

## The Thessalonian Christians

1 Thess. 1:1-10

### Introduction:

1. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to go back in time and visit some of the churches of the first century?
2. Would their struggles be the same as ours? How would they see the world? What would their faith mean to them? How would they be responding? What would they teach us that we could bring forward into our world?
3. There is some sense in which we can go back and visit with them through the eyes of N.T. writers and the letters that they wrote to and about them.
4. That is what I want to do in this study as we visit the church at Thessalonica.
5. First, let's go back and consider their beginning described in Acts 17. Second, consider them as objects of thanksgiving in Paul's prayers (1 Thess. 1:1ff; 2 Thess. 1:3ff) and third, observe the comfort that Paul gives them in light of their anticipation of the coming day of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess. 1:3ff).

### Discussion:

- I. The congregation began with opposition (Acts 17:1-9).
  - A. Paul and Silas began in the synagogue of the Jews.
    1. They reasoned from the Scriptures for three Sabbath days.
    2. In this synagogue the Scriptures were recognized as the authoritative revelation from God. This was the ideal place to begin, or so it would seem.
    3. The Scriptures spoke of the coming of the Christ (Messiah).
      - a. What passages they used are not identified. On Pentecost Peter had quoted Joel 2, Psa. 16:8-11; 2 Sam. 7:12ff; Psa. 110:1. We do not know if they used these texts or others.
      - b. But Luke is quite clear on what it was that they were teaching. They were "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.""
      - c. Their enemies give voice to what they are teaching from their perception in 17:7: They are "saying that there is another king, Jesus."
  - B. Some were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. Among them were God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.
  - C. But there was a division in the synagogue (note vs. 5-8).
    1. The Jews became jealous.
    2. Evidently it was not about the teaching, but about Paul and Silas and people joining them. It was a relational and emotional issue that created a problem.

Division is generally not about a particular teaching, but about such things as fear, control and jealousy.

3. These Jews presented it to the world as if it was a political issue (v. 6-7). It was not!
  4. They used wicked men to create a mob and attacked the house of Jason. Maybe they thought Paul and Silas were staying at Jason's house? They dragged Jason and some others before the city authorities. They were able to bond themselves "out of jail."
  5. Paul speaks of the opposition in 1 Thess. 2:1-2,13-16.
  6. Later these same Jews found out that the word of God had been proclaimed in Berea, they went there, agitating and stirring up the crowds (Acts 17:13).
- D. We can only imagine what things were like afterwards in the synagogue at Thessalonica.
1. If Jason and these others went back the next Sabbath it must have been stressful.
  2. Some of you have been through divisions. You know something of the difficulty.
  3. Maybe the new Christians met in Jason's house or at some undisclosed location.
  4. Probably some were uncertain about what to do. Would they join the believers? Would they stay with the synagogue Jews?
- E. It is clear that Paul and Silas were preaching Jesus as King. They were preaching the kingdom of God. Namely, that Jesus was the Messiah, that he had suffered and been raised from the dead and was now king in a spiritual kingdom.

Application: What insights do we gain from our initial visit in Thessalonica?

1. We learn something about their approach to the Scriptures. They regarded Scripture as the authoritative revelation of God. This is a point reiterated by Paul as he wrote to them in 1 Thess. 2:13. It was not just the O.T. Scripture that was regarded as the word of God. They included what they had heard from Paul about Jesus being the Messiah as the word of God. Is this the way you regard Scripture?
2. We learn something about the dynamics of evangelism. It involves explaining and giving evidence and persuading that Jesus is the Christ. In this case it involved a period of study over three weeks. Are you patient enough as a teacher or student to meet together and study for such a period? It takes some time to understand about Jesus.
3. Jealousy, division, difficulty, injustice, attack, false accusation and unfair penalties were imposed on these Christians. If indeed, you were able to travel back in time and visited this congregation in these few weeks of their beginning what would your report be when you returned to Fort Logan? That you did not want to go back? That they were involved in a mess? Should we try to support a preacher there? Should we try to send someone to encourage them? (cf. 1 Thess. 3:2). Do you

think the situation is too dangerous? Would you be willing to go? Were you to write a letter to them what would you say?

