

How do we measure success? You see, being a successful farmer, isn't just about having the best looking crops, or even the highest yielding crops (for that matter)... The highest yielding crop could possibly be unprofitable because to get such a high yield, the resources have been poured into it (high rates of: fertiliser; insecticide; herbicide). And a crop gets to the stage where you're pouring so much into it, that you're not getting enough back, to cover the inputs...

And the most successful Cattleman,, is he the one who wins the prizes at the show? Or is he the one who knows how to produce kilograms of beef efficiently...

The most successful parent... Is that the one who can:

- breed the most children;
- breed the best looking kids (my mum did well);
- breed the most smartest kids (my dad did well);

Or, is it about:

- having the most kids who don't go off the rails;
- having kids that go on to really successful careers;
- our children coming to faith???

How do we measure success as a parent???

Or what about success in life? How do you measure success?

- Is the champion sports professional more successful than the person who's content to play sport for fun?
- Is the CEO of a corporation more successful than the janitor who vacuums his office, simply because the CEO makes 1000x more per hour???

What about producing stuff? how do you know you're successful?

- Is a teacher more successful if they produce 10 ‘A’ students in their class?
- Is a tradie more successful if they:
 - do a neater job;
 - gets the most jobs finished; or
 - can produce the most billable hours in the day?

How do we measure success?

We live in a world that likes to set goals and write strategic plans. And those who can achieve the goals: “You’re successful”, and those who **don’t** meet the quota – “You obviously need a performance review”...

What about a church?

When I first became a pastor of a church, I discovered that these ‘Godly men’ (pastors) had a real vanity problem... And I did too.

I mean, we all want to know that we’re successful, and somehow we need a yard-stick to measure that... If a person has left everything (career; home; hopes & dreams) – if they’ve left everything (in obedience to God), to go to Bible College and pastor a church, how does a pastor/missionary/chaplain measure success??? Is it worth it???

Do you know what Pastors talk about when they’re together at a pastor’s conference? They talk about you...

“How’s the church going Fred?”

“Yeah, going pretty good... 80 salvations last month. 400 people regularly at our services... Church is just growing and growing...”

You can imagine how inadequate I feel... “The only way I can get to 400, is if I count the flies”... And I’m not sure they’re listening...

How do you measure success?

I’ve told people in the past, “My aim, is to make myself redundant in the church”... And after listening to Andrew’s message & Jake’s message, maybe I just about am redundant... Is that how I measure success???

How do you know, if a church is successful?

Is it the number of:

- worshippers;
- likes on FaceBook;
- Salvations / month;
- size of its mission budget;
- the prestige of its latest album release;
- size of the youth group;
- number of miracles;
- the number of online listeners...
- the feeling of excitement

What is mark of a successful church?

Did you notice in the Bible reading, what the Apostle Paul considered “a success”???

... **Faith and love**...

Paul has a favourite trilogy he likes to use: Faith; Hope; and Love. And in today’s reading, **Faith** and **Love** is what he commends the Thessalonian church for, and he sets their faith and love commendation, in the grand scheme of the great **hope** we have – The glorious coming/appearing of The Lord Jesus and His mighty angels.

The success is a growing faith – like a vigorous organic growth in faith, and a growing in love for each other. And we’ll come back to that shortly, but we’d better begin at the beginning.

Today we begin a new series:

2nd Thessalonians is the second letter Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, but this itself is in dispute, as to whether we have the 1st and the 2nd letters the right way around. I can’t answer that, and I don’t think it really matters. But, it begins like this:

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

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

Isn’t that wonderful: The Lord our God, isn’t just the Father of Jesus – He’s **our** Father. Jesus taught us to pray “Our

Father”, didn’t He. Isn’t this incredible: the creator of the universe, we know Him as “Father”...

Sadly, some people don’t like to call God “Father” – it’s because their experience of their earthly father has been horrible, and they have dreadful memories of their earthly father... But the Lord God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus, is the **perfect** Father; He’s a **loving** Father; And He is **our** Father... And your earthly father may have been a:

- disappointment;
- drunk;
- violent;
- abuser;
- someone you could never trust...
- someone you never knew because he deserted you

But our Heavenly Father is **none** of those things. Please, do not judge our Heavenly Father by your experience of your earthly father.

