

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

1 Thess. | *Jesus is Coming Back: Christian Comfort & Conduct in the Certainty of Christ's Coming*
North Center | August 28, 2022
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Please open your Bible to the book of **1 Thessalonians**.
Pray.

CONTEXT

One of the main characters in the NT is the Apostle Paul. We read the story of his life (*his past, his conversion, and his missionary adventures*) in the book of **Acts**, and then (*in the providence of God*) we have at least **13 letters** that he wrote to individuals and churches preserved for us in the NT – which is almost **half of the books** in the NT. So, **brother Odysseus** was absolutely right (in his message two Sundays ago) when he said that God used the apostle Paul to shape the church's theology and ecclesiology and soteriology and theodicy and missiology in profound ways.¹ Paul's writings are an unspeakable gift to the church.

Before we climb into our exegetical airplane and fly over the book of 1 Thessalonians together this morning, I want to point out that this book is a beautiful example of how God takes what the enemy means for evil and turns it for our good.²

We read about Paul's relationship with the church in Thessalonica in **Acts 17:1–9**.

- After God sent a great earthquake to free Paul and his companions from prison in Philippi (**Acts 16:22–40**), they traveled to Thessalonica.
- For the next three weeks, Paul was preaching and teaching and explaining and reasoning and demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Savior (**17:1–3**), and God used Paul's gospel efforts to build a church in Thessalonica (**17:4**).
- The effect of the gospel in Thessalonica was so powerful that the Christians were accused of “*turning the world upside down*” (**17:6**).
- When it became too dangerous for Paul and his companions to continue ministering in Thessalonica, the church snuck them out of the city in the middle of the night, and they continued their missionary journey to other unreached places (**17:10**).

From the very beginning, Thessalonica was **a hostile environment** for a church to grow in. If you continue reading the story in Acts, you'll see that the unbelievers literally go out of their way to stir up trouble for Paul (**17:13**). We read that the church in Thessalonica was surrounded by much affliction (**1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14**). It wasn't an easy place to be a Christian. It wasn't an easy place to be a church.

But that didn't stop them. It was hard, but that didn't matter. It was dangerous, but (again) that didn't matter. The church was not popular in Thessalonica, but that didn't matter. They loved Jesus. They loved the gospel. And nothing could stop them from spreading the good news of Jesus all over the place!

¹ *Pastor, I don't have a clue what that means!* It means that so much of what we believe about God, about the church, and about salvation come from the writings of the Apostle Paul.

² Listen to the bridge in “[Sovereign Over Us](#)” or in “[See A Victory](#)” by Elevation Worship.

For 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.
And you became *followers* of us and of the Lord,
having received the word in much affliction, *with joy* of the Holy Spirit,
so that you became *examples* to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.
For **from you** the word of the Lord has **sounded forth**,
not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.
Your faith toward God has **gone out**, so that we do not need to say anything.
~ 1 Thess. 1:5–8

What an amazing testimony: powerful gospel – given by faithful leaders – received by joyful followers – who became examples to the world around them – so that the good news of Jesus spread to every place – even in the midst of much affliction.

If that testimony were true of every church, there would be no unreached people groups left in the world. But it's **not** true of every church.

- Tragically, there are many professing Christians (and *therefore* many churches) who do not have a burning desire to “sound forth” the good news of Jesus into “every place”. Far too many Christians are content to just show up on Sunday morning and then disengage from the great commission for the rest of the week. As a result, **there are still over 7,000 unreached people groups across the world today.**

The local church in Thessalonica was loud with the Gospel of Jesus, and Paul loved it.

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,
remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope
in our Lord Jesus Christ...
~ 1 Thess. 1:2–3

For what thanks can we render to God for you,
for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God...
~ 1 Thess. 3:9

Because of Paul's deep affection for this church, he desperately wanted to go visit them, but **Satan** kept throwing roadblocks in Paul's way.

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.
~ 1 Thess. 2:17–18

Paul desperately wanted to go visit this church, but Satan kept hindering him.
This is called *spiritual warfare* (which we read about in **Ephesians 6:10–12**).

Q. What happened as a result?

A. Paul wrote them a letter that has been preserved for over 2,000 years and has encouraged untold millions of Christians all over the globe!

Paul would not have written this letter if he had been able to go to Thessalonica (*because there would have been no need for this letter*). But as Satan was disrupting Paul's plans over and over again, God was using Satan's schemes to create a situation where Paul was forced to write a letter instead – a letter that God would use to encourage Christians all across the globe for the next 2,000 years!

God takes what the enemy means for evil, and He turns it for our good.³ All. The. Time. Satan was waging war against Paul, **but** the Bible tells us that “*no weapon formed against us shall prosper*” (**Isa. 54:17**).⁴

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

~ **Romans 8:28**

So that's the context of this letter.

- Every promise that gives you hope (in this letter) is here because God takes what the enemy means for evil, and He uses it for our good.
- Every word of encouragement and exhortation that helps you live as a child of God and a “child of light” (**5:5**) is because God takes what the enemy means for evil, and He uses it for our good.

CONTENT

What's in this letter?

