

Walking Worthy

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Let's pray. Father, we just first of all want to thank you for your love for us, God, that you sent your Son into the world to die for our sins and that he paid our penalty. And God, even now as we put our faith in him, he's interceding on our behalf, working in our lives. And we give you the praise for that. Pray that you would be glorified in us according to your grace and working in us.

Thank you for Corrie's testimony and pray you'd be working in him and changing him and helping him to live for Christ. We pray for the different people that were mentioned with their illnesses and God just work for healing in their bodies and restore them and help them to acknowledge that it was you that brought that healing. We pray now that you would bless your word in Jesus name. Amen. You may be seated.

Well, this month marks my 45th year in the ministry. 45 years ago in May, I left this church, went out to eastern Montana and a little town called Rosebud and started a ministry there. And looking back at what God has done in my life in the last 45 years, the feeling I have is a feeling of unworthiness. Unworthiness that I'm not worthy of the blessings that God has brought into my life. I'm not worthy to be your pastor.

And I don't say that to put myself down. I say that to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. Because ultimately he is worthy. And that's the way I feel. Whatever he's done in my life, I give him the glory.

Reminded in Revelation 5, where it says, thousands upon thousands of angels, and every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that

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is in them will say in a loud voice, worthy is the Lamb who is slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. And the desire of my heart is when I finish my course, my race, whenever that will be. And we don't know, none of us know when that will be, I want to be in that number that's praising God for His glory and declaring that he is worthy, giving him the glory. So with that in mind, as we start this book of second Thessalonians, it's interesting. Only he is worthy.

But then it tells us in two places in this first chapter, verse five. First of all, he says, this is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy. That you may be considered worthy. Then he prays over in verse 11 to this end, we always pray for you, that God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for your good. And in my mind, this forces me to ask some questions.

And the first is, what does it mean to live a worthy life for God? What does it mean to live a worthy life for God? And how can I be considered worthy? Considering our sinful nature, how does God make us worthy? And so I wanted to look at this first chapter because I believe it gives us some answers to these questions.

And so Paul starts out with the normal salutation, who's written it? He asks the grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he gets into thanking God for the people at this Thessalonian church. And we see a couple things that he thanks them for in this passage.

Look at verse three. He says, we always ought to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, and it's not wrong to thank God for your brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow members of the family of God, for the gifts that God's given them, for using them for his glory. And so Paul does this. And again, I said, we're not worthy yet. Paul tells us to live in a manner worthy of the kingdom of God.

And then he prays that God will make you worthy of his calling. And so the first thing he gives thanks for here is because it says, because your faith is growing abundantly, your faith is growing abundantly. Other versions translate a little different, more and

more, but what you see is an increasing amount of faith. The Christian life begins with faith, it continues with faith, and it ends with faith. And without faith, no one can please the Lord.

And so he's not just thanking them that they have faith. He's thanking them that their faith is growing, is growing. Now, when you and I have children, those babies, you know they're wonderful and that we love them. But if they don't grow, something's wrong, right? In the same way in the Christian life, if we're not growing, something is wrong.

So Paul doesn't thank them for their faith. He thanks them that their faith is growing, that it's increasing. And that's a worthy thing, isn't it? It's worthy to proclaim that I'm thankful that God is working in your life, that he's changing you, that your faith is growing. And so the question is, how does our faith grow?

You can't just turn on a little switch and, oh, I'M going to have more faith, you know, or send some money to the faith healers and then they'll send back a little more faith so you can send us more money. No, it doesn't work that way, does it?

Is what now? Well, patience is a gift from God, and that comes out of faith in God. That's one of the spiritual gifts that God gives in Galatians, chapter five. And they always say, don't pray for patience because God will send you trials, right? And he will.

But how does our faith grow? And there's really only one way. We have to see and believe that God is faithful. I don't want to put my faith in someone who isn't faithful. We put faith in someone who is faithful, who lives up to what they say and does what they say they will do and what that means.

If you're going to grow in your faith, you're going to have to trust God more and more and more. That's what faith is, trusting God. And that means we grow in faith when we obey God's commands and when we hold on to his promises. And in some ways that's experiential, isn't it? Now, all of us have had people that said, trust me, right?

And if you've been around long enough, you go, well, let's see, I don't know if you're trustful or not. And they have to prove trustful. And the more they do, the more you trust them. And it kind of grows, doesn't it, in that way. In the same way we have to learn to trust God.

