

Unshaken

Unshakable Joy

Summary

In the midst of what seems like waves of bad news and an unpredictable future, the Bible has a different story to offer the world. Paul's letters to the church in Thessalonica build our faith, restore our joy and cement our hope in Jesus. He's the answer! No matter how much it looks like the devil has taken away all our options, our King always has another move He can make on our behalf.

It was a brutal season of ministry for Paul. He had been run out of Thessalonica and Berea through fierce, violent persecution. His afflictions remind us that he suffered like few others in history. All the while God was turning the world upside down through this missionary Apostle and his gospel ministry. Sent over 200 miles away to Athens and eventually to Corinth, Paul was now far removed from the situation in Thessalonica and the young church there. Nevertheless, Paul was carrying them in his heart. When Timothy brought back a report about the Thessalonian church, Paul's love overflowed in this letter that we call 1 Thessalonians. It gives a powerful witness to the love of God that is shared between followers of Jesus. There is deep connection and purpose available through the church of Jesus.

Do you feel like your story has run out of options? Is the opposition in your life overwhelming? Our King has another move left. He's offered Himself in your place and for your sin. He rose again from the dead. You can trust Him. And that's the gospel!

Getting to Know Each Other

1. When have you experienced joy that won't be undone by hard circumstances? Who do you know with this solid, persistent joy?

Read Acts 17:1-9

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." ⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." ⁸ And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹ And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Read 1 Thess. 2:17-3:10

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— ⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

Getting Into the Bible

1. What does Acts 17:1-9 reveal about Paul's ministry? How would you describe it? What principles can you identify for our own ministries of sharing Jesus with others?
2. Discuss the following based on 1 Thess. 2:17-3:10:
 - a. How would you describe the relationship between Paul and the church at Thessalonica? What is attractive about their connection? Challenging?
 - b. What does Paul envision for their lives? What dreams and aspirations does he have for them?
 - c. How does this cast vision for you in your relationships in our church?

Application

1. What are the major themes of your story right now? Where do you feel hemmed in by difficulty and opposition? How can this week's sermon build your hope and faith at what God is able to do?
2. How might God be leading you to enter into the story of others? What ways can you move toward them this week, listen to their story, point them to Jesus, and offer practical help?
3. Our stories get woven together with other people's stories through the spiritual gifts Jesus gives us. What are some gifts you believe He has given you to share with others? Are there any new steps you can take to exercise those gifts for the sake of others?