

# 2 Thessalonians 1 • The Righteous Judgment of God

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We are going to be starting the Book of 2 Thessalonians, open your Bibles there, 2 Thessalonians. Wasn't it delightful to see the hills today as you drove in? And I could see that I was, Sue probably gets tired of me talking about it, I was just raving about how I could see all the detail, you know, in the hills and it wasn't this just smoky morass of nothingness you know. I just, I love it, I love being able to see things, even the butte disappeared here the last, you know, couple of weeks ago and it's just nice to see things cleared out, you know.

It's kind of the same thing spiritually, isn't it? You know, when the fog clears, when the smoke clears, when we get to see clearly, it's just a, it's a wonderful thing, and that's one of the reasons that we get into God's Word each and every week. Because by studying the scriptures, the smoke, the fog clears and we begin to have a picture, a better, clearer picture of what is going on.

You know, one of the main reasons that Paul wrote Second Thessalonians and we believe that he wrote it on the heels of First Thessalonians, was to bring clarity. Because he had written things in his earlier letter about the day of the Lord, the rapture of the church and so forth and yet there was still some misunderstanding. And so Paul felt the need to write a second letter, a follow up letter, to bring greater clarity and understanding to the things that he had said previously. In other words, there was still some fogginess and we love the Word of God for that reason. And so we're going to be getting into this over the next few weeks.

This is a fairly short letter, it only makes up 3 chapters in our Bible. Most likely we're going to take a chapter each week and see what the Lord has for us. Chapter 1 is essentially his greeting and some comments, but there are some good things here that we're going to look at. We're going to read through these 12 verses and then we'll pray and then we'll unpack them and see what the Lord will reveal to us.

It goes like this, *“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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— <sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. <sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we get into these verses and talk about what they mean, we really need your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts. You are the Lord of all wisdom and all truth, and you have laid these things out in the scriptures for us to know and to understand, that we may know your promises and understand the purpose and plan of redemption. And we pray that you would fill our hearts and open our eyes and ears to hear. We ask it, Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen. Amen.

Before we get into chapter 1, I want to show you on the screen kind of an outline if I could have of the chapter and what we're going to be looking at.

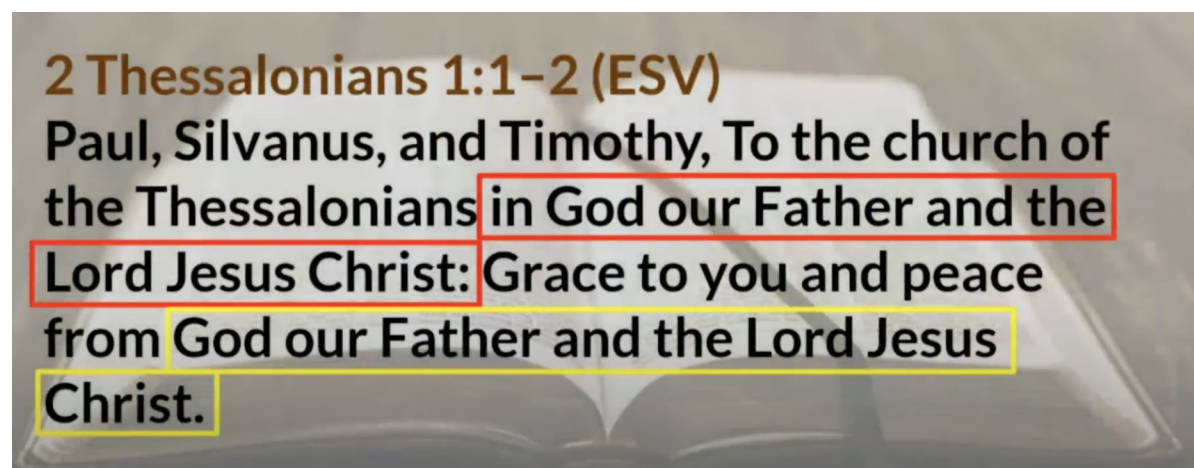
### **Outline of chapter 1**

- Greetings and commendations: 1-4
- The righteous judgement of God: 5-10
- A prayer for the believers: 11-12

