

## **I THESSALONIANS 1**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God, and we begin this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica.

Let me share some background information and then we will get to our text this evening.

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.

In Paul's day some 250,000 people lived there, most of them Greeks, but many Romans and a thriving Jewish community also called Thessalonica home.

Not only was this city an important seaport city but it also was located on the major land travel route, the Egnatian Way, which connected Rome with the Orient.

Today this city still exists with a population of some 300,000 people and it is called Thessaloniki, (formerly Salonika).

Thus, this city had many people coming and going through its gates and of this William Barclay makes this interesting point regarding the strategic location of this city. 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

Before we get to our study this evening I do want to share the events leading up to Paul going to Thessalonica, it will help us with the study of this letter.

First of all, if you remember from our Acts study, 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 finally, Paul had enough. You see, 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 Paul and Silas took away their business. If she could not tell the future anymore, 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 and at midnight they felt the earth shake under their feet, I feel like signing! And then the prison doors were opened and the chains on these prisoners fell off.

And 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 sentences, each prisoner that escaped and thus, it was better to die then 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 all that Paul and Silas were saying and singing about the true and living God, said to them, “. . . **‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’**” Acts 16:30.

And 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!

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.

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.”**

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!

But what was happening in Thessalonica?

Was their faith real?

Did the persecution against them weaken their faith?

Paul wanted to know, and he sent Timothy back to find out and while Timothy is heading to Thessalonica, (I Thessalonians 3:1-2), like I said, Paul goes to Corinth.

Now as Timothy returns, (Acts 18:5), he is going to share with Paul what was going on in Thessalonica, share about their faith. This is what Timothy told Paul, **“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.

What great news Timothy brought back to Paul! Their faith was strong, and we are going to see how that was possible in our study this evening.

So we see that Paul wrote this letter from Corinth in around A. D. 50 or 51.

If Galatians was written in A. D. 50 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 some may wonder how this letter even applies to us today, almost 2,000 years later. And there are some that feel God’s Word has to be updated for the days we are living in.

All I can say to that is ***FOOLISHNESS!***

Almighty God, the One who knows the beginning from the end, knows exactly what we need today and what was written in the past is applicable to us today because man has not changed. The things he was dealing with back then, we deal with today!

And think about this for a minute. The believers in Thessalonica were young in the Lord and they were living in a very dangerous time, a dangerous world!

With the immorality, the rising up of Rome against Jews and ultimately Christians, things were not easy. They were a light shining in a very dark world and the darkness was going to try and extinguish the light!

Maybe it is just me, but I think we are living in a very dangerous world as well. We see the rise of immorality in this nation. We see the violence and hatred if you don't agree with the immorality that is taking place. We see wars and rumors of wars. We see diseases. We see all kinds of cynicism and distrust of the political system. We see drugs and alcohol on the rise. We see mental illness rising. We see suicide rising. In other words, there is a lot of chaos that is going on in our nation and in the world!

So what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians is appropriate for us as well. These words that Paul speaks to them, the Holy Spirit is speaking to us to encourage us in the days we are living in.

I have broken this letter up as follows:

**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*

Then, in chapters 4 and 5 Paul gives us practical lessons of –

**How the church is to walk**

*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 few weeks, 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.

I think what Paul did goes against what the Seeker-friendly churches are doing today, as well as many other churches, watering down the Word of God to make it less offensive and make people comfortable while Paul taught them the deep things of God and they grew, they matured in the faith as we see their walk flow from what has taken place in their heart!

And 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.

With that said, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 1, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word.



## I THESSALONIANS 1

### VERSE 1

I like how Paul starts out here because he is not taking the credit for the work, but it was a team effort. You see, 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.

Yes, the body of Christ is made of individuals and yet, we are all part of the same body or team. We are working together for a cause, to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world!

Silas was probably a Hellenistic Jew and Timothy was Paul's "*son in the faith.*"

Thus, 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.

