

I THESSALONIANS 1:1-2 INTRODUCTION!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we begin a new study here on Sunday mornings. I realize that your Bible probably opens to Ephesians since we spent so much time in that letter, but what a powerful study, so many lessons the Lord had for us.

And I believe the same is true with this letter to the Thessalonians. And it will take us a little time to get through this letter, there is so much the Lord has for us and once we complete this letter we will move on to II Thessalonians.

This morning we are going to have an introduction to this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. I think it is important to know about Thessalonica, what it was like because I think we can be encouraged in the days we are living in.

You see, many Christians today kind of throw their hands up in the air and are frustrated, discouraged and think there is no hope for our nation, there is no hope for our state, there is no hope for our communities, there is no hope for our families. In other words, they have lost ***HOPE!***

But when you look at Thessalonica and see what the people were like, what they were into and what God did, it has to encourage you. Please, please do not factor God out of any equation! Yes, with men these things are impossible, but with God all things are possible, never forget that or you will be discouraged, hopeless!

Now keep in mind that Thessalonica is a very ancient city and it was originally named Therma. The reason for that was because of the many hot springs that were around this area.

Then, in 316 B. C. we see Cassander, who was one of the four generals of Alexander the Great, and when Alexander died they divided the territory that Alexander had conquered by four and Cassander got Macedonia and he made Therma his home base.

He also renamed the city and called it Thessalonica in memory of his wife who was a half-sister to Alexander the Great.

Then, in 168 B. C., when Rome conquered Macedonia, Thessalonica was made the capital of that entire province.

So the city of Thessalonica was located in the Roman province of Macedonia, in the northern part of modern Greece and it was a thriving seaport city with a population of some 250,000 people during Paul's day.

Most of the people that lived there were Greeks but there were also a good number of Romans as well as a thriving Jewish community!

Today this city is called Thessaloniki, formerly it was Salonika. And its population today is some 400,000 people and it is still an important industrial and commercial city in modern Greece, only second to Athens in population!

Now there are a few reasons why this was such an important city. First of all, it was an important seaport city as Thessalonica was located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf (the Gulf of Salonica) which is a branch of the Aegean Sea.

Also, this city, one of its greatest assets, was that it was located on the major east-west highway of the Roman Empire linking Rome with the eastern regions of the Empire. This highway was called the Egnatian Way!

William Barclay explains the importance of this highway for us. He tells us,

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the arrival of Christianity in Thessalonica. If Christianity was settled there, it was bound to spread East along the Egnatian Road until all Asia [Minor] was conquered and West until it stormed even the city of Rome. The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was crucial in the making of it into a world religion.

- William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 181

So Thessalonica, besides its population of some 250,000 people had many others from many different areas coming and going through its gates you might say. And as you can imagine, immorality, the worship of many false gods was the norm in Thessalonica. In fact, the city of Thessalonica was only fifty miles from Mt. Olympus, the home of the Greek gods such as Zeus. Not only that but they worshiped their emperors as gods! That is what it was like until the light of the Gospel of Christ was brought to this city and then everything changed.

But how did the Gospel come to this city? First of all, as you may remember from our study in Acts, Paul and Barnabas, on their first missionary journey, sailed to the island of Cyprus and preached the Gospel there and then headed to Asia Minor where once again they brought the Gospel message to the southern and central regions of what is Turkey today. And many churches were established on his first missionary journey.

Then they returned to their home church in Antioch, which was located in Syria before Paul once again wanted to go out and see how those churches he started were doing.

But there was this problem. Barnabas wanted to bring his nephew John Mark with them again and Paul did not because John Mark left them on their first missionary journey. Paul did not want someone who bailed on them last time.

So a dispute arose and Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus and Paul took Silas and worked their way across Asia Minor. And in Lystra they picked up young Timothy and he joined Paul and Silas on this second missionary journey of Paul's.

Now as Paul was going through the region of Galatia, he first tried to bring the Gospel message to Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbid him. He then came to Mysia desiring to bring the Gospel message north to Bithynia but the Holy Spirit once again forbid Paul from going there.

Paul then moved westward to Troas by the Aegean Sea and as he was there we are told, **“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.”** Acts 16:9-10.

