

## 2<sup>nd</sup> THESSALONIANS

1:1-12

### Introduction

*Extreme Makeover* is a popular TV show that follows people through an intense process of changing the way they look. The procedures include the usual changes in wardrobe, make-up, and hairstyle. The more extreme procedures include liposuction, facelift, rhinoplasty, cosmetic dentistry, chin implants, fat injections, and ear pinning. The press release for the show says this:

*Each episode will feature two people, seen first in their "before" phase, then as they undergo their various procedures, and finally, in a climactic unveiling — "the after" — when the candidates reveal their new selves to their families and friends.*

You may not be interested in TV's *Extreme Makeover*... But, if you are a Christian, **you will experience a climactic unveiling.**

Our chapter describes the return of Jesus to the earth in what is called the Second Coming. The Second Coming occurs *after* Christians have been taken to heaven in the Rapture, and *after* the seven-year Tribulation on the earth. All the Christians of the Church Age, who are here called "saints," will return with Jesus in His Second Coming to the earth.

In verse ten you read that when Jesus returns to earth, He will "be **glorified in His saints** and... be admired among all those who believe." **His saints – you and I - are the ones who will be glorified and admired** on account of what Jesus has accomplished in our lives.

The Bible says that, "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1John 3:2). You will have a glorified physical body – a body that can handle life in heaven for all eternity. And your spirit will have been perfected to be without sin.

The angels in heaven and the people on the earth who survive the Tribulation will see the radical physical and spiritual transformation

that has occurred in us. It will be a climactic unveiling – the ultimate "*Extreme Makeover*" - after which we will forever be on display as illustrations of what the power and grace of God have accomplished in those who accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus will reveal us in that Day. In the mean time we are called upon to reveal Jesus in our day. Verse four describes our "patience and faith in... persecutions and tribulations that [we] endure." **Suffering** is the procedure God uses to reveal His Son through our lives as we await His coming for us.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Reveal Jesus As You Endure Your Suffering, and #2 You're Revealed By Jesus At The End Of Your Suffering.

#1 You Reveal Jesus  
As You Endure Your Suffering  
(v1-5)

The apostle Paul had founded the Church at Thessalonica. He arrived there and began preaching about Jesus from the Old Testament and people responded to the Good News that their sins could be forgiven by God's Savior. Paul was forced to leave after only three weeks with the new believers. Concerned for them, he was able to send Timothy back to check on them after a few months time. When Timothy returned to Paul he reported a vibrant, healthy Church... But one with a few questions and problems. Paul wrote First Thessalonians to address some of those questions and problems.

Several months had again passed. The Thessalonians were facing a more sinister spiritual crisis. Apparently they had received a false letter with Paul's signature forged on it to the effect that the seven-year Tribulation had already begun and that they were going through it.

After all, they *were* suffering tribulation and persecution... Perhaps the dreaded Day of the Lord had begun without their knowing it!

This letter says, "**No!**" The Tribulation had *not* begun; they were *not* in it and they would *not* go through it. In the world they would have tribulation; but they would not be in the world during any part of **the** Tribulation.

*Neither will we!* Christians of the Church Age will be resurrected and Raptured to heaven prior to any portion of the Tribulation. Then we will return from heaven to earth with Jesus in His Second Coming when He establishes the kingdom of God on earth.

OK, but why all the present suffering? Paul took up the subject in the first five verses of Chapter one. He will show you that suffering – especially for the sake of Jesus - has a spiritual purpose and that the enduring of suffering accomplishes that purpose.

2 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

God used three ordinary men to change the eternal lives of the people of Thessalonica. They simply made themselves available and God did the rest.

The "church" was the believers themselves. From an earthly perspective they were in the city of Thessalonica. But from a heavenly perspective they were "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Their lives – *including any suffering* – were under the supervision of two glorious Persons: The sovereign almighty God and His unique Son, Jesus Christ. Further, we know that Jesus in heaven intercedes for us with His Father. We're in good hands!

