having pointed us to our God, the Father and the Son, he now asks us to look at the status that we've been given or the situation which we've been placed in, or the privileges that have been heaped on us. Look at this interesting phrase in verse 1. He says — he's writing to the church of the Thessalonians — "*in* God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Now that is a strange phrase, to write to you and say that you are "*in* God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." If I were to say to you that you are presently *in* Jackson that would make sense, but Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians and says, "You're *in* God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That's an interesting way of talking, isn't it? There's an African American denomination with deep roots right here in Mississippi and in Jackson called, "The Church of God in Christ." And that's a very interesting title that we could unpack, but what Paul says here to the Thessalonians is the church of the Thessalonians is in God and Christ. "You are in God and Christ. That's your location; that's where you're situated."

What's he saying? He's saying that even though you're in Thessalonica right now, even though you're in Jackson right now, if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ you are situated in union with God through Jesus Christ so that God

who sets His love on you and chose you before the foundation of the world, gave His Son for you and the Holy Spirit united you to His Son and what did His Son pray for you in John 17? That you would experience the same love relationship, would be drawn into the same fellowship, which He enjoyed with the Father. And Paul's acknowledging that here. "You are in God our Father and in Jesus Christ if you are trusting in the Savior. That means you have the benefit of adoption, you have been welcomed into the family of God, you've been given the benefit of justification, you've been forgiven by the Savior's work, you've been given the benefit of sanctification, you will be experiencing all of the blessings of glorification in union with God. It's an enormous privilege and Paul wants you to understand that, that even though you're in Jackson, ultimately you are in God your Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of our colleagues who has frequently preached in the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church is Ralph Davis. He's retired now and lives in Tennessee but he taught Old Testament during two different tours of duty at RTS Jackson. And Ralph, when he was here in Jackson, would typically sign his letters with the conclusion, "In Christ, In Jackson." And it was his way of saying, "I'm a citizen of two kingdoms. I'm in this world but my real home is in Christ. That's where I'm situated." And the apostle Paul is just wanting to remind you where you're really situated. And that's so, so important to believe because you know you go through trials in this life and you wonder, "What's going on? Is God really in control here? What's He doing in my life?" That's why I love that first stanza of, "This Is My Father's World" when Maltbie Babcock has us sing, "This is my Father's world. I rest me in the thought." Now he goes on to talk about rocks and trees and birds and seas and all sorts of things like that, but I like to rest in the thought that this is my Father's world because sometimes this world doesn't look like my Father's world and I have to say to myself, I have to look in my mirror and say to myself, "Okay, it doesn't look like my Father's world but this is my Father's world. I'm in Him. I belong to Him. He's in charge here. I don't understand what's going on in my life, I don't like what's going on in my life, but this is my Father's world and I'm going to rest me in that thought because that's where I'm situated. I'm situated in Him. That's home address. I'm in Him and I'm safe and I'm secure there, no matter what's going on in Jackson, no matter what's going on in this world." So that's the third thing. He beckons us to look at our status, or our situation, or our privilege. We are the church in God in Christ. What a glorious truth — a truth of union with our God through Jesus Christ.

BEHOLD YOUR SUPPLY

And then he asks us to look at our supply. Where do we get the strength, what's the source of the strength that we need to endure trials and to live the Christian life? And his answer is, it's this little phrase, "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Everything that we need to live this Christian life is amply supplied to us. And where does it come from? From God our Father and the Lord Jesus

Christ. What do they supply? They supply everything that we need — grace and peace. Now grace is both pardon and power and we need both of those things every day to live the Christian life. We need forgiveness and we need strength; we need pardon and we need power. Every day we need those things to live the Christian life. Every day we sin; every day we need forgiveness. And it's provided for us in what Jesus has done definitively on the cross. It's supplied to us by God's grace.

And we need God's power. Not the least of which we need God's power for is so that we have the desire to do the right thing and to aspire to do the right thing. You know, I was reading just this last week that someone saying that though Satan has a thousand temptations for us, they all boil down to one thing — you don't have enough. Ever since he tempted Eve and Adam, every temptation that he's ever offered to anyone, to everyone, to you and me, is that you don't have enough. “You know, satisfaction is somewhere else. You're real desires are going to be fulfilled somewhere else; not in God. You've got to look somewhere else. You don't have enough. You mean He told you, you couldn't eat from any of these trees?” “Oh yes, we can eat from those trees but not from that one.” “You mean He's that stingy He wouldn't let you eat from that one? You don't have enough. You'd be better off if you disobeyed Him and you found real fulfillment in the places He told you not to look. You don't have enough.” And every temptation of Satan's - thousands, ten thousands — they're all a variation of that one thing. You need the strength of God to desire the right thing and God's grace supplies it — pardon and power for the living of the Christian life and for the enduring of trials.

And peace. We talked about it last week — total wellbeing; God-given, total wellbeing. Where does it come from? “From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” That is a word of greetings that packs a whale of a punch. I can't wait to hear what else Paul has to say to us in this little letter. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask now that You would help us see something of Your glory and Your Son's glory and of our privilege of Your supply in this little word of greeting. And we ask that You would help us by it to live for Your glory and to endure in trials. And we ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Now let's take our hymnals and turn to number 80 and sing to God's praise, “Lord, With Glowing Heart I'd Praise Thee.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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