So they crossed the Aegean Sea and came to Philippi where Paul met Lydia and not only did Lydia get saved, but her household, her family as well.

As Paul continued sharing the Gospel message in Philippi a demon possessed girl who told people of their future followed Paul and said, **“... ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’”** Acts 16:17.

And she did this for many days and Paul had enough, God did not need the demonic world to proclaim His truth and so he cast this demon out of this girl and set her free.

Great, right? Wrong! She was a slave and her owners were now upset because they took away their business. If she could not tell the future any more, then this slave was of no use to them, they were losing money! So they grab Paul and Silas and bring them before the magistrates or judges and they arrested Paul and Silas, beat them and threw them in prison.

Now as Paul and Silas are in prison, they are singing and praising God. Can you imagine? They are in prison for serving the Lord faithfully, going where the Lord told them to go and instead of complaining and getting mad we are told that, “**. . . at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.**” Acts 16:25.

Did you see that? The other prisoners were listening to these men pray and worship God and then, at midnight the earth shook, the prison doors were opened, the chains on these prisoners fell off.

Now when the guard saw this, he was ready to kill himself because he thought all the prisoners escaped and he would have to serve out their sentence, each prisoner that escaped and thus, it was better to die than face a fate like that!

But none of the prisoners escaped, they were touched by God through Paul and Silas, and the guard, upon seeing this and hearing Paul and Silas prior to all this about the true and living God, said, “**. . . ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’**” Acts 16:30.

And Paul told this man, “You must take this course, read this book, sign this paper showing that you are now a member of this prison church!” No, he did not say that. We see that Paul tells him, “**. . . ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’**” Acts 16:31. Not only was this guard saved, but so was his family!

Then, in the morning the magistrates or judges ordered Paul and Silas to be released but Paul wanted these men to come to them and personally let them go, not to do this in secret.

You see, Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and what they did to these two men could have brought about serious repercussions both for these magistrates and the city itself from Rome! So they came to Paul and Silas and pleaded with them to leave Philippi and after visiting with Lydia they headed for Thessalonica.

From Philippi to Thessalonica it was about a 100-mile journey along the Egnatian Way. And keep in mind they were just beaten in Philippi and so this must have been a difficult journey for them, a painful one to make!

In Thessalonica Paul spent three Sabbaths preaching in the Synagogue showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets spoke regarding the Messiah. Listen to what we are told as Paul, Silas and Timothy arrive in Thessalonica.

In Acts 17:1-3 we are told, **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’”**

So as they leave Philippi, heading southwest, they are traveling on the Egnatian Way, an important Roman highway, as I have said, and the first big city they hit is Amphipolis (am-fip’-o-lis), which was some 33 miles from Philippi.

From there they traveled some 30 miles to Apollonia (ap-o-lo’-ni-a). And finally, another 40 miles to Thessalonica which was the capital of Macedonia with a population of around 250,000 people. It was probably a three-day journey for them to reach this city.

Keep in mind that Thessalonica was a Roman colony and thus, they enjoyed the benefits from that. Also, a city which was a Roman colony would gradually adopt Roman laws and customs and ways but Rome allowed them to keep some of their customs, which made these areas surrender without a fight because of the benefits they would receive from Rome like I have said.

Now we see that the first place that Paul goes to is the Synagogue because salvation comes to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles and there were Gentiles that had come to the synagogue as well. Paul had a passion for the Jews to hear and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior but as time went by they hardened their hearts to their Messiah, to Jesus!

And as you can see, Paul's heart broke because his fellow Jews were rejecting the Messiah and they were going to die in their sins! Thus, to the Jews he preached Christ crucified, to the Gentiles he preached Christ crucified, he gave them the Gospel! You don't change the Gospel for the audience you have, it is the same for everyone!

In Romans 1:16 Paul said, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**" The Gospel is the power of God to salvation because it brings you to the One who can save you from your sins, it brings you to Jesus!

Now let's look at what Paul did and keep in mind that he only spent three Sabbaths teaching them, he was only with them maybe one month and yet he spoke of deep doctrinal issues like the Rapture of the Church, the Tribulation Period, the Antichrist and-so-on! We will see that as we go through this letter to the Thessalonians and then on into II Thessalonians!