In the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the mercy of God, the invitation, is to come to know our Heavenly Father as the perfect Father you never had...

My youngest son Ben, used to say to me, “You’re the 2nd best father I’ve got...” And I couldn’t really argue with that....

V3:

³ 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.

Alright, this is what he's boasting about. He'd tell all the other churches about it: "That Church in Thessalonica, you should see how their faith is so strong, and it's vigorous growth... And their love for each other – it's growing too."

But what sort of faith did they have, that he was ecstatic about?

Was it faith:

- to do miracles;
- raise the dead;
- heal the sick;
- faith to receive blessings;
- or even faith for provision...

No. V4:

⁴ 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.

You see, this is the greatest faith. And I'm going to say (quite bluntly), that this is the difference between a spiritual person, and a worldly person. A worldly person, has their mind fixed on earthly blessings, and so they 'believe for' stuff – faith to give me some physical benefit, whereas a Spiritual person, has a steadfast faith, no matter what...

For many people today, they're not interested in a gospel of eternal salvation. What they're looking for, is "What's in it for me today?" "What benefit am I going to get, by becoming a Christian?"

How's it going to:

- improve my life / standard of living?
- help me cope with the pressures of my career?
- fix my marriage/family
- improve my health;
- help me to live longer;
- give me satisfaction in life...

What benefit am I going to have by becoming a Christian?

Whereas Godly faith, is about steadfastness. It's **not** about "What I'm going to receive" – it's about "The one we love, because we know He loved us first"... And it's about sticking with The Lord (through the thick and the thin) because He's our everything...

Many preachers today, would have us believe that faith = current blessings, and that's a very appealing message to the fleshly man/woman. And so:

- if you're struggling financially, that's because you haven't got enough faith.
- If you're sick, you just need more faith. Or
- if you're suffering in life, with persecutions or afflictions, you just need to have more faith – you shouldn't be suffering...

You see, for a Christian to suffer, or be persecuted, that simply doesn't fit some people's mould of what being a Christian is about...

And we can see that Paul is using this Thessalonian church, as a good example to other churches – and he's telling them, have the sort of faith that these Thessalonians have...

When the questions arise:

If the Lord God almighty, is my Father, how come I'm being persecuted? Why is it, that those who have been faithful to God, are the ones who are suffering??? Have we done something wrong? Have we done something to displease God?

No. On the contrary – here's the example of the Thessalonian church...

And Paul does something, that I believe every bible teacher should be doing this day: Teaching us about faithful Christian living, **in line with what Jesus taught.**

Paul says that persecutions and sufferings are evidence that we are truly disciples of Jesus.

This is what he says:

He's talking about the persecutions and afflictions that they are enduring, and in V5:

⁵ 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

You know, today, we get so fixated on this life, and temporal blessings (temporary/worldly stuff) (temporal vs eternal), and in our land, where it's mostly pretty safe to be a Christian, in those odd times when persecutions and sufferings and afflictions arise, we start to think that this is strange...

Welcome to the real world, folks... Sufferings and persecutions are a normal part of Christian life. And to have a season when we're **not** suffering, that's not normal – that's abnormal.

1 Peter 4:12-14 (ESV)

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

It is a privilege to suffer for Christ, and it's **normal** to suffer for Christ. Jesus told us this, over and over again:

In the sermon on the mount:

Matthew 5:10-12 (ESV)

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It's the cost of discipleship. And Jesus warned the crowds, about the cost of being His disciple:

Luke 14:(ESV)

- **²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.**
- **Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**
- **any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

Now, that seems strange... Have you ever thought of suffering in this way? God's righteous judgment, is they are worthy to suffer for Christ. It's a privilege to suffer for Christ, because this is the way **of** Christ.

John 15: (ESV)

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world,

the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.

It is a privilege to suffer for Christ. Christ, is the suffering servant, and for us to be baptised into His death, means we also, enter into His suffering, knowing that we will also enter into His glory...

Righto:

Back to V5: ⁵ 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

And the “judgment of God”, here is a positive, and there is a negative. The positive, is that when disciples of Jesus suffer,

and remain steadfast in their faith, His righteous judgment, is “You’re worthy of the Kingdom of God”. Now, we’re not **made** worthy by suffering (we don’t earn our worthiness). We **prove** our worthiness through suffering.