2 Thessalonians 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the uniquely Christian greeting of the Church. "Grace" is God's unmerited, undeserved favor. You are saved by grace through faith as a gift from God. Because of His grace in saving you, you can experience true "peace." True peace is first of all peace **with** God in a personal relationship with Him made possible by Jesus; then it is the possibility of having the peace **of** God in your heart. The peace of God is a precious resource to suffering believers.

The sovereign almighty God is supervising your life on earth from heaven. His Son, Who was and is God, is always praying for you. You can therefore have peace in your heart regardless your suffering.

We still haven't seen any purpose for suffering. Here it is, in verse three.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

Paul couldn't help but be "thank[ful]" to God for what He was accomplishing through their suffering. Because of it, their "faith [was growing] exceedingly" and their "love" was "abound[ing]."

Let's look first at "faith." Faith should have two qualities: It should be *genuine*, and it should be *growing*. Suffering accomplishes both.

How do you know your faith is genuine? Suffering reveals false faith. Jesus told a parable in which seed fell on various soils. The seed represented the saving Word of God; the soils represented the human heart. Jesus said,

Matthew 13:20 ...he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

Matthew 13:21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

The Thessalonians had not fallen away. Their faith was genuine, saving faith that had taken root in their hearts.

And it was growing. Growing "exceedingly" means *beyond what could be expected*. There are other ways to grow in faith, such as getting deeper into God's Word. Suffering is a unique way of causing your faith to grow beyond what you might expect because through it you discover God is giving you grace to endure and is proving Himself faithful.

"Faith grow[ing] exceedingly" is an experience that occurs inwardly, in your heart. The next purpose for suffering occurs outwardly, in the household of believers; your "love... abounds toward each other."

"Love" is not a feeling; it is an activity of self-sacrificing serving of others. Their individual suffering had not made them selfish, but rather self-less. They went about ministering to one another in practical ways.

Churches can be a place where many Christians are lonely together in their suffering... Or they can be vibrant with love as we reach-out to one another.

Suffering must be endured to accomplish its purpose:

2 Thessalonians 1:4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

Paul and his companions were "boast[ing]" about them. God was doing a great work both *in* them and *through* them.

"Endure" is a key word. It can have a rather negative connotation; for example, if you're a Cubs or Red Sox fan... *You have to endure another painful off-season!* The kind of endurance that can be boasted about is marked by "patience and faith..."

"Patience" means *perseverance*, and especially sustaining your hope despite difficulties. "Faith" means *faithfulness*. You don't get flaky; you remain faithful.

Suffering is identified specifically as "persecutions and tribulations."  
"Persecutions" are the hostilities you suffer from the enemies of God.  
"Tribulations" are the afflictions that their persecution inflicts upon you.

Jesus was being revealed through their endurance of suffering:

2 Thessalonians 1:5 *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

Let me give you an alternate translation of this verse: "All this trouble is a clear sign that God has decided to make you fit for the kingdom [for which] you're suffering now..." (MSG).

God is always right in His determination to allow your suffering. Through it He prepares you for the kingdom of God. The "kingdom of

God" means the earthly kingdom that Jesus will establish when He returns to earth in His Second Coming. Our present suffering is preparing us for our future place in the kingdom. As you endure suffering, unbelievers see that you are living for the King Who will return. Jesus is thus revealed to them as Someone real, Someone alive, and Someone worth surrendering our lives for – even though it means suffering for His sake.

Your suffering is but for a moment. You endure it, but it will soon end. When it does,

#2 You're Revealed By Jesus  
At The End Of Your Suffering  
(v6-10)

Jesus came to earth the first time to die on the Cross. He's coming the second time to wear the Crown – to rule and reign over all the earth. It's called the kingdom of God. The next few verses describe His Second Coming to earth to establish the kingdom of God. His Second Coming will be a *revelation* and it will bring *retribution*.

