

1 Thessalonians Overview

Well we are going to be starting our study through the book of 1 Thessalonians a little differently and today could be deemed really a topical study rather than a verse by verse study. I really felt it necessary here for this book of the Bible to go ahead and give kind of an overview of what was happening behind the scenes, how the church was established and the circumstances around it and I wanted to also go ahead and give a few exhortations for us as a church this morning as well.

So the book of 1 Thessalonians had 3 writers that were spoken of and you can find that right there in the first verse of chapter 1 as we are told that it was from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy...Now Paul is the author that this is most widely attributed to but we should note that these were not just his thoughts alone.

We might ask who these other men were...and we know a lot about Timothy as he is mentioned multiple times in scripture and he is actually someone that Paul called his son in the faith. So close were these two that Paul actually wrote 2 personal letters to Timothy titled 1 and 2 Timothy in our Bibles.

Silvanus on the other hand is a little less known and he does have a second name found in scripture which is Silas. This was a man that was actually with Paul when he was on what is called his second missionary journey which included visiting the city of Thessalonica therefore this church knew Silvanus quite well. Paul calls him a faithful brother in 1 Peter 5:12. In Acts 15:22 we learn that before he went with Paul he was actually a leader in the church of Jerusalem.

I suppose we should spend a little time getting to know the city of Thessalonica and how they became a church.

So to give a brief background Thessalonica was a port city in the northern part of Greece and today it is the second largest city in the country and is known as the cultural, commercial and intellectual hub of Greece and has close to 1 million people living in it.

During Biblical times it was near two very well-travelled trading routes. The east to west route called the Ignatia Way connected to Italy and there was another well used road that ran north to south.

Religiously speaking the city was dedicated to the Roman pantheon and the allegiance of the emperor. We also know that there were many Jewish individuals that lived in the city.

Finally, the date of the writing of this is thought to be one of Paul's first letters with many scholars putting it written around 49-51 AD.

So how did the church come to be would be the next question. Let's turn if you would please over to Acts 17 please and we can explore that here for a few minutes.

While you guys are turning there when Paul came to Thessalonica it was during what is known as his second missionary journey and for your reference this began in Acts 15:36 and ends in Acts 18:22 when Paul finishes his circuit which began and ended in a city called Antioch. We know from Acts 15 that Paul had it in his heart to go back and visit all the churches that had been planted during his first missionary journey and really he just wanted to go back and see how they were doing.

Something interesting happened though as the journey began for Paul and his travelling companion Barnabas as they had a sharp disagreement and they ended up going separate ways. Paul took with him Silas also known as Silvanus while Barnabas took John Mark with him.

It is while Paul was travelling on this journey with Silas that they came to Thessalonica in Acts 17 and I'd like to read that to you this morning if you look at verses 1-9 with me which say this Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ 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." ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." ⁸ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the

city when they heard these things. ⁹ So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

We learn here that there was a synagogue of the Jews in the city and we know that it was Paul's custom to go and visit the Jews first before taking the gospel to the Gentiles and notice we are told here that for three Sabbaths he was there reasoning with them from the Scriptures we are told.

Notice we are told in verse 4 of this portion of Acts that some of those that listened were persuaded and then we are told there were a great multitude of Greeks and a few leading women as well that joined the work of the ministry with Paul and Silas.

I do think it's worth it to mention that Paul was only present in this city for 3 weeks...and I share that because as we study through this book of the Bible we are going to learn that they had learned all about the end times and the simple fact that one day Jesus was coming back and Paul had this expectation for them that they knew this truth...The point I want to make is that the end times should not be something that is hard to grasp and that Paul was not afraid to teach even those young in the faith about how the Lord Jesus will both come for His church and also that one day He will return physically to the earth to rule and reign.

So Paul had been with the Thessalonians for only a short time and in our text in Acts 17 we learn that there were enemies of Paul that were present in the city as well. We are told there were Jews that were not persuaded of the truth and they became envious we are told (perhaps because the people respected Paul and listened to him giving preference to him over the Jewish religious leaders in the city) and

they took others that were in the marketplace who were evil and gathered a mob and went to the home of a man named Jason and we see that they accused him of housing Paul and Silas and they actually dragged him out of the city...and notice they brought an accusation against them saying they are acting contrary to the rule of Caesar as they say there is another king whose name is Jesus...and so there was a little bit of an uproar here over Paul's ministry in the city.