And that's a step of faith. Because sometimes he says, trust me. And we're going, well, how's that going to work out? He said, trust me. Well, I want to see.

No, trust me. And of course, as he proves himself faithful, then our trust in him grows stronger and stronger, doesn't it? And our problem is we tend to trust in ourselves and other people. And it's not until that trust has been betrayed that, oh, I better go to God. And as a result of that, we don't grow like we should, and we should go to him first.

And when we do, I believe what's going to happen is our faith will grow more and more. And you know, that usually involves problems, right? I mean, if I don't have any problems, why do I need to trust anybody? I got it all taken care of. And so when problems come, that's when we cry out to God or whatever that need is, and we wait on him.

And sometimes we Wait. And we wait, and we wait, right? But we wait on him. And I believe that he proves himself faithful. And then we trust him more.

As I was preparing this, I'd been reading in my Old Testament reading and in Second Chronicles and the story of Hezekiah, a righteous king in Judah. And he had restored the temple, and he brought the people back to the Lord. And no sooner had he done that than Sennacherib, the emperor of Assyria, attacks Judah with an overwhelming army. And most of the cities had fallen to the Assyrian army. And now they're outside the walls of Jerusalem.

And the general says, don't let Hezekiah tell you that you can trust God. What other God has been able to stand before this mighty army? And so what does Hezekiah do? He hears the threat, and it's real. It's a powerful army.

No nation had been able to withstand him. He and Isaiah went into the temple and they prayed and cried out to heaven. They knew that they had to trust the Lord for their deliverance. And if you've read the story, you may remember that night an angel of the Lord went through the camp of the Assyrians. And in the morning they woke up and there were 185,000 dead soldiers.

He miraculously delivered them. They left Judah in disgrace. And when they got back to the capital, Sennacherib went into the temple to worship his God. Two of his sons killed him. And I point that out because that increased Hezekiah's faith.

When you see God do something miraculous in your life, when you know that I don't have this in control, and it should increase your faith, I can go to Jesus. He loves me, and I can trust him. And so our faith grows when we see God deliver us from our problems and our fears. The second thing that Paul gives thanks for, he says, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. If you want to walk worthy with God, then you're going to have to love his other children.

And I use that word have to, because sometimes it's not easy, is it? I believe that God deliberately brings difficult people into your life because, oh, I love everybody. And we love all of you. Thanks for coming to our church. You're so lovely.

And then you find out, wait a second, they got problems and they're a little irritable or they're a little this or that. And then we start figuring out that, boy, this isn't a human love. This has to be a God love, a supernatural love. And he allows that to happen because he wants us to love each other. That's one of the things that identifies Christians.

Back in Jesus prayer. Back in John 17:20, Jesus prays after he'd been praying for his disciples. He says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. And if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you're one of those people. You have believed in that word that the disciples gave us in the scriptures, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he's God, that he saves us from our sins.

And then he says that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us. So that the world may believe that you have sent me. And one of the greatest testimonies we have in the church is when we love each other. That's a testimony to the world. Because they love their own, don't they?

But if it's not their own, sorry, don't love you. I don't agree with you. I don't like you, blah, blah, blah, blah. But in the church, we're called to love each other. The glory that you have given me, I've given to them.

That they may be one even as we are one. I in them and you and me. That they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me. And that's a work that God has to do. And when we experience that love in our hearts for one another, he says that is a worthy thing.

And what he's wanting to develop in our life, well, all of that sounds easy, doesn't it? You know, more faith, more love. I'm worthy, God likes me, and I'll enter into heaven and everything will be all right. Sounds easy. But God knows it's not that easy.

So what does he do? He sends persecutions. He sends trials. He sends afflictions because he knows that for it to be real, we're going to have to be tested and we're going to find out what we really are. Not when things are going well, but when things aren't going well.

And that's how we can know that we are living worthy of the Lord. He does this to make sure our faith is real. It's not just, hey, it's wonderful. This is what I believe. But going through hard times.

And guess what? I still believe because I know it's true. I know Jesus is Lord. I know that he is in all authority and he's sovereign and he's working everything out for good to those who love him and are called him for their purpose. Paul boasts about the Thessalonians twice in this book.

And we're told not to boast. Well, we don't boast in ourselves, do we? But we can boast in what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing in people's lives. We give him the glory. And he

boasts about them because in the midst of these persecutions and trials, they are continuing on with the Lord, trusting him in difficult circumstances, loving brothers and sisters who can be difficult, but showing that that love comes from him.