2 Thessalonians 1:6 since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

2 Thessalonians 1:7 and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

2 Thessalonians 1:8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's talk first about the revelation of Jesus. These verses tell us He will be "revealed from heaven." "Revealed" is the word from which we get the word *apocalypse*. It is the unveiling of His majesty and glory and power at His Second Coming.

In His first coming Jesus' majesty and glory and power were veiled in human flesh. In His Second Coming He will be unveiled for all the world to see.

He will be revealed "from heaven." Just as He ascended physically and bodily into heaven after His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus will return physically and bodily from heaven.

He will be revealed from heaven "with His mighty angels." We read in other passages that His mighty angels gather together the survivors of the Tribulation so that believers are separated from unbelievers.

Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels "in flaming fire..." Jesus will look as though He has a royal robe of fire encircling Him!

Fire can be very constructive; or it can be very destructive. The believers who survive the Tribulation will find the flaming fire of Jesus to be light and warmth and purifying. The unbelievers... They will be destroyed by it. They will be the subjects of retribution.

"Retribution" is the meaning of the word translated *vengeance* in verse eight. Our ideas about vengeance come mostly from TV and movie heroes who deal out brutal vengeance from anger. It's more like retaliation or revenge.

God's retribution is not like that at all. His retribution is the calm, controlled, just punishment meted out by the perfectly Righteous Judge upon those who have willfully violated His perfect law and refused His offers of salvation.

Unbelievers are identified in verse eight as those "who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Second Coming of Jesus will be preceded by unprecedented preaching of the Gospel all over the earth to every person on the earth. Unbelievers "do not know God" because they refused to "obey the Gospel." It will be their willful decision, for which they will be held accountable for all eternity.

What will be their punishment?

2 Thessalonians 1:9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

"Punished" can be translated *pay the penalty*. In His first coming, Jesus died on the Cross to pay the penalty for mankind's sin. As He

dismissed His spirit to heaven He cried out, "*Tetelstai*," which is often translated, "It is finished," but also means, "Paid-in-full."

Sin carries a penalty: "the wages of sin is death." The penalty must be paid. Either you pay it... Or Jesus pays it for you.

If you refuse and reject Jesus, then you pay the penalty of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." "Destruction" (sadly) does not mean *annihilation*. It means *ruination*. It does not mean the cessation of your existence, but the ruination of everything that makes your existence worthwhile. One author wrote that "unbelievers will pass into a night on which no morning dawns."

It will be far worse than darkness. In other places it is described as "torment"; a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" where there is "no rest night or day" and where the "fire is not quenched." The devil and his fallen angels will be there; but they will not be ruling a kingdom or meting out any suffering. They will be suffering intensely as well. And, in the eternal darkness of Hell, I doubt any of its inhabitants will see anything ever again.

"The presence of the Lord and the glory of His power" were the things you were created to enjoy in eternal fellowship with God... Which gets us back to where we started:

2 Thessalonians 1:10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

When Jesus returns with His saints, the believers and unbelievers who have survived the Tribulation on the earth will see just what God had in mind all along in creating the human race. You will be glorified, perfected, ready to share endless ages of joy with God. All because you "believed" - because you believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior when you heard the Gospel.

Conclusion

The last two verses are the application:

2 Thessalonians 1:11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power,

2 Thessalonians 1:12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In light of your future glory, you have three responsibilities in your present suffering. These are captured by three words: *worthy*, *walk*, and *witness*.

1. Worthy in these verses applies to the present. It is an encouragement to live up to your calling by enduring suffering.
2. Your walk is described in verse eleven. The NIV translates the words this way: "That by His power [God] may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act promoted by your faith." The idea is to let God empower you to endure suffering.
3. Your witness is to have "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... glorified in you, and you in Him..." You are to reveal Jesus by enduring your suffering until your suffering ends.

All of this is only possible "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

You were saved by grace; your life is sustained by grace. When you are satisfied in your suffering that God's grace is sufficient for you it is a witness that reveals Jesus until He's revealed.