We also see that this letter is to the church in Thessalonica, not a building, but the people, that is the church and the reason they are called the church is because they are *IN* God the Father *THROUGH* the Lord Jesus Christ. I will expound a little more on that last phrase in a minute, it is important.

But first I want to talk about what is Paul's customary opening to his letters, as he speaks of grace and peace!

The grace of God that is given to us through Jesus must first be received before we can experience the peace of God in our lives.

I know I keep going back to these verses in Romans, but they are important.

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!

The peace that the Scriptures speak of are not an absence of problems or a carefree life. It is a peace that surpasses all human understanding because this peace is based in Christ and apart from Him there is no true peace! It is a peace in the midst of turmoil or persecution!

Now this phrase, **“the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

What we see here is that Paul is using the Savior’s full title, *the Lord Jesus Christ*. That combines in one phrase all the major aspects of His redemptive work. Let me show you what I mean.

The word **“Lord”** is describing Him as the creator and sovereign ruler. In other words, since He has made us or created us, He has the right to rule over us – ***HE IS GOD!***

Paul said in Philippians 2:10-11, **“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

The word **“Jesus”** or really the Hebrew word *YESHUA* speaks of, ***YAHWEH IS SALVATION OR THE LORD IS SALVATION!***

And then **“Christ”** not His name but it is a title that means ***THE ANOINTED ONE!*** And it is speaking of Him being the Messiah, the one promised by God to fulfill His plan of Redemption!

And this is key because there are those today who are trying to deny the deity of Jesus or deny that Jesus is God. If He is not Almighty God, then we are in trouble, we are still in our sins because only God can take away our sins!

Thus, Paul shows 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; the Father, the Son, and 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 put it this way in John 10:30, **“I and My Father are one.”**

Not the same person, but one in essence!

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.”

Thus, 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!*

#### VERSES 2-4

This is amazing to me, his love for these believers in Thessalonica! Why do I say that?

Keep in mind that Paul spent less than a month with the people of Thessalonica, establishing the church there. And when he left, he was run out of town!

And yet Paul had a deep love for these people and their newfound 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!

And the amazing thing is that when someone comes to Christ, they are immediately adopted into the family of Christ and there is that oneness that we have in Christ. And that is what we see here with Paul and these Thessalonian believers!

And then Paul expounds on what he sees in their life.

First of all, let me ask you this. What does faith produce in our lives?

Paul tells us that faith produces work because without it our faith is empty, it is dead.

That is exactly what James said as he wrote in James 2:14-18, **“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”**

This is not speaking of how we are saved for we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Then what is Paul and James saying?

They are saying that saving faith is never alone, but it is manifested in the things that we do and the things that we say. True faith will be manifested in our lives!

Then Paul speaks of their **“labor of love.”** And Paul speaks of AGAPE love and that should cause us to labor. The Greek word that Paul uses for **“labor”** is KOPOS, (kop’-os) and it speaks of toil, pains, it “implies toil that is strenuous and sweat-producing.”

We are teaching Christians today that they are kings to be served and not servants to serve, and thus, a few people do the church work.

Many times there are more spectators than players and there should be no spectators in the body of Christ!

But not in Thessalonica, they had a love that caused them to labor, to work hard for the Lord, ministering to the body of Christ.

If your labor is not done out of love, then it won’t last, you will stop, drop out, do nothing because you are doing it for the wrong reasons!

Then Paul speaks of “**patience of hope**” and the question I will ask you is this. Why does hope produce patience or long-suffering endurance in us?

Because our hope is in the Lord, that He will see us through the most difficult of times and in the end, He will bring us home to glory!

And then Paul speaks of our “**election by God.**”

And this is where many get confused.

Yes, the Scriptures clearly teach that God chooses us, Divine Election!