We then see in verse 10 of Acts 17 that Paul and Silas left by night to Berea.

You might make note of verse 6 in Acts 17 as it's one to underline I believe as it says **6 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.** You know it's my hope that we as a church body might become known like what is said here...That we might be called people that have turned the world upside down for the name of Jesus.

You know we can be known for a lot of things in life. We can be known as a hard worker, we can be known as a family man or a lover of sports or any number of activities but to be known as someone that turns the world upside down in the name of Jesus seems to be the best way that someone might be known.

I've been to several funerals in my life and its interesting what people are remembered for. I hope when my life is over I'll be known as a humble man that loved Jesus and my family more than anything else. I hope my funeral is a testimony of God's goodness and faithfulness in a life.

I wanted to share with you just a little bit here from 1 Thessalonians if you wanted to turn there for a few minutes and let's just grab some additional information about what happened with Paul and his companions while they were in Thessalonica.

Look with me at 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 which says the following

⁵For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

⁶And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, So you can see here that the gospel came to them not only in word but in the power of the Holy Spirit...I wonder what specifically that means? I think we often think that this is tied to miracles and or signs that would be done and certainly Paul had his fair share of that taking place through his life as God used Him.

I am also reminded that the power of the Holy Spirit can be present to simply convict people of their sin...I am reminded of Calvary Chapel in the early days and this is something I pray often over our church and would love if you would pray this also but I pray that the power of the Holy Spirit would meet people in the parking lot as they walk in the building...that the presence of God can be thick in and around this place and that people would just be convicted of their sin by the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

It was not uncommon as the Holy Spirit worked at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa that people would come to know Jesus without even hearing the gospel preached for the power of God's presence on the church.

Look a little further down in 1 Thessalonians 1 in verse 9 which says **⁹For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,** so we can see here that they were a people that served idols and they chose to turn away from those idols to serve the living and true God. I like that, the Lord can take us from living for things that are dead to serving the One that lives forever and ever. I am reminded that in Christ we can have life and we can have it more abundantly.

So that's a little background on how this church started and how Paul had ministered to them along with Silas and Timothy.

Now the book of 1 Thessalonians has a major theme that is touched on in every chapter of the book and I wanted to look at that briefly with you here this morning and then we can move on to a few exhortations that I have for us.

You might make a note that every chapter in the book of 1 Thessalonians talks about the return of Jesus Christ **both for His church and then to rule and reign upon the earth** and these are two separate events and we'll cover that as we progress through this letter.

I'm going to read to you from each of these chapters if you follow along with me. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says this **⁹For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 says ¹⁹For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 says ¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, ¹³so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and this is probably a key portion of this book says ¹³But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And then in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says ²³Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul who was only with this church 3 weeks tells them often in his letter that they need to be ready and waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ...and I just want to share with you that we at this church believe that Jesus will first come back for His church in an event called the rapture of the church and then there will be a 7 year period that takes place called the tribulation period spoken of over in Daniel 9:24-27 and this is a period of time that the antichrist will come into power on the earth (and we'll actually learn about him in the book of 2 Thessalonians when we get to that) and then Jesus is going to come back at the end of this period to physically rule and reign upon this earth for a period of 1,000 years called the millennial reign of Jesus and you can read about these events in Revelation chapters 19-20.

Now I want to point out one final thing here found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and I just want you to take a look with me at 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 which says this **We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³ remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.** Notice here in verse 3 that there were three things this church was being remembered for. First was their work of faith, second their labor of love and third their patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 1:3 where Paul says this **We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,** notice that there is something missing from the account in 2 Thessalonians as Paul makes no

mention of their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ...and we might just chalk that up to Paul writing a second letter and of course it is going to be different but later on in 2 Thessalonians we are going to learn that a portion of the church actually believed they had missed the coming of the Lord...So they had lost hope that the Lord was one day coming.

