
What does a 2,000 year old letter have to do with us? Thessalonica was a real place, with real converts and a very new congregation. There were real questions and real opposition to their new faith. And like us, they were learning how to follow Jesus in the everyday arena of life. These were serious believers! They had a sincere faith. I believe this describes us. We are sincere and serious about our faith. We want to know how we can honor and love Jesus more and more. This letter is for us and it's for now... it's for us everyday saints. And it all started with a vision!

I. THE BACKGROUND

Acts 16

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were in Troas and preaching the Gospel. They discern the call of God to continue into Greece and they immediately begin the journey! They set sail and begin preaching in Philippi. Lydia is saved and baptized. And then Paul cast a demon out of slave girl who was being used to tell fortunes. They are beaten, jailed and insulted. Feet in the stocks, Paul and Silas were singing in the middle of the night, when God sends an earthquake and opens all the prison doors. Rather than running Paul preaches to the jailer. His entire family believes in Jesus and is baptized. The next morning the leaders of the city ask them to leave...

A. From here, Paul and his team journey to Thessalonica.

Acts 17

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. 10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night...

B. The first letter to the Thessalonians was written shortly after this connection. This is the context...

II. AN APOSTOLIC HEART REVEALED

A. The first 3 chapters of the Thessalonians reveal more about Paul and what he understood about apostolic ministry and commissioning than maybe any other letter. It is clear that Paul loved these people and carried them in prayer before the Father. He reminds them of His regard and how he labored among them to be able to provide the Gospel free of charge.

B. There's something else that is noteworthy... Paul sees he's calling as an apostle linked to their growing faith. In a day where apostles/pastors/ministry leaders define themselves by their own success, it's breathtaking to see that Paul views his role in relation to those he is serving. How can we understand this? It's like a mother whose role is established by the fruit of her children. The calling is from the Lord in heaven, but the commissioning is in relation to a real people. Just like parenting, God provides the life, but mothering/fathering happens in relation to the child.

1 Thessalonians 2

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.

C. The point of any gift in the body is not for the sake of the gifted, rather it's for the sake of the body!

Ephesians 4

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

D. Paul writes because he's concerned that the persecution and immediate affliction have caused their faith to falter. The man accused of "turning the world upside down" is grieved over their hearts. This is the apostolic heart! And it's God's heart toward us. He makes intercession for us in our weakness.

1 Thessalonians 3

1 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.

E. Part of the apostolic commission is to prepare the church for affliction. This is indeed part of the call. What's astounding is that Paul was only with them a few weeks before he was torn away. He had already taught them the high cost of following Jesus. I know this is not a popular message! But the truth is that if there is a cost, and a high one at that, then what Paul was really preaching was the high value of Christ. May we be as brave! May our ministries reflect the faith handed down to us, and not some new "gospel." There are afflictions... we too, are destined for this.

- F. I pray for a full recovery of the apostolic message and messenger in our day. I pray that Resound would be part of this recovery for the nation and the nations.

III. A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD

1 Thessalonians 3

12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thessalonians 4

1 Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

- A. It's astounding to me what the Apostle Paul covered in three weeks of preaching. Many of us have been in church 30 years without ever hearing even one sermon on suffering and affliction... but Paul felt this was foundational for the church. There is a theme in Thessalonians about increase. Increasing in revelation. Increasing in love. Increasing in holiness and blamelessness. The letter to the Thessalonians is about the process of sanctification, not just the position of justification.

Isaiah 9

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end...

- B. The life of God, the love of God should be more and more and more and more. This is the normal Christian experience. More and more!
- C. There are instructions for how we "ought to walk." But the instructions were to be the starting line not the finish line. The call of God was not a better version of the old self, but a whole new creation... established in holiness before the Lord! We must hear and then declare a message that not only saves from sin, but saves for holy communion with God. Let's not fall short of receiving this call!