In Ephesians 1:4-6 Paul tells us, “**just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.**”

Jesus said in John 15:16, “**You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.**”

And here is where Reformed Theology or Calvinism comes in and they say that you don’t have a choice in the matter. If God has elected you, then you will be saved. If God has not elected you, then you won’t be saved, you don’t have a choice in the matter. In other words, you don’t have a free will, it is all the choice of God who goes to heaven and who goes to Hell!

Not exactly. And truthfully, it is not even close. The reason I can say that with such confidence is because I am not going to pick a verse here and pick a verse there and leave out others that will contradict what I am believing.

You see, Jesus said in John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**

In Joshua 24:15 we see Joshua tell us, **“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”**

And in Revelation 22:17 we are told, **“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”**

Here we clearly see we have a choice to make. God does not force us to come to Him.

So what is the answer, Divine Election or Free Will?

Yes!

I may not fully understand it, be able to comprehend it with my finite mind, but it is what the Bible teaches and thus we must believe it by faith that we are chosen by God and we have a free will to receive Him into our lives.

And here's the thing. I think God has chosen all of us and it is up to us to choose if we want to come to Him. If we don't, well, then our name will be taken out of the book of life! We see that in Revelation 3:5, where we are told, "**He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**"

The bottom line is this. God knows who will come to Him and who won't. But it is our choice otherwise God would not be righteous; He would not be fair if only those He has chosen could ever be saved.

And here's the thing. How do you know if you are elected or not?

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you are and if you reject Him, then you are not!

The believers in Thessalonica were elected by God and now Paul is going to show us how this was manifested in their lives, that their faith was real!

Now let me make this comparison to show you how Paul knew they were elected, they were saved. And the answer to that is simple, there was a change in their life. When you come to Christ God will transform your life inwardly and that inward working of God overflows in our actions and in our words. There is a change that people can see!

Put I Thessalonians 1:3 next to I Thessalonians 1:9-10 and you will see what I mean. And we will dig into this more as we read on, but I want you to see what Paul saw in their lives, this change.

*Your work of faith (v. 3)*

*Your labor of love (v. 3)*

*Your patience of hope (v. 3)*

*You turned to God from Idols (v. 9)*

*To serve the living and true God (v. 9)*

*To wait for His Son from heaven (v.10)*

So let's read on and see how this is played out for us, this radical change that Jesus brought to these Thessalonians!



VERSE 5

The Gospel message does not change nor does the Word of God. And yet, I am amazed at the number of people that get sucked into false teaching, false doctrine that goes outside of the Word of God.

Let me share this example with you and then I will show you why this is wrong, and it is really pretty easy to figure it out, but many will follow. We are told,

Welcome to the New Message from God. Remarkably, across time and a long and perhaps mysterious journey in life, you have arrived here. You have found the New Message from God or perhaps it has found you. It is no accident that this is so.

God has spoken again. There is a New Message from God in the world. This is the miracle of God's love and communication for humanity unfolding in our time, and you are amongst the first to know about this.

The New Message from God is an original communication from God to all people in the world. This is a gift of communication and revelation for people of all nations and faiths, given now to a literate world of global communication and growing global awareness.

The New Message is not for one tribe, one nation or one faith group alone. It is God's communication to the whole world.

This communication has the power to ignite the spiritual heart of humanity, to sound God's calling for unity amongst the world's nations and religions and to prepare humanity for a radically changing world and for its destiny in a larger universe of intelligent life.

The New Message was delivered over a period of more than 37 years to the man Marshall Vian Summers. He has walked a long and arduous journey to receive God's New Message and bring it to you and to all who can receive it. He is a humble man, sent into the world for this purpose, to be the Messenger for the New Message from God.

- <http://bit.ly/34K0QXR>

Is God giving us a new message? Absolutely not!

Just two verses to show you what I mean. In Hebrews 1:1-2 we are told, **“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”**

God has spoken to us through Jesus and thus, His Word is finished. We are not to add to the Word of God or take away from it and yet, these spiritual gurus are leading people away from God and we in the church, need to be careful because there are many out there waving you in their direction instead of the direction of God!