And so he boasts about the Thessalonians because of their steadfastness and faith and all their persecutions and afflictions that they were enduring. Enduring.

It's often a matter in the Christian life of enduring. Not easy, but it's worth it. I'm looking forward to that day when I will see Christ no matter what. Just kind of an illustration of this to close. Of course, we know that Rebecca Small was here yesterday to minister to the women.

And I know many of you know her story, but she and her husband Dan, were the camp directors out at Shiloh Bible Camp over towards Brooklyn. And I think eight kids. Is that right? Eight kids. She homeschooled those kids and helped her husband.

Just a good support to him and the ministry that he had. Well, their oldest son, Jeremiah, went to Iraq to teach at a Christian school. And they loved him, and he was having an impact where he was teaching in the school. But one day, as he opened up the class in prayer, one of his students pulled out a pistol and shot him dead right in front of the other classmates. And of course, you can imagine what that'd be like for Dan and Rebecca to get word that their son, who loved the Lord and he was a gifted young man, had been killed for his testimony of Jesus Christ.

It became an international incident. They actually went over there and met the president of Iraq. And yet they persevered and they talked about the love of the Lord. And then a year or two later, Dan came down with a fatal blood disease. And over a year's time, he got weaker and weaker and weaker until finally he died.

So Rebecca had suffered the loss of a son and then the loss of a husband. And it's like her ministry was forged. That ministry yesterday was about flames, right? Her ministry was forged in the flames of the trials of this life. And we look at what she does, and it was amazing.

I sat in on some of it, this amazing. But we have to recognize that that came through endurance. It came through trusting the Lord. It came through loving the Lord and loving others. And God is using us her.

And we praise God for that.

We see how God does this in verse 11 and 12. And this will be a separate sermon, but I want to mention this. As far as us living worthy of life, he says in verse 11, to this end, we're living worthy of Christ. To this end, we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for your good and every work of faith by his power. And ultimately, if we're going to be worthy in this life, it's going to be God who is done it.

He's made us worthy. But we see a couple elements that are involved on our side. And the first is every resolve for good. You and I, as Christians, we should be making resolves, not, not New Year's resolves. I want to lose 10 pounds, or, you know, I want to do this, but ever resolve for good God, I resolve that I want to do good for you.

And God works in that and makes us worthy of his calling. And then it's all according to the grace of God. Apart from the grace of God, none of us can do anything. The grace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. And so this is a prayer.

Basically, Paul is praying as he opens up this first chapter of Second Thessalonians, that people would desire to live a worthy life, not because of who they are, what they've done, but because of who he is. And I believe if we'll make this resolve, I believe God will work in our hearts to fulfill it. And the thing that I'm looking forward to more than maybe anything else is to be a part of that great crowd that was mentioned in Revelation, chapter five, that is bowing down before Christ and throwing their crowns before Him. And I pray that I'll be one of those who is crying. Worthy is the Lamb who is slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory.

Blessing. And I believe when we come to the place where that's the resolve of our life, that we are worthy in Christ's eyes, that we are worthy not because of anything we've

done, but because of everything he's done. And so I just leave you with this one of the verses that really impact my life early on you have not, because you ask not. And of course, what do we ask for? Sunny day, or, you know, a paycheck at the end of the month, or, you know, good report at the doctor.

Nothing wrong with that. At least we're not asking for pink Cadillacs like some of the faith healers. Okay, but why not ask for something that's really important? That's really important? Knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and living a life worthy of the calling that he's given you.

And then it doesn't matter what you face in life, because it wasn't about you. Was was about Him. And there could be no greater glory in your life than it being about Him. Let's pray.

Well, Father, along with Paul, we thank you for these Thessalonians. God, that they demonstrated faith and demonstrated love in the midst of trials and temptations and persecutions. And God, that even today, now, through this letter that Paul wrote to them, we can learn what it means to walk worthy of the Lord and God. We pray that as we resolve to do that, that your spirit be working in us and. And accomplishing your purpose, for the purpose of glorifying you with our lives.

We just thank you, Father, that you're faithful in all things, that we can trust you, whether we see the answer we want or not. We know that you're working for our good. And we thank you for the love that you poured out on our hearts. And we know it's the love of Christ. And we pray that we'd be able to express that love to the body of Christ and expressing your love for them.

And out of that, Father, that you would declare us worthy to be worshipers, be able to fall down before you and give you glory and honor and blessing and power and authority for all eternity. Pray in Christ's name. Amen.