The first thing that Paul did was that he "**... reasoned with them from the Scriptures.**" Acts 17:2. The word "**reasoned**" is from the Greek word DIALEGOMAI, (dee-al-eg'-om-ahee) from which we get our English word "dialogue" from. "*... There was exchange, questions and answers. He dialogued with them 'from the Scriptures.'*" (Hughes)

I think it is so important that we dialogue with people about our Lord and what I mean by that is that we ask them questions, they ask us questions and we can answer them with the Scriptures because God's Word is the final authority. Today many are embarrassed to say, ***“Because God's Word says . . .”***

I think it is important that they are reasoning things out in their own mind, that they are thinking these things through and we can help them as we share with them the Word of God!

Now Paul not only “**. . . reasoned with them from the Scriptures**” but there was some “**explaining**” that Paul did as he shared his faith. (Acts 17:3) He did not just say believe what I say but he pointed them to the Scriptures once again to be the final authority! This Greek word, DIANOIGO, (dee-an-oy'-go) “*. . . literally means ‘opening’ . . . Paul opened the Scriptures with clarity and simplicity.*” (Hughes)

You don't have to use big words to show how smart you are, all you need to do is speak the truth, open up the Scriptures to people so that they may see Jesus!

In other words, you share with others what God has shown you through His Word. It is not what you think it says that you share with them; it is what God's Word says that you share with them so that their joy may be full like our joy is full in the Lord!

So Paul “**. . . reasoned with them from the Scriptures**” and he was “**explaining**” or opening up the Scriptures to them and lastly he was “**. . . demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead . . .**” (Acts 17:3)

The Greek word for “**demonstrating**” is PARATITHEMI, (par-at-ith'-ay-mee) and it is a word that speaks of “‘*Giving evidence*’ (NASB; ‘*proving*,’ NIV), which means ‘to place beside’ or ‘to set before.’” (Hughes) Paul was presenting the evidence of Jesus being the Messiah to those who were there, bringing the things that He did in His life alongside the Scriptures to show that He was the fulfillment of what the Old Testament Prophets spoke of regarding the Messiah!

One of the big problems today is that we have churches who believe that we must be seeker sensitive and thus, we can't give them the Word of God, it is too difficult for them. We will just give them a little here and a little there. That is not at all what Paul did. And keep in mind none of them were believers, some did know the Old Testament Scriptures, but they rejected Jesus as the Messiah and there were also Gentiles present who did not know these things and yet Paul had a dialogue with them, he opened up the Scriptures to them, and he gave the evidence to show why Jesus is the Messiah!

Think about this for a minute. In I Thessalonians and II Thessalonians, almost all the major doctrines of the Christian faith are spoken of! Incredible, this young church was given solid food, healthy doctrine and not junk food or unhealthy doctrine and they grew, matured in the faith because of the diet they were taking in!

And in regards to end times and that being too difficult for people, hogwash. Yes, I said it, **hogwash!** In I Thessalonians Paul deals with the Rapture of the Church, something that many Christians are ignorant about. And when we get to II Thessalonians we will be looking at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, His return to set up His Kingdom!

This is not fluff, this is meat and yet Paul thought that it was important for this young church to learn about this so they can be strengthened in the faith and encouraged in the faith. I think the same is true for us, that is why the Lord included these letters in His Word!

Now the result of his work there in Thessalonica is told to us in Acts 17:4-9, **“And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.”**

As Paul preached the Word of God with them, as Paul shared the Word of God with them, as Paul expounded on the Word of God with them, some of the people were saved, both Jews and Greeks or Gentiles and many women came to the faith!

It was not Paul’s fancy speech. It was not Paul’s illustrations. It was not the skit that Paul put on that brought them to saving faith. Then what brought them to saving faith?

It was the Word of God! Paul put it like this in Hebrews 4:12-13, **“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”**

God's Word is living, it is active and when we hear it, God's Word sinks deep into our hearts and lives. It is not only living but it is also powerful, so powerful that it can take people who are spiritually dead in their sins and bring them to life as they come to Jesus. You see, Paul also said, **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."** Romans 1:16.

