

Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions

Sermon Title: "A Flourishing Faith" - 2 Thessalonians 1:3 NLT

Sunday, January 6, 2019

Pastor Howard T. Washington

Paul was commending the church for their growing and increasing faith. 2 Thessalonians is a book written by Paul to the church. He prayed for them to grow in their faith. He prayed for them to have faith, hope and love. They were a young church that had been attacked by false teachers. Paul received a message after the first letter that seemed to indicate that the believers in the church were afraid that their faith was not going to stand the tests, trials and persecution. Paul recognizes their faith is flourishing and their love for one another is growing through their tests and trials.

We are aspiring to be a church that is growing and maturing in our faith. Even though you may be going through a difficult time, continue in the faith that you have. Stand strong in persecution. Declare, "Lord, I want a faith that is flourishing, that is growing, that is maturing." Many of us have written down those things we want to do for the new year. Goals like eating better, etc. Make "growing faith" a part of your intentional journey this year. Allow the Word of God to lead you during the year as it impacts your life.

Identify a faith Scripture: At the church leadership meeting yesterday, Pastor Washington asked each leader to search the Scriptures to identify one theme Scripture to encourage their faith for the year. Leaders will share their faith Scripture at next month's meeting. Our church theme Scripture is 1 John 5:4. You are encouraged to identify a faith theme Scripture. This is the Scripture you will go to when your faith is tested. God will speak to you and encourage your heart.

Sermon in a Sentence: A flourishing faith is found in the church where faith is growing, love is increasing and patience is enduring.

Faith is authentic and active (God-inspired) confidence in the presence of obstacles, opposition and oppression. We must exercise our faith to grow stronger. Whenever we are tested, experience trials and face opposition, it is an opportunity to exercise your faith.

Christians are encouraged to grow through testing. In order to grow in an area, you have to be tested to build muscle, you must push some weight around. God will give you everything you need to build your faith. You go through what you go through so you can become stronger in order to help someone else.

Some of us are being sifted. I pray that your faith will fail not. After you go through, you will turn around and reach out and help your brother and sister. Christians are called to have a faith that is growing, built up by prayer, the encouragement of others, and testing.

They were growing in their love for each other. How do I grow to love my neighbor? They were growing spiritually in spite of their trials and troubles. Sometimes we go through a rainy season in our life so that when Spring comes, the flower blooms.

Illustration: A boy thought he was helping a butterfly by opening up the cocoon. However, the butterfly did not survive because its wings were not strengthened by the pressure of pushing against the cocoon. Your time of pressure has a purpose. The beauty in the butterfly is what it becomes as a result of the pressure.

The situation you are going through is not designed to destroy you. See your situation through the eyes of faith. What you are going through is either ordained or allowed by God. Go to Him for your plan and strategy to grow in and through it. According to Romans 8:28, every circumstance God works together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Not just the good things. When you look through the eyes of faith, every situation is an opportunity for growth.

Faith Illustration from Scripture: Joseph did not realize that his brothers throwing him in the pit was God's design. He went from the pit to the palace. We want to interrupt what God is doing because it is painful and uncomfortable. The truth is that the place of development is dark and painful. God is working on the inside so that sooner or later, we will develop and become what He is calling us to become. Joseph had not done anything wrong. Potiphar's wife wanted him. He would not relent. He did not do anything wrong, but he ended up in prison. God had a plan and Joseph had to be patient. He helped the people around him in prison (See Genesis 39-40). Joseph had faith to sustain him through the darkness of being thrown in a pit by his brothers and put in prison for something he did not do. Ultimately, the gifts God gave him saved the nation. His relationship with his family was also restored. (Genesis 41-43).

We grow through trials and tribulations through the faith God gives us. The churches in the New Testament were strengthened in faith and they grew. See Acts 16:5; 2 Corinthians 10:15 and Revelation 2:19—Your latter works will exceed your first.

