

Handouts

Including

Notes and Questions



1 & 2 Thessalonians

caring advice for young Christians, and a reminder that “All will be well”

YOUR NOTES

The Christian faith is still new to many

- As we learned in our previous lesson on Acts and Hebrews, when Paul first began preaching this new message of salvation in Jesus, he began by showing how Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- As he moves further away from Jerusalem and begins to preach to people who aren't as familiar with the Bible, he runs into both new questions and new challenges.
- Many of these are specific to the particular location he writes to.
- We need to remember that as we go through the specific letters, what we label **the Epistles**. I'll point out what is unique to them as we go along.

Where Paul is now, his 2nd Missionary Journey

- Going east, Paul has crossed Asia Minor, gone through Macedonia, stopped in Philippi where he was imprisoned and miraculously released.
- He goes south to Thessalonica—a very important city that was both a seaport and the connecting point of important Roman roads, specifically the Via Egnatia that went from the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, connected with Thessalonica, and continued to Byzantium.
- It is important to understand the urban/city nature of where Paul preached. He didn't go to —small villages as we might assume from Bible story pictures, but to major urban centers.

Thessalonica was a strategic city in which to share the gospel

- Paul frequently chose major cities like this on trade routes as from them the gospel would spread—modern day equivalents would be LA, Chicago, New York.
- Arrives in Thessalonica—the story is told in Acts 17 and as usual he preaches in the synagogue and a dispute breaks out—
- **However, there is a Ignatia HUGE shift here in the accusations behind the persecution—it was not a doctrinal one like earlier ones.**
- Now the accusation was different, it was not religious, it was political.
- In many ways, what happened was much more dangerous and this is what would cause the severe persecution of the church in its early centuries, let's look at it more closely.

What happened, in Acts 17

- *Acts 17:5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.*
- *⁶And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;***
- *⁷Whom Jason hath received: and **these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.***
- *⁸And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.*

This passage is often totally misunderstood

- The comment: **“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;”**

- **Was not** some comment about the great new faith of the Christians and how life-changing it was—the personal changes of the gospel were NOT what they were referring to, as the verse continues—
- *7“Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.”*
- **The authorities didn’t care about a new religion—Rome only cared about a new rebellion—about a new king, a king named Jesus.**

This political focus changed everything

- This shift happened as Christianity was no more seen as merely a Jewish sect.
- Paul and others worked very hard to distinguish themselves from the Jewish faith in clarifying that the Law was preparation, people are now saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus alone and that this salvation is for ALL people.
- They had to make this distinction, this break, but being removed from the Jewish religion, they were removed also from the protection Rome gave to the Jews.
- In addition to no longer being seen as part of the Jewish religion there was also the problem **of the exclusivity of the Christian religion.**
- Christianity said Jesus only—and that got them into trouble.

Why this was a problem

- In contrast, in all the other religions in Rome you could “worship” any collection of gods or philosophies you wanted.
- People put together whatever they needed or felt like, an offering to a certain “god” for wealth or fertility or whatever you wanted or for whatever religion made you feel good.
- In addition, if you were a Christian (it was like this for the Jews, but they were not aggressively evangelistic about it) **it meant you could not worship the ONE religion required of all Romans and that was—**
- **That you would not worship the Emperor as god**—which each citizen had to profess at various times by either a verbal declaration, offering incense, etc.
- Some said “it’s a little thing...” to proclaim worship to the Emperor but many chose to die rather than do it.
- The demand for Christians to state loyalty to Caesar would harden and great persecution was coming because of it, but the seeds of it are here.

The young Christians were not prepared for this, so Paul sent Timothy to check on them

- And then when the news back about them Paul responded with this letter that both encouraged them and answered additional questions as we see in...
- *1 Thess. 3:2,NLT we sent Timothy to visit you. . . . We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, ³and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles. ⁴Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know.*
- **Application always:** troubles will come, but troubles are never an excuse for behavior unbecoming a believer in Jesus. Paul goes on to encourage them in that.

He gives them advice on how to live a holy life in contrast with the world around them

- **1 Thes. 4:3** *It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.*
- The Roman world was incredibly immoral, far beyond even anything we

experience today.

- It was primarily based on the power of men, who could have sex with anyone they wanted if strong enough or rich enough.
- Paul simply says don't live like that. The Christian sexual ethic was very different. Sex only in a monogamous marriage was the Christian standard.
- In the **Letter to Diogenitus**, an early Christian apologetic, it describes Christians by saying, "their board they spread for all, but not their bed."

Paul goes on with advice about various things and the same topics are in both letters

- He talks about the coming of Jesus, which is incredibly important primarily in the fact that **it will happen**.
- **In this lesson we won't get into specifics because there is absolutely NO consensus on end-times prophecy**, even among good, sincere Bible-believing people.
- As one example, there are over 30 interpretations of who the Man of Lawlessness is in 2 Thes. 2.
- After much prayer, study, and lots more prayer and I trust listening to the Lord—

I've chosen in the time we have

- To focus on what is NOT in debate and but instead how **we need to live in light of the reality that Jesus is coming back**, not the details on timing—which Jesus said nobody knows for certain anyway and which ought not to be our focus.
- As Acts 1:7,8 reminds us: *He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*
- Our focus is to be a worthy witness and that is what we will focus on, while remembering....

