

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

**<sup>3</sup> We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.**

**<sup>5</sup> All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (NIV84)**

Theme: Uncommon Grace Leads to Uncommon Gratitude

“You don’t know how good you’ve got it.” Anyone ever said that to you before? Maybe when you were younger and refusing to eat your food your mom said, “you don’t know how good you have it—there are starving kids in Africa right now who would love to eat what you have on your plate.” Or maybe you thought this about someone else, like about the professional athlete who was complaining that his multi-million dollar contract isn’t as much as that guy’s on the other team who plays the same position—“man, you don’t know how good you’ve got it—your making millions of dollars for playing a game; you’re set for life!” Or about your neighbor who complains about how busy he is and how much time he has to spend with his kids, “you don’t know how good you’ve got it—treasure your children while they still want you around, whenever you can—because you never know when they’ll be gone.”

It’s good to be reminded from time to time just how good we’ve got it. We get so caught up on the bad things in life that it is good to think about all the blessings we enjoy.

Paul was on his second missionary journey when he first visited Thessalonica, a thriving seaport of about 200,000 people—a very large city at that time. As he normally did Paul went into the Jewish house of worship, called a synagogue, and began teaching them about Christ. Some Jews believed the gospel, as did a large amount of Gentiles including a good number of prominent women. But the Jewish leaders

were jealous of Paul and upset that so many had become believers in Christ. So they incited a riot and took Jason, a believer who perhaps housed Paul and his companions, in front of the city officials. Jason and some others had to pay off the officials so that they could go, but the Jews weren’t satisfied. Fearing that Paul’s life was in danger the Thessalonian believers helped Paul and his companions flee in the city in the middle of the night. Those hostile Jews followed Paul and made trouble for him at his next stop in Berea and forced him to flee once again.

It wasn’t long after this that Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the believers were doing. Timothy reported that the young believers had remained in the faith despite being heavily persecuted. They also had many questions about Christ’s second coming. So Paul wrote his first letter to them to encourage them in their faith and to answer their questions. About six months later Paul got word that they persecution was still heavy—causing great troubles and distress to the believers, and that they had some follow-up questions about Christ’s second coming. So Paul wrote this second letter to the fledgling congregation.

Put yourself in the place of the Thessalonians. You just heard about someone named Jesus, who this traveling missionary said was the Christ, the long-promised Messiah. He pointed out from Scripture that this Jesus paid for your sins and rose from the dead, thus winning for you life after death! Although it didn’t make much sense, you were brought to faith. And because you believed, you were persecuted. Your life was threatened, maybe you were beaten, lost your job, alienated by your friends and disowned by your relatives.

It would be hard not to focus on all the bad things that were going on in your life. It would be hard not to think about all the problems you were going through, how horrible you have it, the pain—both physical and emotional, all because you believed what some guy said about Jesus. It would have been a real temptation simply to reject Christ, save yourself the trouble and the heartache, and move on to something else.

It is hard for us too—hard for us not to focus on some of the pains and troubles in this life—whatever they may be. We have all sorts of problems living in this world and it frankly they consume us. It is all we think about, all we worry about, they cause us sleepless nights and

anxiety during the day. It often happens that all our focus and attention is on the bad, that we completely forget about all the good—about all the blessings God gives to us.

So it is good to be reminded about all the good we have in life. And God has certainly blessed us with many things in our life—here in the U.S. we have a countless number of physical blessings and has he has blessed us with many people in our lives who love us and provide for us.

That wasn't Paul's explicit purpose in our text for today—to remind the Thessalonians of their physical blessings, if they had any physical blessings—they were being persecuted! Paul's opening words to the congregation were very similar to the ones of his first letter, they were words of thanksgiving. Let's hear those words again: **We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.** Here is a pastor giving thanks to God for his members. And he wasn't thanking God for their wealth or prosperity; he didn't thank God for their jobs or power; nor for their health or anything that had to do with their earthly life.