Essentially in verses 1 through 4, it just gives us the greetings and commendations that Paul gives to the Church of Thessalonica. And then in verses 5 through 10, he talks about the righteous judgment of God, and that's going to be kind of the theme of what we're going to be looking at here today as we talk about one of your favorite subjects, I know, judgment, right? People just love talking about judgment, I'm joking, they don't. People usually avoid it like the plague. And then finally, in the last couple of verses of the chapter, Paul just kind of lays up a prayer for the believers there in Thessalonica.

So, you know, he begins this letter as letters began in those days with the authors, Paul, Silvanus, which of course is Silas. Silvanus is the Greek version of that name. He also cites Timothy as one of the senders of the letter, followed by the recipients. This is the way letters went, *"To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,"* and then Paul's trademark greeting, *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

But there's something already interesting that we need to look at and I don't know if you noticed it. But in the first 2 verses of the chapter already, Paul repeats an interesting connection and that is, 2 times, he says, *"God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* You can see it on the screen, I did the first one kind of boxed it in red and then the second one in yellow.



Interesting that just right off the bat, he talks about the fact that these things are from *"God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* And what is interesting about those references, is that the Greek sentence structure that Paul is using here, shows that God the Father and the Lord Jesus are one source. It's very important that we see that.

In verse 1, you'll notice that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and then you'll notice in verse 2, that grace and peace, the source of those things, are God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul is doing something very purposeful, he is linking God the Father and Jesus Christ in a way that is undeniable that they are on an equal plane. It's important that we see that and yet, and this is all over the New Testament by the way. And yet the deity of Jesus Christ is a biblical truth that continues to trouble so many people. It just really causes people to flip out and ask questions.

And I think the thing that people struggle with the most is how Jesus can be both God, fully God, and at the exact same time, fully man. That just tweaks our brains no end. And I get often the question, you know, if Jesus is one with God the Father, then why is it that we see him praying to God in the gospels? That really bothers people. They'll say Jesus is God, right? Yeah, Jesus is God. Well, then why is He praying to God? People will even say, is He praying to Himself?

It's a very, very common sort of question and whatever answer I give to people, and I try to answer people's questions, but whatever answer I give, for the thinking person is really not all that satisfying. Because what we're talking about is the nature of God in particular, and not just the nature of God, we're pondering the relationship of God the Father and God the Son and it seems that the more we ponder it, the more confusing it sometimes gets, you know. I mean, if you really start thinking about it, to the point where, you know, we go all the way back to the beginning.

Well, we can't go all, our minds can't go back to the beginning and we think about, you know, Jesus being in existence before He even became Jesus. I mean, Jesus is an earthly name. He was the Word of God, but then made flesh in what we call the incarnation and even when we're talking about the incarnation, we have to kind of scratch our heads. You know, we call it the miracle of the incarnation, you know that. That's a very nice way of saying, I don't get it.

We call it a miracle because we don't understand it. We call it a miracle because we can't comprehend it, it's beyond our ability to comprehend; to understand the nature of God as it exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's just, it's mind blowing and it frankly is a problem for a lot of people. But believe me, many more minds, far more astute than yours and mine have wrestled with this issue and come away perplexed.

You know, there's a story that I once heard about the reformer Martin Luther who retired to his study to simply ponder the statement of Jesus on the cross

when He cried out saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And as the story goes, he went into, he shut the door in his study to just simply ponder that statement and to meditate on the meaning of it and to try to discern it as best he could. And as the story goes, he eventually emerged after many hours of deep thought and was heard to say, God forsaken of God, who can understand that? And that's exactly..., this man was a deep thinker. So if it bothers you to admit that the nature of God is beyond your comprehension, it's fine, just get in line behind a lot of other people who've come before you, who it bothered as well in the sense of us having to admit something as outside of us as this, you know. Moving on.