Conclusion:

1. There are many things to be gained from our initial visit with Thessalonica. We will continue our considerations in another lesson.
2. A question faces you, as you consider the Scriptures and the evidence for Jesus as the Christ. Do you believe He is the Messiah? Do you believe He suffered and rose from the dead? Do you believe He is King? Are you willing to make Him the King in your life?

II. The Thessalonian Christians were the objects of Paul's thanksgiving (1 Thess. 1:1ff; 2 Thess. 1:3ff).

A. Paul commends them in 1 Thess. 1:1ff.

1. He thanks God for them. What? Are they not upsetting to the community? He says they became imitators of us and of the Lord in tribulation (6).
2. He commends them for their work (3). They had become an example to other believers (7) as they sounded forth the word (8).
3. They had received the word in power (5). Cf. 1 Thess. 2:13-16.
4. He commends their faith, hope and love (3).
5. They had turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (9).
  - a. Now we have observed that Paul and Silas had gone into the synagogue and taught there. How could it be said they had turned to God from idols?
  - b. Perhaps the congregation has been an influence on the Gentiles of the city. Perhaps those who were identified in Acts 17 as God-fearing Greeks had previously turned from idols to serve God following in the Jewish tradition. They had now recognized Christ as the Messiah. Or perhaps they had turned from the idolatry of these Jews in the synagogue who elevated themselves above the truth of the kingdom.
  - c. There are sophisticated forms of idolatry. Some are focused on money, power, selfish ambition, obsession with work, sports, TV, various addictions, superstitions (cf. Eph. 5:5).
6. They were waiting on the return of the Son of God from heaven (10).
  - a. The coming of the Son of God would bring them relief from their suffering. (More on this in the next lesson.) Wrath is coming on the sons of disobedience, but the Christians could rejoice in having been rescued. Cf. Rom. 5:9.
  - b. But now they would continue to wait and endure suffering (1 Thess. 3:1-5).
  - c. Like those souls crying out under the altar in Rev. 5:10 and like the congregation at Smyrna tribulation was part of their experience (Rev. 2:10). Cf. James 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:12ff.

B. Paul continues his giving of thanks for them in 2 Thess. 1:3ff.

1. "Your faith is greatly enlarged." Faith is like a living organism, unless it is nurtured, cultivated, stimulated it tends to stagnate, rather than thrive. Were we able to travel back in time to the time this letter was read before the congregation how would we hear its message?
2. "The love of each of you toward one another grows ever greater." Love, like faith, is something that needs nurturing, cultivating and stimulating. Otherwise it too grows stagnant rather than thriving. We need each other (Heb. 10:24). And we need to figure out ways to effectively stimulate this love. Assembling together facilitates this. But what we do when assembled is critical too. It is not just about meeting together as if the object was to meet together. The object is to stimulate one another. And this text calls on us to give consideration to how we can stimulate one another. So when you assemble have you thought to whom and how you are going to contribute? And it is not just accomplished in assemblies. Their love had grown greater because they were considering how to stimulate love.
3. "We speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of your persecutions and afflictions which you endure" (1:4).
4. God is going to right the wrongs that they are suffering. He will afflict those who are afflicting them and He will give them relief (1 Thess. 1:5-12).

Application:

1. On our second visit to the church at Thessalonica we hear again about their suffering and about their afflictions. We hear promises of deliverance, but not yet. What would our reaction be to such letters? Are these the kind of letters that we would have written to this congregation?
2. As we visited this congregation and heard these letters of Paul would our love for him grow? Does he understand something of their suffering? Is he "laying down the law" or supporting them in suffering through what they must? Has he considered how to stimulate them to love and good deeds? How is he doing it? Read 1 Thess. 2:7-8, 11-12.
3. For whom are you thankful? For what?

Conclusion:

1. The Thessalonians had realized a need for changed. They had turned to the true and living God from idols.
2. Now they are an example to other believers.
3. Paul is thankful for them.
4. Are there changes that you need to make, that will result in others being thankful for you?

Reading: 2 Thess. 1:3-10a

Introduction:

1. On two previous occasions we have gone back in time to visit with the church at Thessalonica.
  - a. We visited them during the time of Paul and Silas' first visit when they went into the synagogue and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures about Jesus being the Christ.
  - b. We visited again after this and heard Paul's letter read as he expressed thanksgiving for them.
2. Now we visit them again. Again Paul has written to them. His message is largely a message of comfort but contains some exhortation. We will focus on his message of comfort.