And one of the problems in the church today is that people look at God's Word as mere words.

Folks, when Paul tells us in Romans 1:16, **“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”** we need to believe it!

And it is not only the Word of God but also the Word of God illuminated by the Spirit of God to our hearts and to our lives. It is God's Word applied to our daily life.

Thus, we have assurance; we have confidence to live what we believe.

Can you imagine sharing your faith with someone and not having assurance, that would be crazy.

Let me share with you this commercial from AT & T, and you will see what I mean when I say, just okay is not okay!

In this commercial we see a man on a hospital bed, surrounded by his wife and kids before a surgery.

The woman asks the nurse standing by the bedside if she has ever worked with doctor Frances before and she responds back by saying that the surgeon is, according to the nurse, “ok.”

“Just ok?” the man who is going to be operated on asks, as he is obviously a little bit worried.

At this point, doctor Frances shows up, shouting down the hallway “Guess who just got reinstated?”

Okay, not words you want to hear from your surgeon.

But the surgeon enters the patient’s room, and he confesses he was not officially reinstated and asks the patient if he’s nervous.

Receiving an “Yeah” as an answer, doctor Frances reveals he’s nervous, too, but urges him to not worry about this, they will “figure it out.” “I’ll see you in there,” he adds while walking out the room, referring to the surgery room.

And the commercial ends with these words, “Just ok is not ok, especially when it comes to your network.”

Why would you allow that surgeon to operate on you? I wouldn’t and I would be out of that bed so fast!

If that is the way we feel as we share the Gospel message, as we share God's Word with people, why would they want what we have when we are not even confident in it? They wouldn't!

Folks, believe God's Word is powerful, it is living, it can change lives as the Holy Spirit opens God's Word up to us and have the assurance to share your faith with others!

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 2:1-5, **“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”**

The power of God's Word opened up to people by His Spirit! We can't do it apart from God. But we can do things that are amazing when we obey God and share the Gospel, share the Word of God with others! Paul witnessed that and we have as well! Never forget it or negate it because okay is not just okay, we need the power of God's Word and His Spirit to see lives transformed.

#### VERSES 6-7

Think of the things and the people you followed before you were saved and now look at what you are following since you have become a Christian, people who love the Lord, things that will build you up, not tear you down, at least that is what you should be doing!

Before I was saved I was a follower of evolution. I was into rock and roll. I had no interest in God or those who knew the Lord. And to go to church and hear the Bible being taught, are you kidding me!

But once I came to saving faith I wanted to go to church and hear God's Word. I could not get enough. I loved fellowshiping with other believers and sharing the things of God with them. I saw how God created the heavens and the earth and thus, we are not here by random chance processes.

I was no longer following those who were moving me away from God!

Now I started to focus on those things that would build me up and that is what Paul said in Philippians 4:8-9, "**Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**"

May we do that as the Thessalonian believers were doing.

Now we don't like to talk about suffering. And the word that Paul uses here speaking of their affliction carried with it the idea of pressure upon grapes being squeezed in a press. That is what they were going through and it is what we go through.

I realize that is not a popular message, but it is a reality. Peter tells us in I Peter 2:21, "**For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.**"

Paul and Silas, before they came to Thessalonica were beaten up and thrown into prison for their faith and the Thessalonians saw the marks on their body for their faith in Christ, their faith was real!

Folks, mere human joy will die under intense pressure, but the joy of the Holy Spirit will see it grow as Paul said in Philippians 4:4, “**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**”

Now, what happened as these Thessalonian believers lived out their faith, as people saw that it was real?

Listen again to what we are told in I Thessalonians 1:7, “**so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.**”

Keep in mind that they were followers of Jesus for a short time, and yet, the people saw their faith was real and they were examples, they encouraged other believers and word spread through the province of Macedonia or Northern Greece where Thessalonica, Philippi and Berea were located.