1. **Faith must grow** — How do we have growing faith— active, God-inspired confidence in situations out of our control? It is our actions and attitude. It is not confidence in what we can do by ourselves. It is God-inspired confidence. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Draw on the confidence that God is the source of your strength. He deserves all credit and praise. If we want to flourish in our faith, see Hebrews 11:6. Faith is the way to please God
 - a. The purpose of our faith is to please God. It is the means by which we receive God. Remember the PURPOSE and PROMISE of faith.
 - b. Remember this promise: Philippians 4:19 – God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory.
 - c. Recognize the privilege of faith – Hebrews 12:1-2 – We have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Lay aside every weight. Run with endurance the race set before us. Fix your eyes on the author and finisher of our faith. God initiates, originates and completes our faith. We exercise it. We don't have to create it. He completes it. He perfects and completes our faith. He is not judging you. Philippians 1:6 – God is going to complete in you what he started.
 - i. Illustration of those who go to the gym with fancy gym outfits, but they rarely are seen exercising. We are called to participate in what God has started and what He will finish. While you have breath in your body, live and endure. You have to want you to grow.
2. **Faith must be demonstrated in increasing love for one another.** Jesus demonstrated love when He walked on this earth. Increasing love begins when my relationship with God gets stronger. Then, you are better able to connect with those around you. Your love for one another is increasing. I, in turn, have love that is increasing for my neighbor. John 15:12 - This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. We need God to give us the ability to love others—to love others as we love ourselves. When we accept God's love, we can

love ourselves correctly. Then we can love others as he commanded. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love is fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10). Loving one another is commanded, it is also completion. Jesus fulfilled what God commanded. When we love others, we are compassionate. I love you with the love of God.

3. **Faith that flourishes has enduring patience.** This faith does not fail in trials and tribulations. We have enduring patience. When you ask for patience, God allows situations that will call us to endure. God is not mad at you. Some of us are going through situations because we have to learn to have patience. He is strengthening you. Tribulations produce perseverance (Romans 5:3). It is not simply waiting it out, it is steadfast endurance in the Lord. It is going when the going gets tough. If you pray for more patience, expect tribulation. It is the Christian method to produce patience and endurance. You are better because of what God brought you through.
 - a. Suffering will either make or break you. Your faith has made you strong because you believed and had faith.
 - b. Some of us need to open the door. We may be fighting in our own strength. God has the training tools for you to grow. Looking back over 180+ years of history, this church (Second Baptist) has resilience because of what God pulled us through. Pastor stated that this year, he talked to 2-3 pastors that quit, shut the doors on the church and sold the property.

As we look at 2019, don't get to the place that we don't recognize that God is sovereign. That He is in control. Our faith in Him is what matters, despite what we see. We are a visual culture and that works against us. With all of the technology in the world, God wants you to have faith beyond what you can see. He wants you to trust Him in the most difficult of times. God give me the faith that matches what I am going through.

God gives us faith, but we have to use it. There were gifts we received for Christmas that we said we needed, but they are still in the box. We have access to faith that God has given us when we begin to walk by faith and not by what we see. Trust God for everything. We are challenged to trust God in all areas. When we trust God and have the courage to trust Him, we will find that our victory is right there. Even if it means surrendering to His will. Our victory is in the surrender.

The sweet spirit is knowing I can trust God in whatever the circumstance. Flourishing faith is found in the church where faith is growing, love is increasing and patience is enduring.

Discussion Questions and Follow-up:

1. Identify your faith Scripture for 2019, memorize it and use it when you are faced with trials.
2. What did you learn from this sermon about seeing your trials and circumstances through the eyes of faith? How will you apply what you learned when you face trials?
3. There was a challenging moment in the sermon when Pastor Washington shifted from the illustration of people in the gym who show up only to look good in their gym clothes but don't exercise to people showing up at church and looking good but not exercising faith in daily living. Reflect and discuss how as believers in Christ we can exercise our faith muscles.
4. How can we become better and not bitter through trials, tests and difficulties? Explain.
5. Give examples of when you have seen your love or the love of others increase during and after challenging circumstances. How is it possible for love to increase when we are challenged?