On the day that Jesus returns, He will be glorified by His saints who have stood fast. And when a Christian suffers for the Lord, Jesus is glorified.

Throughout the book of Revelation, we hear about those who “overcome”. And in its context, to “overcome”, isn’t about beating our adversaries, or about escaping our predicament – it’s about steadfastness of faith – being unshaken in our faith, even unto death...

You see, in the face of persecution, the direction isn’t to retaliate, and it’s not to fight – it’s about steadfastness of faith. And it’s about getting on with the commission He has given us. We have a gospel of salvation to proclaim. We don’t have time for worldly distractions of physical preservation...

A great Spiritual truth, is that when Christians are persecuted, in the Power of the Holy Spirit, we go on doing good works, and proclaiming the name of the Lord Jesus, and in **this**, the Lord Jesus is glorified. And even if we **keep** getting persecuted, we **keep** doing good. And we continue to glorify Jesus, even unto death...

But that doesn’t mean that those who do the persecuting will prevail... their days are numbered.

And so, we come to the devastating judgment of God.

When disciples of Jesus are persecuted, does that mean God has forgotten them? Not at all.

Those who persecute the children of God, will get what's coming to them – it's just not us who pay them back. In Romans 12:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This also, is completely in line with what Jesus taught:

- Turn the other cheek
- The Son of Man, has authority to execute judgment.

Jesus said:

John 5:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

This is basic Christianity 1.0.1 – we don't fight; we don't retaliate; we don't take retribution into our own hands... What we **do**, is we do good; and we love our enemy; and we leave the judgment bit to God.

V⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ 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

Many people don't like to hear about the judgment of God. There's the age-old argument: Is God is love, then He could never send anybody to hell...

But the thing is, because God is a god of love, He is also a God of justice. And the justice of God, is if you make another suffer, you will suffer. And let's be clear here: The judged penalty for those who reject God, is described as "destruction" (complete ruin). And it's "eternal" – there's no end to it...

On the Day of Judgment (when Jesus returns), those who are excitedly waiting for the return of Jesus will be granted relief, whereas those who reject Jesus and don't want to have anything to do with Him, will have their wish granted...

They don't know God; love God; want to be with God, and their wish will be granted. They will hit the drafting-gate, and "You didn't choose Jesus, and therefore you have no part in His glory

V⁸ 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. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might

What's the great separator here? What sets the Thessalonians (who will glorify the Lord) – what sets them apart from the unbelievers (who do not obey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus)???

Faith. It's because they believed the testimony of the Apostles (the Gospel of Jesus Christ), and they're firm in it... That's what sets them apart – faith – steadfast faith...

Now, when it comes to the judgment of God, some preachers love to preach on it (hell; fire; and brimstone)... Others completely ignore it because they don't want to be offensive.

By working our way through whole books of the Bible, we are reminded of the Day of Judgment, just as often as God brings it up in His word. And each time that it's brought up, there's an application for us... Alright, it's not just about knowing there is a Day of Judgment... Because there's a Day of judgment, how do we live???

V¹¹ **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,¹² 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.

Now, “Christian living”, isn’t about what we do because we’re afraid of judgment. The way we live, is our response to the grace that God has shown us (in the Lord Jesus Christ)... As we live by the Spirit, our lives should be glorifying Jesus in us.

We have a calling. You have a calling. I have a calling. And so, let’s pray for each other – that we live, worthy of God’s calling, and that we may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power...

....

When you think of judgment, do you feel, “*Yeah get ‘em God – those evil people... You’ll get what’s coming to ya...*” If that’s the way you feel, you don’t have the heart of God.

Ezekiel 33:11 (ESV)

¹¹ ... As I live, declares the Lord YHWH, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live...

When we consider the coming judgment, the way of Christ, is to have a heart of compassion, and to have a love and a resolve, that wants to share the good news of Jesus, with those who are not yet saved. This, is the good that He would have us do – to love others enough (even those who are evil) (even

those who persecute us) – to love them enough to share Jesus with them.

Let's pray Paul's prayer:

¹¹ 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, ¹² 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.

Amen.