We see in verse 3, Paul offering a word of thanks for the believers. He says, *"We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right,"* and then he tells them why. First of all, number 1, he cites the fact that their faith is growing. He cites an abundant and growing faith and he also cites a love among them for one another and he says that it's increasing.

In fact, he goes on to say in verse 4, that their growing faith and their abundant love is a source of bragging, boasting that Paul does to the other churches. He talks about them to the other fellowships. But it wasn't just that their faith was growing and their love was abundant, it was the fact that those things were happening in the midst of difficulty that really impressed Paul the most and blessed him the most.

Because you know, when we get into trouble, you guys, when things start to heat up, you're going to go one way or the other. You're either going to get closer to the Lord and closer to one another, or you're going to pitch the whole thing and say, you know what, I didn't sign up for this and kind of just say, whatever. And these people were being drawn closer to the Lord, that's that growing faith, and they were being drawn closer to one another by their persecutions, by their difficulties. It's interesting, isn't it?

Even going through this pandemic, as we have been over the last several months, I have seen it draw churches together, standing together. All of a sudden, all the denominational differences between a lot of fellowships is just kind of falling away and it's like, people are like, yeah, you're my brother in Jesus and let's stand together and have you seen that? I have seen it and it's been encouraging and we see that this is one of the marks of true Christian brotherhood, the difficulties and challenges unite us.

We like to live in times where we're not going through hardship I mean, I do anyway, I like taking it easy, frankly. When life gets hard, when life becomes

challenging, I don't particularly like it, but I like what it results in as far as how we treat one another, how we think of one another. I've been more connected to other pastors in town over stuff and just since all this stuff has been going on, you know, it gives us reason to get together and talk and yeah it's kind of interesting.

Paul doesn't go into specifics here of how their faith was being seen as growing or how their love for one another was being seen, but it's not hard to guess. I imagine that as these people became Christians, they were losing business contacts, that people were pulling away from them and life was probably getting hard. I would imagine that for some of them, their ability to earn money was drying up because people didn't want to deal with these Christians. These, you know, these Christians, you know, they're connected to that guy we ran out of town, you know, that Paul guy or whatever his name. You know that the officials ran him out of town, right? Well, these people are, they're followers, they think what he says is good, I don't think we should have anything to do with those folks.

And I think, I'm pretty sure that was that was happening and yet these folks decided in the midst of that kind of an environment to stand by one another, to take care of one another and that's really cool. Paul was very proud about their reaction to that and he told them so.

Now concerning the suffering that they were enduring, he goes on to say something in verse 5 through 10, which is going to be the essence of what we're really going to focus on here this morning. And you need to really think through these verses because, particularly verse 5, which is the lead off verse for this, because it's challenging, okay. This is a challenging verse.

He says in verse 5, this and by this, he means the persecution, the difficulty, the struggles you're going through. *"This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, (remember those words, those are key) that (he goes on to say) you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering."*

Now, we're going to stop there with me for just a moment. In this section of verse 5, Paul tells them that in their suffering, he sees something. He says, I see *"evidence of the righteous judgment of God,"* and we're left to kind of wonder, what do you mean by that, Paul? What do you mean? Because when you and I look at persecution and difficulty in trials, what we see is injustice, we see people being treated badly.

When Christians are persecuted for their faith, you and I look at that and we say, that's injustice. Paul looks at it and says, I see evidence of the justice of God, the righteous justice of God and judgment. So, he goes on to explain what he means because we're sitting here going, what do you mean by that?