God's Word is powerful enough to bring us to that saving faith! Thus, the enemy, the Devil keeps pastors from teaching from the Word of God or severally compromises what is being taught! They give a feel-good message instead of just sharing God's Word and letting the Holy Spirit bring conviction, correction, encouragement, hope and-so-on to God's people!

We also need to keep in mind that as many as came to saving faith, not all were persuaded by what Paul had to say. Why is that? Because everyone has a choice to make, to be open to what the Holy Spirit is saying or you can harden your heart to what He is saying. Those that were open received Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives and those who rejected these things remained lost in their sins.

Now those Jews who rejected what Paul said, the ones who were rejecting Jesus, caused this uproar in Thessalonica. Jason was a Christian in Thessalonica whose house seems to have been a center for the church to meet. When the evil men from the marketplace did not find Paul and Silas there, they attacked Jason himself, and some brethren who were with him.

Thus, they dragged Jason, a Jewish believer, out of the house. Now what is the charge? Listen carefully, **"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus."**

Now that is not exactly correct. The world is upside down now, sin has distorted what God has created, sin has turned things upside down and now Jesus, through His disciples are turning this world right side up! Then why do people fight against this so strongly? Because the light of God exposes their darkness, they don't like the light. Thus, instead of turning to Jesus they try to put out the light.

What about today, why don't we see Christians turning this nation upside down anymore? Listen to what is said in this article and, as you will see, it fits into what we are seeing at alarming rates today in churches. We are told,

“If you wonder why the first century church turned the world upside down and why we do not, it is because they preached the gospel, and we do not.” (Quote from “Hearts for the Lost”)

The gospel that was preached in the first century *offended* the establishment Political Leaders (Rome) and the establishment Religious Leaders (of Jerusalem).

One result from their preaching (aside from people converting to faith in Jesus Christ) was that these followers of the Way (Christians) who preached the gospel, were labeled “traitors, treasonous and sacrilegious” by the State and, “heretics, law breakers and insubordinate” by the Religious Leaders. There was a price to pay for preaching this message.

Their preaching was not State Custom compliant (the custom of worshiping Caesar and the gods) nor was it Religious Tradition compliant (the tradition of loveless legalistic dead ritualistic rote religion).

Their preaching of JESUS IS THE WAY THE TRUTH THE LIFE and REPENT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND and SALVATION ONLY IN CHRIST JESUS THE LORD actually offended the government and the religion! (“The State” and “The Church”, we would say today.) Their gospel threatened the State’s power and control over everyone as they forced allegiance to the gods and to Caesar as lord. Their gospel threatened the Religious Establishment’s power and control over everyone as they forced allegiance to the Religious Establishment and Leaders and Traditions and Rules.

The first century gospel turned the world upside down! What does that mean? The State flipped out when the Christians preached Jesus as Lord and they declared their allegiance to Him alone! (and not to the State or their System!) The Religious Establishment flipped out when the Christians preached Jesus as Lord and declared their allegiance to Him alone! (and not to the Religious Leaders or their System of manmade rules!)

The people flipped out when they heard that Jesus is the Way– NOT Rome or Caesar’s decrees, NOT the Temple in Jerusalem or the Pharisees’ traditions. JESUS IS THE WAY! Many believed and followed Jesus Christ THE WAY.

The people flipped out when they heard that the KINGDOM OF GOD is here and it is NOT the rule of Government’s Caesar in Rome and it is NOT the rule of the Religious Pharisees in Jerusalem. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS the rule of JESUS CHRIST! In the hearts of His people! Many believed and entered the KINGDOM OF GOD.

The people flipped out when they heard that salvation is NOT through the State (Government) and it is NOT through the “Temple in Jerusalem” (the “Church”) (Established Religion). SALVATION IS IN JESUS CHRIST! Many believed and received SALVATION IN CHRIST ALONE.

Why is it different today? Why are not the Christians turning the world upside down today as in the first century? . . .

The gospel that is preached now is weak because it leaves out the fact that “JESUS IS THE WAY” means that State Government and Religion are NOT the way.