Discussion:

III. Paul comforts them in anticipation of the coming day of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess. 1:3ff).

- A. This is a congregation that is waiting for the coming of the Son of God from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10).
  1. That God comes to deliver His people is a theme developed throughout Scripture. He delivered Israel from Egypt. He delivered them from Babylonian captivity. He delivers us from sin and He delivers His people through suffering and persecution.
  2. Heb. 10:32-39 encourages the people of God of the first century to endure suffering and quotes from Hab. 2:3 (vs. 37-38), regarding God's deliverance from the Chaldeans.
  3. The ultimate deliverance comes with the second coming of Christ. I take this to be what Paul is referring to in 1 Thess. 1:10 when he says they are waiting for the coming of the Son of God from heaven.
  4. The ultimate deliverance occurs with affliction on those who afflict the faithful. There may be deliverances all along the way, but the ultimate deliverance is yet future. Cf. Rev. 6:10-11.
  5. Christ, having been raised from the dead, is the one who rescues us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10).
  6. Often our concern is for deliverance here and now, deliverance from the immediate circumstances is what we demand. But it is deliverance from the wrath of God that is under consideration here. So here, it would seem to be less about their deliverance from present afflictions and more about their ultimate deliverance.
  7. Comfort comes from deliverance from the wrath of God. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).
  8. There is comfort in knowing that God ultimately rights the wrongs of this life.

- B. Paul sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them (1 Thess. 3:1ff).
1. Paul was moved to send Timothy (1).
  2. This is an action we see early on in the church. When Jerusalem heard about the new Christians in Antioch they sent Barnabas (Acts 11:22). After the first preaching tour Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for a time, but then determined to return and visit the brethren in every city in which they had proclaimed the word of God to see how they were (Acts 15:36ff).
  3. We rightly teach congregational autonomy. We are not a denomination, therefore have no denominational oversight over various congregations. BUT this does not mean that we ignore one another, that we isolate ourselves from one another. We ought to be concerned to strengthen and encourage one another. This is the N.T. pattern and it is reflective of the love we have for one another and for the cause of Christ.
  4. Paul was greatly encouraged by the report Timothy brought back to him (1 Thess. 3:6-13).
- C. Paul “vaccinated” them for suffering (1 Thess. 3:4).
1. Somehow things seem different when you know what is coming.
  2. We may be shocked, if suffering was not expected, when it is it is like, “OK, I knew this was going to happen and I can get through it.” Peter’s language is revealing. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you as though some strange thing were happening to you” (1 Pet. 4:12). “Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Pet. 4:1). The idea seems to be that since you have set your goal as serving the purpose of God, suffering comes with it, so be ready. When you know what’s coming it is easier to be prepared.  
Ex. Consider directional signs on highway.
- D. The personal nature of Paul’s relationship with them must have been a comfort to them (1 Thess. 3:11ff).
1. He longed to be with them.
  2. He prayed for them.
  3. He encouraged their relationships with one another.
- E. As they worked and labored and disciplined themselves Paul comforted them with the promise of being with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:12-5:11).
1. There is a relational element foundational to the comfort provided.
    - a. First, he addresses their relationship with those who have already died. The Lord will bring them with Him when He returns. We who are alive will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so **we** shall always be with the Lord. So relationships with one another provide comfort.
    - b. Second, he says we will always be **with the Lord**. So relationship with the Lord is a comfort.
  2. There is comfort provided from insight into what is going to happen. Like the

“inoculation” against suffering, knowledge of the future creates preparation, thus he says, “You are not in darkness that the day would overtake you like a thief.”

3. This preparation involves soberness and a life disciplined by what is coming (1 Thess. 5:18ff).
- F. Paul appeals to them to not be quickly shaken from their composure, to stand firm and hold to the traditions that they were taught (2 Thess. 2:1ff, 15-16).

Conclusion:

1. So what have we learned from our visits to the church at Thessalonica?
2. Hardship and difficulty are expectable. They began struggling with the opposition and it continued.
3. What they needed to do was to stay the course. They were to encourage one another, hold on to what they had been taught, and continue to sound forth the word of the Lord.
4. They were to discipline themselves in light of the coming of the Lord. They were to comfort one another with the expectation of being together with the Lord and those who had already fallen asleep in the Lord.
5. They were to live their lives in soberness.
6. In summary—1 Thess. 5:12-18.