Well, he thankfully, thankfully, because he doesn't always do this. He goes on to explain in verse 6, he says, *"since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and (on the other side of that coin) to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us."* In other words, what Paul's saying here, is that God is going to turn the tables on those who are now afflicting, the believers there in Thessalonica, and they will be repaid with affliction and those who are now being afflicted will receive relief from the Lord and that is God's righteous judgment. Guys, that is God's righteous judgment.

And the other statement that we need to address is at the end of verse 5 and this can be a challenging statement to where he says, *"you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God,"* And you need to be very careful whenever you read the word worthy in the Bible, because people get all caught up and they think, oh, I got to be worthy, I got to be good enough. And you have to be careful there because Paul is not saying that the sufferings that they are enduring makes them worthy of heaven. He's not saying that because frankly, none of us is worthy of heaven, right? I don't deserve heaven, I'm on my way there, but I don't deserve it and neither do you.

We're saved and we know this, through the gift of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and whatever we may suffer for the Lord in this life adds nothing to that sacrifice, okay. That just needs to be established. Paul's not saying that as you suffer, you're adding somehow to the sacrifice of Jesus and your worthiness to be a believer. The Greek verb that is used here when he speaks of "to make worthy", it means, "to declare worthy." And that means that the sufferings of believers and their response to the sufferings that they were going through proved, if you will, or declared them to be worthy of the kingdom.

In other words, your sufferings make this evident, they bring forth the proof. The proof is in the pudding, people like to say, well, the suffering was the pudding, if you will. This is the proof that you have been made worthy, that you are worthy, made worthy by the Lord. These things and your responses have declared you to be such, right? So, that's what he means by that.

Now, we left off in the middle of verse 7 and here Paul reveals when God's righteous judgment is going to be carried out. In the middle of verse 7, he says,

*“when the Lord (and it starts with the word when and that's important timing word, when the Lord) Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”*

Now, what was he talking about earlier? He was talking about the fact that there's coming a day, when those who are afflicting you will be afflicted and those of you who are afflicted will be comforted and given rest, and we're all kind of sitting here going when, when, is that going to happen? He says here, it's going to happen when Jesus is revealed, that's the when.

If you're waiting for your enemies to drop dead before your eyes, you may have a long wait ahead of you. The when, is when Jesus is revealed, when He comes from heaven, revealed from heaven, Paul says, with *“his mighty angels in flaming fire.”* What's He going to do at that time? He's going to inflict *“vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel.”* And that is when those things will take place.

He goes on to elaborate on that judgment and I'll grant you that verses 9 and 10 are probably not the most enjoyable to read. He says, *“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”* As challenging as these verses are to read, these 2 verses, because they speak of judgment and the severity of it.

It is important that we understand them all the same, because the teaching in God's Word about a final judgment is frankly vital to our understanding of God's overall plan of redemption and it also helps us to understand God's holiness. Because without judgment there is no holiness. And yet there, as I kind of inferred earlier, there are a lot of people and Christians among them who would rather pretend that these truths did not exist. They're uncomfortable with them because the idea of judgment makes us uncomfortable.

If you're talking to an unbeliever and you begin to talk about judgment, you can expect a level of discomfort from them, it's even illustrated in the Bible. Remember when Paul was giving his testimony and talking to Felix, the governor, while he was kind of under arrest for a period of time. Let me show you this on the screen, it's taken from the Book of Acts and it says,



### **Acts 24:24-25 (ESV)**

*After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."*

*After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. (and listen to this) And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control (and then look at here) and the coming judgment, (it says) Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."*

And that's kind of a way of saying, when it's more convenient, I'll call you back and we can talk, but right now, I don't want to talk. And, you know, we actually went through these verses in our devotions that we do on a day to day basis and Felix had reason to be uncomfortable when Paul talked about judgment. He had not lived a righteous life, he had not lived a godly life, he was not a godly man. And so when Paul began to speak about the coming judgment, he immediately got uncomfortable and you can expect the same when you're talking to people.