The gospel that is preached now is weak because it leaves out the fact that “THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND” means that USA, the world, the government, the presidents, politics, political leaders, parties, laws, constitutions, nations and The Institutional Church is NOT the Kingdom.

The gospel that is preached now is weak because it leaves out the fact that “SALVATION IS ONLY IN CHRIST JESUS” means that it is NOT in Government or politics and it is NOT in Church or Religion or Traditions.

One reason the preachers of the modern gospel do not want to say these things is because they do not believe the truth that the first century believers believed. The other reason is that preaching the truth as the first century believers did, would jeopardize their standing in the world, i.e., the Establishment: politics, government, the State, The Church, religion, “important people” . . . all that is the Establishment of the world system and society. Thus allegiance is given to The State and to The Church, and not exclusively to Christ. And the true gospel is not preached. . . .

- <http://witnessingencouragement.wordpress.com/2012/07/02/they-turned-the-world-upside-down/>

I would agree. That is exactly what we are seeing! You see, we want the world to like us. We want to grow our church. We want this and we want that but there is not that allegiance to Christ but to things. Just as sin affects those who are around it, we as Christians should affect those we are around, only this time for good! We should make a difference in this world! We need to light up for Christ and not let the darkness cover our light! We need to bring the Gospel and not water it down or change it but give the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world!

Now for Jason, he was in trouble. You see, it is not that they just turned their world upside down, but Jason was harboring these criminals who were saying there is another King, Jesus! You see, Caesar was King, and they had come to believe that Caesar was a god!

Now in verse 9 we see Jason and the rest set free. How can that be? It was simple; Jason and some of the other believers had to leave what we might call a security deposit. In other words, if these men came back to stay with Jason and he did not tell them or report that information to the authorities he would lose this money!

Thus, we are going to see them leave Thessalonica, leave the house of Jason and maybe Paul's words in I Thessalonians 2:17-18 reflect his anguish over this issue. He said, "**But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us.**"

So, because of all the trouble in Thessalonica, they sent Paul and Silas away and they traveled some 50 miles southwestward to Berea where once again they shared Jesus with the people. The results, **“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.”** Acts 17:11-13.

Once again Paul was in trouble and the people sent Paul away and he heads south to Athens but Silas and Timothy stay in Berea for a time. In Athens Paul calls for Silas and Timothy to return and while in Athens he has a meeting with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers and Paul picks up on their many gods, especially the altar to the unknown god and Paul wants them to know this unknown God, Jesus!

As Paul concluded, we are told in Acts 17:32-34, **“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”**

Not much fruit there in Athens and Paul is going to head down to Corinth, a wicked and immoral city and will spend the next 18 months or 1½ years there sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and establishing the church there!

And Paul sends Timothy back to Thessalonica as well as sending Silas from Athens to Macedonia, possibly to Philippi. And in I Thessalonians chapter 3 we are told of Paul sending Timothy to them to see how their faith was doing. We are told, **“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith . . . For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.”** I Thessalonians 3:1-2, 5.

And the report that Timothy brought back to Paul was very encouraging. He wrote, **“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?”** I Thessalonians 3:6-10.

Paul was encouraged by their faith and yet, he knew there were some things that were lacking and he wanted to help them to grow in the Lord. Persecution brought some discouragement to them. There were those spreading lies about Paul and his companions. And thus, Paul wanted to help them to grow and any pastor should have that same heart for his people, that he wants to see them grow and mature in the faith!

Now I am not going to get into a discussion about who wrote this letter because we are told in the very first verse. There is a lot of speculation out there and people like to make a big deal out of nothing, I guess it makes them feel important, but I have no doubt that Paul wrote this letter.

We have the early church authorities that stated that Paul was the author of this letter. Men like Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin. Also, Paul wrote this letter from Corinth and it was written around 50 A. D. or 51 A. D.

Now if Galatians was written in 50 A. D., that means I Thessalonians is either Paul's first or second letter he wrote that became part of the Bible, God's Word. Of This G. Campbell Morgan tells us,

This letter is full of interest because it is certainly among the first of those which have been preserved for us from Paul. It was the first he wrote to European Christians, and in it the fundamental things of the Christian life are very clearly set forth.