It's sad but it can be true that some churches can start off so well and then they can lose their way and what I love is that the Holy Spirit in the second letter to the Thessalonians is working to help them to grow and return to a place of expectant hope in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know I think sometimes you and I might be guilty of losing sight of what really matters in life. I think we like the church in Thessalonica can become weary of looking and watching for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible is clear that one day the Lord shall return and those that believe and are prepared will be yanked out of this world and we'll be instantly in the presence of the Lord.

And so now we come to the portion of our study this morning where I wanted to take some time to exhort us in a few things.

The first thing I wanted to just speak into our lives is that we must be ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that we are attentive to our Lord, that we find ourselves expecting and hoping for His return and we are choosing to live a life that is set apart unto Him.

I fear today that many may be caught off guard by the return of Jesus and while I will not pass judgment on anyone for I do not know the hearts of those who are here and I won't presume to judge when the

Lord is clearly the one that will do so I will say that there is great danger in choosing to live a life that is not focused on the things of the Lord.

Those who are living for this world are in my opinion in danger of being left behind. And let me just give you a scriptural example to just build on this a little bit if you listen to a parable that Jesus spoke over in Matthew 25 and you can turn there if you wanted to as we'll spend a few minutes there.

I do want to preface this as we look at it that there are a few different interpretations of what the parable means. This morning I am going to present this from the position of this pointing to the rapture but others believe it speaks of the physical return of Jesus and how some of the Jewish nation will be ready for the Lord and others won't.

Let's read what we have in verses 1-5 of Matthew 25 which say this **"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. ³ Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵ But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.** So as Jesus is sharing with the disciples he again gives them a parable and this time it is the kingdom of heaven that He is speaking about and He is giving them something they would have been familiar with so they can picture what it will be like.

And so this time the Lord uses the picture of the groom coming for the bride and in Biblical times and the Jewish culture the groom would often become engaged to a woman and then it was his job to take

some time to build a home (usually at the house of his family) and to prepare his life that he might be ready for the time of the wedding.

Now the bride was to be prepared, she was to be ready for the coming of the groom for he would come at an unannounced time for His bride...and the idea was the father of the groom had to give permission, it was his job to say everything was ready and you could now go and get your bride.

It's an interesting picture if you put it in the context of the Christian experience and our waiting on the Lord Jesus. For you and I as the church we are the bride of Christ we are told in the book of Ephesians and Jesus has indeed paid for us with His own blood.

And so you and I are to be waiting on the Lord to return for you and I and I want you to just listen to something Jesus said in John 14:2-3 when He said this ²**In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.** ³**And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.** It's amazing that Jesus is preparing a place for us and I can't wait for the day that the Father is going to tell the Son that the time has come...**Go and get your bride.**

That will be a glorious day, a day that I cannot wait for when the Lord snatches us out of this world and we get to enter into His presence.

I find it interesting in the parable that we are told there were 10 virgins total that were to be prepared and we are told that 5 of them were ready having oil in their lamps so that when the bridegroom came they

could readily go with Him...and then there were 5 others that were not ready at all for they had no oil.

Let's look at what happens in the next verses in Matthew 25 if you look at verses 6-13 which say ⁶“And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’” ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

¹¹ “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’” ¹² But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

¹³ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

So the bridegroom is on the way and the announcement has been made and notice that the 5 foolish virgins were suddenly found to be in want as they knew they had not properly prepared themselves for his coming.

They are seen being desperate and you can imagine they are looking around trying to figure out what to do that they might be acceptable when the bridegroom arrives.

And the only solution they can come up with is to beg from those who were properly prepared and they ask if they might have some of what they possess that they also might be seen as ready.

We then see the bridegroom arrive and he takes with him those that were ready and those who were not ready are left behind and notice afterwards the foolish virgins came and desperately attempted to get into the wedding and the simple response from the master was I do not know you.

And then the Lord closes the parable by saying you don't know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come.

I believe that this parable really highlights the simple fact that there are many in this world that should be ready for the coming of Jesus for the church, they should be watching for His return and yet they simply aren't prepared in their hearts.

There are many who name the name of Jesus and yet in the depths of their heart they are far from Him. There are many that show up on Sunday's for church service and yet when the Lord comes for His church they will be found in want.