Here's, and it's too bad that Felix had such alarm that he kind of sent Paul away in a sense, you know, to come back at another time that was more convenient. Because had Paul had the opportunity, he would have been able to speak to Felix further about the fact that the judgment of God has been dealt with for those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. That's why, to a born again Christian, who really understands the cross, the subject of judgment is not scary, it is one that elicits our worship and our adoration of the one who went to the cross on our behalf and bore our judgment. Jesus Christ took our judgment, He bore it and what was the one of the last things He said on the cross? It is finished, right? Done! He did it, He not only did it, He did it completely, He finished it.

So, for you and I to speak of this subject of judgment, although it may still be difficult, it should not be personally uncomfortable. I do talk to Christians from time to time for whom it is uncomfortable, personally. I mean, I know that it's uncomfortable for some people because they have family members that don't know the Lord. But I know also some Christians who find it personally uncomfortable whenever the topic of judgment comes up and do you know why? It's because they themselves are not secure in their salvation.

When there is a security, when I know that I know that I know Jesus died for me on the cross, there's nothing I can add to it, and there's nothing that remains to be done as it relates to the sacrifice made for sin, that it has been finished, completed on the cross. When I know that, I can rest, I can rest in my salvation. I can rest in the work that He accomplished for my salvation, right? It's a very restful thing. I'm glad that I, when we talk about judgment, I can say, oh, as terrible as these things sound, Jesus, you took my judgment. You were judged on my behalf and you finished that judgment on the cross, thank you, Lord.

And if you're one of those saints who struggles with the assurance of your own salvation and the topic of judgment makes you personally uncomfortable, I would strongly encourage you to begin to lay hold of some of the verses in the Bible that speak of the finished work of Jesus on the cross and the fact that it is a gift which cannot be earned and to really make those verses such an intricate part of your understanding of redemption that they are impenetrable by fear, right.

Write down in your notes, Ephesians 2:8 and 9, breathe those verses. Bathe your heart in Ephesians 2:8 and 9 if you're the kind of person who lacks assurance, for whom judgment causes you to tremble. Because Ephesians 2, 8 and 9 is one of those lovely passages that reminds us again that our salvation is not by works, lest anyone should boast, but it is a gift.

Now the challenge that some people have with talking about judgment and in some cases this is Christians, but mostly non-believers, is their idea is, you know, they hear us talking about God is love, God is love, God is love, God is love, God is love and then they hear us talking about judgment and they kind of go, ding!. There's a disconnect and they go, okay, I don't get that, how can you say to me that He is a God of love and at the same time say that He is a God of judgment?

In fact, some people, I've even had someone ask me, God tells us to forgive others, why can't He just do the same? Now that's a question you should be prepared to answer. But what they forget, is that although it is possible for you and I to overlook sin, it is not so for God. Although you and I can take something that has been sinned against us and we can brush that under the rug God can't do it, He cannot do it because to do that would be to be unjust. It would mean God that was unjust and if you don't understand that, if you're like, well, I don't get that pastor, but I don't get it. How for Him just to forgive people makes him unjust.

Well, put it in human terms. Can you imagine a judge sitting on the bench who had a convicted murderer come before him who clearly was guilty of the sin, the crime? Can you imagine that judge just saying, we forgive you, we the state or whatever, we forgive you, go in peace. Can you imagine that happening? You can't, because judges are tasked with the job of upholding justice. We expect them to uphold justice, right? If somebody comes before them, they're guilty of a crime, we expect them to say, all right, you are guilty, there's a punishment for your guilt, connected to your guilt into the crime that you committed, we expect it. If somebody just started releasing people who were guilty, you know, even in the face of their guilt, we would say, ah!, get rid of that guy or woman as the case may be. Get rid of them, why? They're not upholding justice, they're not just.