- G. Campbell Morgan

Now, as I you have seen, on Sunday mornings, as we go through books of the Bible, we take our time and we try to glean all we can from these books or letters. We will do the same with this one as well, I Thessalonians.

Before we get to the verses we will be looking at this morning, let me show you how we will divide this letter up. It divides up like this,

First Paul looks at the church – How it was born – I Thessalonians 1

How it grew – I Thessalonians 2

How it was established – I Thessalonians 3

Practical lessons on how the church is to walk - I Thessalonians 4 & 5

As seen in:

In holiness – I Thessalonians 4:1-8
In love – I Thessalonians 4:9-10
In honesty – I Thessalonians 4:11-12
In hope – I Thessalonians 4:13-18
In light – I Thessalonians 5:1-11
In gratitude – I Thessalonians 5:12-13
In obedience – I Thessalonians 5:14-28

So we have a lot of ground to cover in the next several months or so and the thing I want you to keep in mind is that Paul spent less than 1 month in this city teaching them, three Sabbaths, and yet look at the deep things he taught.

And as they heard the Word of God, as they applied the Word of God to their lives, by the empowering of God's Spirit upon them, their faith was so radical that what took place in their lives spread all over the place!

Remember, it was a town that had people coming and going and as people passed through, they took with them what they saw, what they heard, so things spread quickly about their faith in Jesus and many came to know the Lord through them.

With that as our introduction, let's pick up reading in I Thessalonians chapter 1 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

I THESSALONIANS 1

VERSES 1-2

Remember that Paul, Silas or Silvanus and Timothy ministered in Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey, they were a team and Luke the physician was also with them. Paul did not consider himself as more important than these other men who worked with him. They were all servants of Jesus!

Now Silas was probably a Hellenistic Jew and Timothy was Paul's "son in the faith." Because they all worked together in spreading the Gospel in this city, Paul includes them in his introduction because the people were aware of their love for God and the love they had for the people of Thessalonica.

And please understand that this is a letter written to a specific church, people who Paul knew and loved and we are listening in on what he was saying to them. Now, in saying that some may feel that this is not for us, that it was for a specific church and not for us today!

Please understand that the Scriptures are written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and thus, what God gave to Paul was not just for this local church, but also for believers in general, throughout the ages.

Yes, there are some instances in Paul's writings that are very specific for that day, like women wearing head coverings. But also, may we not negate the lessons that God has for us! Remember what Paul said in II Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

All Scripture is profitable for us and thus, may we read it, study it and apply it to our lives!

After Paul introduces himself and the men who they knew in Thessalonica, he tells us who he is writing to, “**the church**” which is in Thessalonica! It is the Greek word, EKKLESIA, (ek-klay-see’-ah) and it means “to call out” or “the called out ones.” I like that because we, as the church, have been called out of the world into the Kingdom of light, the Kingdom of God. And the same was true of the Thessalonians. They came out of a pagan world into the light of God and what a transformation it was. And we will see that as we go through this letter!

And in this first verse Paul speaks of the “**Lord Jesus Christ**” twice, and to me, that is important! That one phrase speaks of the major aspects of the Lord’s redemptive work in our lives!

First of all, the word “**Lord**” in the Greek is KURIOS, (koo’-ree-os) and it speaks of Him as creator, as sovereign ruler. In other words, He made us and thus, He has the right to rule over us! That is important for us to understand.

Not only is He Lord, a title, but His name is “**Jesus.**” In the Greek, it is IESOUS (ee-ay-sooce’) and we see this name given to Him before He was born. In Matthew 1:21 we are told, “**And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**”

In fact, His name is His mission. Jesus is the Greek word from the Hebrew word Yeshua or Joshua, which means *YAHWEH IS OUR SALVATION* or *YAHWEH HAS BECOME OUR SALVATION*.

It is just as Peter proclaimed in Acts 4:12, **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** But this One who would be born to Mary not only would testify of God’s salvation, but would Himself be that salvation. By His own work, He would save His people from their sins.

And lastly, Paul speaks of **“Christ”** not His last name but who He is, the anointed One, the Messiah, the One promised by God to fulfill His plan of redemption!