IV. THE WILL OF GOD IS OUR SANCTIFICATION

1 Thessalonians 4

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

The Death Side. In sanctification God has to deal with us on the death side as well as on the life side. Sanctification requires our coming to the place of death, but many of us spend so much time there that we become morbid. There is always a tremendous battle before sanctification is realized— something within us pushing with resentment against the demands of Christ. When the Holy Spirit begins to show us what sanctification means, the struggle starts immediately. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate . . . his own life . . . he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

In the process of sanctification, the Spirit of God will strip me down until there is nothing left but myself, and that is the place of death. Am I willing to be myself and nothing more? Am I willing to have no friends, no father, no brother, and no self-interest— simply to be ready for death? That is the condition required for sanctification. No wonder Jesus said, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew

10:34). This is where the battle comes, and where so many of us falter. We refuse to be identified with the death of Jesus Christ on this point. We say, “But this is so strict. Surely He does not require that of me.” Our Lord *is* strict, and He *does* require that of us.

Am I willing to reduce myself down to simply “me”? Am I determined enough to strip myself of all that my friends think of me, and all that I think of myself? Am I willing and determined to hand over my simple naked self to God? Once I am, He will immediately sanctify me completely, and my life will be free from being determined and persistent toward anything except God (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

When I pray, “Lord, show me what sanctification means for me,” He will show me. It means being made one with Jesus. Sanctification is not something Jesus puts in me— it is *Himself* in me. (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*- 1 Thessalonians 4:3)

- A. Sanctification is nothing short of being conformed to the image and life of Christ! This is the will of God for us.

Galatians 4

19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

1 Thessalonians 4

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

- B. Sanctification includes abstaining from sexual immorality. Now this may seem pretty basic, but the basics need to be preached. We can talk about heaven and the glory of God and the return of Jesus and miss the more foundational truths that address how we ought to live now. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, in some limited respect, were are the facility of heaven on earth. The Holy Spirit of God living and abiding in us!!
- C. We must be rid of sexual immorality in all forms, thought and deed. We are learning how to control our bodies in holiness and honor! The body was created for God! How do we do this? Firstly, you need to shut every door, every portal of immorality in your life.
- D. After closing the open doors, we need to be renewed. There are thoughts and images that have been imprinted on our souls. We need to ask the Lord to renew us... AND we need to become full participants in the process. We need to mediate and saturate ourselves in the Word.
- E. No one becomes a pervert over night. No one is thoroughly corrupted overnight. It took time to get bent and knotted up. It took effort. You had to give yourself to it. You had to invest in perversion. Why does it surprise us that there is a process involved in the renewal!? There is a process. But the good news is that with every investment of your time you are becoming more and more like Christ. More and more like the real you. You were created to love God. You were created to be free! With every investment, there will be transformation!

IV. LOVE ONE ANOTHER... AND DO IT MORE AND MORE

9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, 10 for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,

- A. This is practical. Go out of your way to serve one another. Think of others as better than yourselves. Spend time thinking about how you can be a blessing to someone here. Think about love! And think about how to do it more and more. Your life in God is so absolutely dependent on the body. You cannot grow in your faith in Christ (you cannot grow into the Head) without being attached, really connected, to His body. You will never be healthy, and you will never really be able to serve in your function, unless you are attached to others. You are a gift (to the body)! Do you see the theme here? More and more... Love more and more.

V. LIVE QUIETLY AND MIND YOUR BUSINESS

11 and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs...

- A. Really give yourself to the function God has called you! If you are parenting, parent with all your heart. If you are building something, build with all your heart. Give yourself to the task at hand! Let's break anything critical in our hearts toward our brothers and sisters. Maybe we don't need to comment on every little thing in someone else's life. Let's live our day out well before the Lord.
- B. If God entrusts you to steward someone else's business... (someone asks you to counsel them, etc.) then before the Lord you should carry that as a stewardship, something for which you will also give an account to God, then by all means give yourself to it. But if it's not within your stewardship, feel free to mind your own affairs.

VI. WORK WITH YOUR HANDS

...and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

- A. Paul will continue to lay out the theme of hard work all through both letters to the Thessalonians. He had worked hard as an example to them, and one of his greatest charges was against idleness in the church. Go back to Ephesians 4:16. There is something good about laboring for the Lord! Hard work is good! Laboring is good.
- B. Adam was working/laboring/cultivating the Garden before the Fall. The difference is that before the Fall it was yielding a good return. God is redeeming our labor! Work, hard work is from the Lord. Prayer is hard work. Victory is hard work. Delivery is hard work! But it's all worth it. These are the first foundational truths of the church and they are good. Let's live into them!