1 Thessalonians is a letter full of encouragement, inspiration, exhortation, and comfort – *rooted* in the promise that **Jesus is coming back**. God meant for Paul's letter to encourage, to inspire, to exhort, and to comfort for the local church in Thessalonica...and He meant for it to encourage, inspire, exhort, and comfort us – as a local church – here *in the Twin Cities* today.

TAKE AWAYS

So, here are four takeaways for us today from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians:

1. **Encouragement**: *the sovereignty of God*

Paul was an encourager, and so this letter is full of encouragement for God's people. But one of the encouraging themes that keep recurring is the sovereignty of God (which we've already seen this morning).

Paul means to encourage us with the truth that **God is in control of everything that happens in our lives – at every moment**. God is sovereign over our salvation (1:4), and He is sovereign over our suffering (3:4). He knows what He's doing with your life. That is one of the most encouraging truths that I know – in the entire Bible: God knows what He's doing with your life. From start to finish.

³ See Genesis 45:4–8; 50:20.

⁴ “The weapon may be formed, but it won't prosper. When darkness falls, it won't prevail. Because the God I serve knows only how to triumph. My God will never fail.” [See a Victory](#).

2. **Inspire:** *the heart of a missionary*

God uses Paul's letter to inspire us with the heart of a missionary. Listen to the way Paul describes his heart for this group of people who came to faith in Christ through his missionary work.

...we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

~ 1 Thess. 1:7-8

At our Wednesday Connection this past week, we were looking at the life of **Amy Carmichael** who was a lifelong missionary in India during the early 1900's. At that time and in that culture, many families would sell their daughters to be slaves in the Hindu temple. Amy had such a heart for these girls that she gave everything she had to rescue them from a life of temple slavery. Amy's love for these girls compelled her to give her life for them. In one of her books Amy said, "You can give without loving, but you cannot love with giving."

That's what Paul is saying here in this letter. His missionary heart (full of love for these people) spills over into giving everything he has for them. And it's this kind of heart that inspires others to become missionaries.

Illustration: I remember, as a young teenager, sitting in a room with a bunch of other teenagers, listening to a missionary pour out his heart for missions, and thinking to myself "I want to be part of that." He was talking about people who are giving their lives for the sake of bringing the gospel to the forgotten places of the world...and **I wanted in.** Now, I don't remember this missionary being a particularly gifted speaker, but his love for the mission was pouring like a waterfall into my soul. His goal was to inspire some of the teenagers in that room to devote their lives for the sake of the mission, and (*I don't know what happened to any of the other teenagers in that room but*) God used that missionary moment to plant a seed in my heart that would continue to grow over the years.

The heart of a missionary was on display, and I was inspired. And that's what's happening here in **1 Thessalonians**. The heart of a missionary is on display, and God means for it to inspire us. To compel us. To awaken us. To propel us.

Application: One of the reasons we are revising **our church's mission statement** is because of books like 1 Thessalonians. We want to be a church that *treasures God together...by pursuing the nations* with the good news of Jesus. And we want to make this missionary trajectory crystal clear by putting it in our mission statement.

3. **Exhort:** *the conduct of a Christian*

Chapters 4 & 5 are primarily about the conduct of Christ. Being a Christian isn't just about what we know; it's about how we live...and how we love one another.

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

~ John 13:35

- Abstain from sexual immorality (4:3–5)⁵
- Don't take advantage of one another (4:6)
- Seek to grow in how you love one another (4:9–10)
- Don't be that person who takes pleasure in gossiping or in stirring up trouble (4:11)
- Honor your spiritual leaders (5:12–13)
- Watch out for one another (5:14)
- Don't see revenge (5:15)

“You may be the only Bible that someone ever reads.”

Our conduct matters. Big time.

4. **Comfort**: the promise that Jesus is coming back & we will live with Him forever.

As Paul closes his letter, he comforts us with the promise that Jesus is coming back, and that He will take His people home to live with Him forever!

For 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.

Then 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.

Therefore *comfort* one another with these words.

~ 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

Therefore *comfort* each other and edify one another,

Just as you also are doing.

~ 1 Thessalonians 5:9–11

Paul is reminding us that there is more to this life than living and dying.⁶

In all of our *sorrows* and in all of our *suffering* and in all our *saying goodbye* to loved ones, we have a hope beyond the grave. Yes, there is sorrow, but we don't “*sorrow as others who have no hope*” (4:13), because **we know how this story ends**.

In all of our struggles (even to the point of death itself) there is a comfort for Christians in the absolute certainty that we will spend eternity in the presence of our Father and our Savior and our Christian brothers and sisters. **We will see this victory!**

If I had to boil down the message of 1 Thessalonians into a single phrase, it would be this: *Christian Comfort & Christian Conduct in the Certainty of Christ's Coming*.

⁵ Sexual immortality is essentially taking something from somebody else that does not belong to you. It is using your eyes, your heart, your mind, your hands, your body (or all the above) to gratify the lusts of your flesh. In marriage, a husband and a wife belong to one another. But outside of marriage, any act of sexual gratification is an act of stealing. It's not an act of love – no matter how it feels. *They will know we are Christians* (in part) when our actions are driven by love – and not lust.

⁶ [More to this Life](#) by Steven Curtis Chapman.