May you have that kind of relationship with Him. That He is Lord over your life and He has brought to you the gift of Salvation that you have received from the Anointed One, the Messiah!

We also see this mentioned twice in this first verse, **“God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Why does Paul do this. Paul is showing us the equality of Jesus with the Father, that Jesus is God just as the Father is God. Not two different God’s, we are not polytheistic, but one God manifested in three distinct persons; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

A great Old Testament verse that shows Jesus is God is in Isaiah 44:6-7, where we read, **“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them.’”**

Notice, **“Yahweh, the King of Israel”** and **“His Redeemer, the Yahweh of hosts.”** The Father is God and Jesus is God and in the New Testament, Jesus puts it this way in John 10:30, **“I and My Father are one.”**

Then why doesn't Paul just say that Jesus is God? When you look at the Greek structure of this sentence, he does. On this Heibert tells us, "Paul's construction, which unites the two under the government of the one preposition in (en), places the two names side by side on a basis of equality. It is a clear witness to his conviction concerning the deity of Jesus Christ."

When you look at the totality of the Scriptures, to try and deny the deity of Jesus Christ means you have to deny what the Scriptures are clearly teaching, that Jesus is God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, our Immanuel – God with us!

As Paul continues on we see him speak of what some call the Siamese twins of the New Testament, "**grace and peace.**" And Paul uses this phrase several times in his letters. And as you can see as you read his epistles or letters, grace is always first and then peace. Why is that?

Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-2, "**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**" We need to make peace *with* God through Jesus Christ and then we can experience the peace *of* God in our life as we go through various trials and tribulations, the storms of life that will come!

Grace is God's unmerited favor towards us. He gives to us eternal life not on the basis that we deserve it, we don't, but because He loves us and extends that gift to us.

And, as I have said, once you experience the grace of God then you can experience the peace of God in your life. Not an absence of storms or problems, but a peace that surpasses all understanding as you are going through the storms of life!

And then Paul says in verse 2, “**We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.**” Wow, is that what flows from our lives, that we pray for each other. And when I say pray for each other I am speaking of lifting each up in prayer and thanking God for each other, not praying that God would smash them! You see, we should pray for each other.

I realize that we have differences, and you might not agree with everything I do or say, if you did, that would be weird. And we are not going to agree with each other on everything, but can we pray for each other, lift each other up in prayer that God would bless and use us for His glory!

This truly was the heart of Paul. In Philippians 1:3-5 Paul wrote, “**I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.**” May we have that same love for the brethren, praying for them and being thankful that God has brought them into our lives!

Keep in mind that Paul spent less than a month with the people of Thessalonica, establishing the church, and when he left he was run out of town! And yet Paul had a deep love for these people and their new-found faith in Christ and he thanks God for them and he lifts them up in prayer just as Silas and Timothy were doing! Maybe that is one of the reasons this church stood strong and shined brightly, they were prayed for!

As I close this morning I hope you have an understanding of who Paul was writing to and his deep love for these people. Next time we will be looking at this labor of love the Thessalonian believers had as they were serving the Lord.

I will close with this for you to think about. We are told,

I read about a young boy who had been naughty. During family devotions the father prayed for his son and mentioned a number of bad things the boy had done. Soon afterward the mother heard the 6-year-old sobbing. When she asked what was wrong, the boy cried out, “Daddy always tells God the bad things about me. He never tells Him the good things I do!”

What happened to that child underscores a shortcoming that is common to many of us. Instead of recognizing the good in people, we tend to notice their faults. We could learn from the example of the apostle Paul. In his letter to his spiritual sons and daughters in Thessalonica, he wrote, “We give thanks to God always for you all” (v.2). He remembered their “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope” (v.3). He told them that because they “received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,” they were an example to others (vv.6-7). He said that from them “the word of the Lord has sounded forth . . . in every place” (v.8). Paul’s words must have encouraged them and spurred them on to even greater service for the Lord.

Let’s be more ready to commend than to condemn. When we see good in others, let’s tell them. It will encourage them, and that’s exactly what they need.

- Richard De Haan

May we be able to say, “. . . To the church of . . . [you fill in the blank] in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” I Thessalonians 1:1-2.