Rather he thanked God for their faith! Out of all the people in the world, God chose them to be saved. So he sent Paul and his companions to their city and when they heard him preach the gospel and when they heard it they were brought to faith. And now, despite the fact that their leader had to flee for his life after only a few weeks and now you were facing persecution, they not only remained in the one true faith, but the Lord increased their faith through the gospel! Their faith was ever increasing! As they read God's Word their knowledge and faith grew.

And as their faith grew so did the fruits of their faith. They grew together as a congregation. Their love for each other also increased—it had to as most of the city probably turned on them, and their own friends and family were persecuting them. But they had their own brothers and sisters in the faith and they loved each other more and more.

And there was more. Paul said in verse five, **All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.** Christ made them worthy of God's kingdom. He paid for their sins, he gave them his perfect life. They were pure and righteous in the eyes of God

and so when they died they would enter his kingdom of heaven and join him for eternity!

Sure, they were being persecuted—they had many horrible things that were happening to them. And yet Paul's first words to them were words of thanksgiving. They didn't know how good they had it—they were believers, brought to faith in Christ and they were on their way to eternal life! They could even rejoice in their persecution for that means that they were worthy of suffering for Christ as his believers!

We certainly have our troubles. We do suffer through a lot of things in this world—things that we can legitimately complain about. They are different for each and every one of us. Maybe its health issues that you are going through—or health issues of a loved one. Maybe someone close to you recently died, you have financial issues, family problems, or maybe it's just your everyday life dragging you down. But instead of dwelling on how horrible your life is, think about all the great things the Lord has done for you! Compare what you complain about to the blessings God has given you. Sure the Thessalonians suffered for being Christians, but they were Christians! God had brought them to faith and will take them home to heaven! Those blessings far outweighed any amount of suffering they had to endure. The same thing goes for you. The blessings of Christ far outweigh any amount of troubles or difficulties that we may face.

Like the Thessalonians we were brought to faith. Not because we were better than anyone else. Not because we had done something to please God to make him bring us to faith. No, God simply brought us to faith. And that faith receives the blessings that Christ won for us. We are forgiven by Christ's suffering and death and eternal life is given to us by his resurrection! These are gifts of God's grace. Grace is undeserved love that God has for us. Grace is gifts of God, given out of love to us that we don't deserve or earn.

And this gift is worth more than any amount of gold or silver. It is the most precious gift ever—it could only be purchased by the precious blood of the God himself. So it doesn't matter what we suffer through. Our troubles and our difficulties may be great. Perhaps you don't have much, you have financial problems, and so on. But in the end, you are rich—you have it all. Your salvation is priceless. Soon you will enjoy all the glory and honor of eternal life. This is yours not because you

have earned or deserved it, but simply because God loves you and gave you this gift of our his grace!

He has given us his Word so that we may know him and grow in his grace. His Word he has made accessible to us in many different ways. He has given us a Church that proclaims his word purely and accurately. He has given us a church family that loves and cares for us. He has given us his true body and blood in the sacrament—a tangible forgiveness of sins so that we may know for a fact—we can taste and see the forgiveness of sins. We can go on and on about all the gifts of God's grace.

Uncommon grace leads to uncommon gratitude. God's grace is certainly uncommon. No one loves as he loves us. No one gives as he gives us! And so we have uninhibited joy and thankfulness. Let us show the gratitude that is in our hearts for the most precious gift of all. Like the one Samaritan leper who returned to thank Jesus for healing him by bowing down before Jesus, let us thank God first and foremost by worshiping him— then by praising his name reading and listening to his Word, and partaking of his sacrament, by growing in faith and sharing that faith, and by loving each other more and more! And we willingly and cheerfully do this because of the love he has for us.

It's good to be reminded of all the great things we have been given. As we live our lives we tend to focus on the bad things—the things that we have to suffer while in this sin-filled world. But you don't know how good you have it! By God's grace you are his own dear child. He has brought you to faith him. You are forgiven, you are his own, you will live a perfect life with him forever. That is uncommon grace. Let us respond with uncommon gratitude. Amen.