What is not in doubt is that our Lord will return

- What is also not in doubt is that He can come at any time—and as various Scriptures remind us, most likely at a time when things are going well, and people don't expect it.
- (We so often think about God in times of trouble and forget Him in times when things seem to be going well.)
- And we want to meet Him joyfully, living as He wants, no matter what our circumstances.
- And that is not to be the sort of person who thinks they have every prophetic timeline and debate figured out, yet are a nervous, ungrateful wreck, snapping at people, arguing and causing problems.
- So, let's look in more detail at the very challenging passage at the end of the book and how we might apply it as it tells us how to live until we meet Jesus either when we die or He returns.

We will read and then discuss

1 Thes. 5:13b-24

- *1 Thes. 5:13 Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*
- *¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*
- *¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.*

- ²³ *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²⁴ *The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

Let's break down some of the statements, all the language notes and definitions are from the *Blue Letter Bible*—plus my meditations, suggestions

- *1 Thes. 5:13* "Live in peace with each other."
- **BLB: "to bring to peace, reconcile," denotes in the NT, "to keep peace or to be at peace."**
- Very similar to: *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* Romans 12:18
- Both verses imply **actions on our part**—
- Reminds me of the saying that in any situation, you can either bring water or bring gasoline—what do you bring to a situation?
- Some people are simply peaceful, restful to be around, others we are always on edge, defensive—we need to rest in Jesus' peace and reflect that.
- One way to do that is that we need to remember it is the Holy Spirits job to convict of sin (John 16:8)—without His conviction our words have little effect and often do the opposite than what we want. Prayer should always be our first response to concerning situations.

Living in peace doesn't mean doing nothing

- ^{1 Thes. 5:14} *And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.* ¹⁵ *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*
- Don't ignore bad behavior but be kind about it.
- On patience—no one changes quickly (none of us do). Sometimes gentle reminders must be given many times.
- **No "wrong for wrong"**—sinners will sin, we shouldn't be surprised. Our challenge is to do good in those situations, that is how we are different. God is the ultimate judge, NOT us.

One that is challenging for me

- ^{1 Thes. 5:16} "Rejoice always", is a challenge for me in that I am way too serious/melancholy by nature.
- BLB: But the Greek is – **rejoice/chaíró, calmly happy.**
- I love that! "Calmly happy." I can do that.
- To me it is the same quiet assurance as we find in the meditation by Dame Julian (1343-1416) who wrote in the *Revelations of Divine Love* that "All will be well."

From Dame Julian of Norwich

- He did not say, you will never have a rough passage,
- you will never be over-strained,
- you will never feel uncomfortable,
- but he did say you will never be overcome.
- All will be well, All will be well,
- All manner of things will be well.

"Pray continually"

- When we think of prayer as a conversation with God, it becomes easier, simply always sharing thoughts, emotions, questions, requests.
- ^{1 Thes. 5:17} Pray **continually**, this particular word for "continually" is the same word is used by Paul to describe how often he prays for his people.
- Notice his pattern as you go through his letters in how he will often mention a situation or challenge or concern and then he will turn it into a prayer.
- This is another way to "be at peace with all people" –when you see a problem,

an issue in someone's life or if they do something you don't like—don't gossip or judge, turn it into a prayer for them.

Give **thanks** in all circumstances

- **BLB:** The word for “thanks” here is one that is primarily used of saying thanks before a meal—the idea of thanking ahead of time for what is put before us. Also, from the **BLB (“in”) in the verse is: en, en; a primary prepositioni.e. a relation of rest**
- Putting the two word studies together if we THANK God at the start of a challenging situation, then as we go through it—we can be at rest in it.
- Remembering that the command states we are to be thankful “in” not “for” all circumstances. The circumstance might be horrible or evil, yet—
- We can give thanks “in” all circumstances because we know that our God can use ANYTHING in our lives for our ultimate good and His glory. We give thanks from a position of resting in God.
- How we react to situations, difficulties shows our trust, our priorities.
- Not only to others, but often to ourselves so that we can adjust and grow and become more of who Jesus wants us to be.

Finally, Paul's prayer for us

- *1 Thessalonians 5:²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*
- Our God is a God of peace and in spending time with Him, we will become more peaceful and in that we will be sanctified—set apart as people of peace.
- The finally encouraging thing is that God is faithful. It isn't up to us to simply grit our teeth and try to do better.
- He will help us become all He wants us to be.
- **In that we can be thankful in all things, we can rejoice, we can be at peace.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 &2 Thessalonians, *caring advice for young Christians*

Important suggestions: be sure everyone in the group gets a chance to contribute—freely share YOUR thoughts, insights, questions—truly interact with each other and God’s Word.

1. How was the persecution of Paul and his sharing the good news about Jesus different in Thessalonica than it had been in other places? Why was this important?
2. Why was it important for the Christians then to assert that Jesus is the ONLY way and why is it important for us to do the same today? How can people get distracted from this truth, this focus on Jesus as the only way to God?
3. What does it mean to “live in peace with each other?” What are some ways we can actively work on peace within the family of God? In our social and work world? What are some things that can destroy it?
4. How can we “pray continually?” Is that realistic?
5. Which one of these commands that we talked about in the last sections of 1 Thes.5 is the most difficult for you to put into practice? What are some things you can do to make them more real in your life?
6. What does it mean to you that “God is faithful” in our struggles to grow as a Christian? How does that bring us peace?