When I look at the parable of the 10 virgins I am reminded that each of the virgins had to be personally prepared. They could not take from what someone else had to make themselves ready...and I think the same thing happens today when many that you talk to say "My grandma is a person of faith, or my mom and dad serve the Lord or my wife goes to church and I go with her" and somehow people will think they are right with God because they say those words.

I have to tell you this morning that you are not considered to be right with God or ready for the return of Jesus because of anyone else's faith or belief in the Lord...The only way to be right and ready for the return of Jesus to take away His church in the event called the rapture of the church is to have your heart ready meaning you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, to live whole heartedly for Him and to live as if He is coming today for you know not the hour of His return.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 Paul said this to the believers when he said ¹⁰**You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;** ¹¹**as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,** ¹²**that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.**

So I ask you this morning are you prepared? Are you ready for the return of Jesus Christ? Are you walking out your life in a way that is worthy of the Lord who has called us into His kingdom?

I know for me personally that I can't wait for the Lord to come...no I'm not perfect as much as I wish I could be, but I know that when He comes my lamp is filled and my eyes are expectant that He is coming for me and for all of those who are watching for His return.

I think the final exhortation that I have for us today is that not only should we personally be living out the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives being set apart unto the Lord but we also ought to be looking to share our faith with the world around us.

I am reminded in closing today that this church in Thessalonica only exists because someone was obedient to go and share the truth of Jesus Christ with others.

Today you and I have a calling on our lives to share our faith...The Lord before His ascension into heaven let the disciples know that their calling was to go into all the world to declare the good news and it was their task to go and make disciples.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul said this ²⁰ **Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.** When someone is an ambassador they are a representative of the person that has sent them. You and I have that great privilege today to tell the world of the Savior that gave His life for them on the cross that they might be saved from their sins and reconciled or brought near to God.

We should remember that just as someone came to us and gave us the Gospel so we also must carry that to the world around us...really it's an obligation that we have to do so. We are to be salt and light in this world, we are to bless and minister to others as often as we can that they too might be ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

I have to just say as we kind of work towards wrapping things up today that probably one of the saddest things that I can think of would be if the Lord came back for the church and you yourself were personally not ready and were left behind.

I believe you would think back to sermons that you heard like today's and you would be sorely disappointed for not heeding what the Word of God says.

Furthermore, I cannot imagine living your whole life rejecting Jesus as your Lord and Savior and then dying and going before the judgment of God and finding yourself sent to hell for all of eternity...And it won't be God's fault, but instead you will have sent yourself to hell because you rejected the only sufficient sacrifice for our sins which is the death of Jesus on the cross.

The Bible is clear that you and I are sinners, that we fall short of the glory of God, that we because of our sins are separated from God just as Adam was in the garden and that because of our sin we deserve an eternity away from God.

But the good news or the Gospel news is that Jesus Christ chose to come to this world as a man, He lived a perfect life and then He chose to go to the cross not for Himself but for the sins of the world. Jesus died in our place and the truth is that when anyone in all of the people of the world recognizes what Jesus did for them on the cross and they choose to accept that He paid the price for their sins and they ask Jesus to come into their heart to forgive them and they do that by faith that the Lord will come into that persons heart and forgive them of their sins and give them a new life.

If you died today where would you go? Would you go to heaven or would you find yourself in hell? If today you need to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior I would just encourage you after the service to come forward as I would love to pray with you that you might be saved from your sins and begin a new life with Jesus.

And listen if you are here today and you know you are not prepared for the return of Jesus as you should be, if you know you are one of the foolish virgins who just wasn't prepared for the coming of the groom

then I just encourage you as we worship the Lord that you would cry out to Him from your heart, that you would repent of your empty way of living and simply ask Jesus to cleanse you from your wicked ways and seek after Him and live properly before Him.

So next week we'll be in 1 Thessalonians 1 if you want to read that ahead of time.

Let's pray.

“1 Thessalonians: An Overview”

Cross references

Acts 17:1-9

1 Thessalonians 1:5-6

1 Thessalonians 1:9

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Thessalonians 5:23

1 Thessalonians 1:2-4

2 Thessalonians 1:3

Matthew 25:1-5

John 14:2-3

Matthew 25:6-13

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

2 Corinthians 5:20