Also, their faith spread to the province of Achaia or Southern Greece where Athens and Corinth were located.

Again, with the seaport and the Roman road, the Egnatian Way, word was able to spread quickly and for good, not because of any wrong they were doing!

What an example they were, and may we do no less. May we be an example to others of the faith we have in Jesus!

You don't always know who you are encouraging by living out your faith no matter what may come your way!

VERSES 8-10

As you read this you can see that there was a buzz going around about these believers!

What was all the buzz about?

The changed lives, the transformed lives of these believers in Thessalonica and it was so radical that their faith spread out past Macedonia and Achaia.

It was not just empty words but changed lives that made the difference, it was Jesus!

They turned away from idols and they turned to Jesus, 180-degree turn to the living God!

Of this Clarke tells us,

The mere preaching of the Gospel has done much to convince and convert sinners; but the lives of the sincere followers of Christ, as illustrative of the truth of these doctrines, have done much more.

- Clarke

I know people who feel that our witness is not important, that we just need to evangelize. I agree that we need to bring the Gospel message to the lost but if your life is not matching up to what you are saying, you are bringing an empty message.

How many lives have been touched by the witness of others, by our witness! I think it is that important.

Also, Spurgeon tells us,

Everybody asked, “Why, what happened to these Thessalonians? These people have broken their idols: they worship the one God; they trust in Jesus. They are no longer drunken, dishonest, impure, contentious.” Everybody talked of what had taken place among these converted people. Oh, for conversions, plentiful, clear, singular, and manifest; that so the word of God may sound out! Our converts are our best advertisements and arguments.

- Charles Spurgeon

Again, keep in mind that these are new believers and yet, what were the believers in Thessalonica waiting for?

The return of Jesus.

Is this the Rapture of the church or the Second Coming?

I tend to see them looking for the Lord’s return in the Rapture, prior to God pouring out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world. Paul will be speaking about that more in I Thessalonians chapter 4.

Also, Paul tells us in Titus 2:13, **“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

Why are so many Christians hopeless regarding this world?

Because they are focused on this world and it is hopeless but we are not to focus ourselves on this world but upon the Lord and His return, He is coming back and He will restore this world to what it was like in the Garden of Eden as righteousness fills this land! Thus, we look forward to His return!



And yet, in the church today there is this lack of interest in the Lord's return. In fact, Peter warned us of this very thing when he wrote in II Peter 3:3-7, **“knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”**

Did you notice that in the last days, Peter warns, there will be those who will mock the coming of Jesus! They will say that we have heard that for years and things will just continue on, nothing changes, the Lord is not coming back!

And what is the rebuke that Peter gives to them?

That they are willfully forgetting God's judgment with the flood and because they willfully reject that, they are also rejecting the coming judgment of God and His return!

May the church wake up and be excited about the days we are living in, knowing His return is close and thus, we need to keep doing the work we were called to do, bringing the Gospel message to a lost and dying world! To build people up in the faith!

And as young as this church was in the faith, they knew that their lives were to be a witness of their faith and they believed in eschatology or end times. They believed that the Lord was coming back, and they were waiting!

Why am I making such a big deal about this?

Because, as you read through this letter, you will find that every chapter ends with a reference to the Lord's return:

- I Thessalonians 1:10 – *Waiting for His return to be delivered from the wrath of God that is coming.*
- I Thessalonians 2:19 – *The unity of all believers at His coming.*
- I Thessalonians 3:13 – *The sanctification process – being prepared for His return.*
- I Thessalonians 4:13-18 – *The Rapture of the church.*
- I Thessalonians 5:23 – *Prepared for His return.*

I will close with this. These are words from Charles Spurgeon who said, “Oh! This is a high mark of grace, when the Christian expects his Lord to come, and lives like one that expects him every moment. If you and I knew to-night that the Lord would come before this service was over, in what state of heart should we sit in these pews? In the state of heart we ought to be.”

May we be ready for His return, it is getting closer every day!