Well, even though human beings can be unjust, and we've proved that many times over the history of mankind, God cannot, He cannot be unjust, it would mean that He would be less than God. He cannot be less than Himself and one of the basic tenets of His being is justice, just as much as it is love. He must be just and that means He must punish sin. Christians, do you get it? He must punish sin. The good news is, He sent His Son and punished His Son instead of you. That's what the whole gospel surrounds, that very idea that God was just in the punishing of His Son on your behalf.

He stood in your place and He was qualified to stand in your place because He Himself had committed no sin. He bore our punishment and then what that means for us, no punishment remains. But for those who reject God's solution for forgiveness, which by the way is a free gift, there remains, for those individuals, Paul makes it clear in these verses, a final judgment, a final judgement.

And if they refuse to let Jesus bear that penalty for them, they must bear it themselves and I don't like talking about that any more than you do. But the apostle John was given a vision of that judgment that he recorded for us in the Book of Revelation up on the screen for you. From Revelation chapter 20, John writes,

**Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV)**

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead*

*who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.*

This is called the Great White Throne Judgment and you and I will not stand in that judgment because Jesus has already stood for us in judgment, I remind you. But this judgment will happen nonetheless, we will receive a judgment. We go through kind of an interesting sort of a... I know I keep coming back to believers, but that's, I trust who I'm talking to. But we as believers, we kind of go through a 2 phase judgment. In this life, before we die, we go through discipline, the Bible says, God disciplines those whom He loves.

So, Christians sin, but are we judged? No, we're not judged, we're disciplined. He disciplines us as a father would discipline his children. He does it because He loves us, He chastens us. But then after we die and these bodies die, anyway, we go to be with the Lord, we know that there remains a judgment also for believers, but it is not a judgment of sin and this is one of those interesting things.

I had a guy write me just this last week and say, "pastor Paul, am I going to stand before God for my inability to keep the law?" And I said, "you better hope not," that's what I said. You better hope not because you're going to fail big time, buddy, you will be condemned. If you're going to be judged according to the law, you will be condemned. Thankfully, we will not be judged according to the law. In fact, we will not have our works judged because of sin, we will have our works judged to see how we have used what God has given us in this life so that we may be rewarded accordingly.

That's the judgment that you and I will have one day, it's a judgment of rewards. And the Bible tells us that some people will receive rewards and some people will not. They will themselves be saved, but Paul refers to it as a man escaping the flames with pretty much nothing left, but he escapes the flames, why? Because he put his faith in Jesus Christ but he never lived his life for the Lord in any sort of a way to be rewarded. But we trust better things for you, better things for you.

Paul ends with these words in verse 11, *"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling."* And again this means that God would reveal in you, in your lives, in the way you live, a kind of a life that is worthy, if you will, or in keeping or consistent with the calling that you have received through Jesus Christ. That's just Paul's way of saying, may you live your lives in a way that is commensurate with the calling that you have received.

And he goes on to say, and he's talking about the Lord here. May the Lord *“fulfill every resolve for good,”* and that means everything that you have determined in your life to do for good, may the Lord fulfill it. And he says, *“every work of faith,”* every desire that you have to step forth in faith, may the Lord fulfill it. Notice the last 3 words of this sentence, *“by his power,”* I like that. So, may your good works and may your stepping out in faith be accomplished according to the power of God. Why? Verse 12, *“so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace (and here he does it again) of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Paul says that our lives are to be lived in such a way as to bring glory to Him because you know what? One day He's going to share that glory with us, that's a mind blower and we really don't understand how all that's going to occur, but we know that it's true. He's going to share His glory with His church one day, wow, wow.

And then again, he ends this chapter with the same link between the Father and the Son that he did twice before in verses 1 and 2. That link with God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, connecting them in a way that shows that undeniable equality between the two.

As we get into the next chapter, which we're not going to do this morning, Paul is going to commence to bring clarification about some of those issues that were a little foggy. And we're going to get into that coming next week as he talks about the man of lawlessness, the day of the Lord and some timing issues that I think you will find interesting along those lines.