

# (Through the Bible) 1 Thessalonians 1-3

by Chuck Smith

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*Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was a miracle of the power of the Holy Spirit, and he emphasized the importance of faith, hope, and love, as well as the doctrine of divine election and patience in waiting upon God.*

**Duration:** 1:18:23

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

**Topics:** "Second Coming", "Gospel Preaching"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of studying the Word of God and the hope of the coming of Jesus Christ. The speaker emphasizes the love and dedication of the apostle Paul in preaching the gospel to the Thessalonians, working tirelessly and not seeking personal gain. The speaker also highlights the contrast between the idols worshipped by the Thessalonians and their turning to the true and living God. Throughout the sermon, the speaker emphasizes the significance of the coming again of Jesus Christ and the hope it brings to believers.

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## Transcript

Let's turn to 1 Thessalonians. Paul the Apostle, on his second missionary journey, had taken Silas with him, who was commended by the church in Jerusalem as one of the leaders. When they got to Derbe, Timothy joined their evangelistic team.

As they journeyed on, they came to Troas. And Paul's desire was to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit forbade him. And there in Troas, as Paul was sick, he had a vision.

And there was a man of Macedonia calling him to come and help. And so Paul immediately got a ship, crossed the Aegean, and came to Macedonia, the area of Philippi, at which point Luke joined Paul's team. Whether or not Luke was the man that Paul saw in his vision, we do not know.

It is quite possible that it was Luke that Paul saw. Nonetheless, they came to Philippi and they began to share Jesus Christ there in Philippi by the river with ladies who would go there for prayer. And a lady who was a merchant whose name was Lydia was converted along with many others.

There was a young girl in the area of Philippi who was possessed by evil spirits. And Paul, through the power of Jesus Christ, freed her. And this caused a ruckus among those men that were controlling this young girl and actually profiting by her divination, a gift that she had through the demon powers.

And so they created an uproar. They had Paul and his company arrested. They were beaten and thrown into the dungeon of the prison.

At midnight, an earthquake opened the doors and the Philippian jailer, when he awoke, finding the doors open, was ready to commit suicide when Paul stopped him. And he came trembling and said, What must I do to be saved? And Paul shared the gospel with him. He took Paul home.

Paul shared the gospel with his family. And then the magistrates of the city found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, as was Silas. And so they said, Hey, tell your friends to just get out of town.

And Paul said, Look, they beat us publicly. They made a big public display of the whole thing. Let them come down themselves and deliver us, you know.

So Paul forced the issue and they came down, asked Paul to leave Philippi. So Paul with Silas, Timothy and Luke began to follow the Roman highway south from Philippi. They came through Amphipolis.

They passed through Apollonia. And they came to Thessalonica, which was a principal Roman city and is an important city today in modern Greece. Thessalonica is the same as the Thessalonica of the Bible.

It was here where Paul went into the synagogue and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, proving that Jesus was the Messiah. And many of the Jews believed. Some of them did not.

Those who did not believe stirred up a ruckus against Paul and Paul escaped from the city of Thessalonica and went on down to Berea. And there they again shared until certain of the Jews who had created the problems in Thessalonica came to Berea. And so Paul went on to Athens.

Later Luke and Silvanus, who is also Silas, and Timothy joined Paul and they journeyed to Corinth. But Paul was concerned about the believers in Thessalonica. So Paul asked Timothy to go back to Thessalonica to find out how the believers were doing.

Now, from the record, it would appear that Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was a very short ministry, as short as possibly just four weeks. As they mentioned, the three weeks ministering each Sabbath day for three Sabbath days in the synagogue. And then the trouble that was created.

And so it would appear that Paul's time there among them was extremely short. When Paul and his company came to them, they were probably still pretty well not bloody, but swollen and bruised from the beatings that they had received in Philippi. Their clothes probably ripped.

They probably looked pretty much a mess. But yet, Paul speaks about his coming to them in afflictions. And so the marks of the beatings still upon him, still very obvious there on his body when he first came to Thessalonica.

Timothy came back to Thessalonica to find the welfare of the church found it in good health. Found them really going on in the Lord. And returned to Corinth to share with Paul how that the church was prospering and going on in the Lord.

And so Paul then wrote this letter which is probably the first letter that Paul wrote to the churches. He wrote from Corinth back to Thessalonica this first epistle as he seeks to correct some of the misconceptions that had arisen. Now, the interesting thing to me is that from the gist of this letter of Paul, one of the most important truths that Paul had emphasized in that very short ministry was that of the

coming again of Jesus Christ.

And all the way through this first epistle he is making mention of that hope of the coming of Jesus Christ. And of course, next week in our lesson as we get to chapters 4 and 5, we'll be dealing with Paul's teaching on the rapture of the church as he is writing to the Thessalonians concerning the things that he had been teaching them and some of the misunderstandings that had arisen from his teaching. But I am amazed at what a tremendous foundation Paul was able to lay in the Word of God in the hearts of these people in such a short time as is evidenced by this epistle.

So, with that kind of a background, the year is about 5354. Paul is on his second missionary journey. He's just arrived in Corinth, has begun his ministry there, which will continue for one year and six months.

As the Lord spoke to him in Corinth and said, stick here Paul, I've got a lot of people that are going to believe on me in this place. And so, he is sent back now to Thessalonica. He has heard from Timothy the welfare of the church and he immediately writes them this letter.

Paul and Silvanus, another name for Silas, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church in God. The church in Jesus Christ.

And presently, Paul is going to be talking about the power of the Holy Spirit with which the message came to them in much assurance. And so, again, the Father, the Son, the Spirit in which the church was established. Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice how often Paul is relating God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together. If Jesus was not God, such a relationship and relating their names together constantly would be blasphemy. Some people say, but why doesn't he also include the Holy Spirit? Well, you remember that Paul's epistles are actually inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus said when the Holy Spirit is come, He will not testify of Himself, but He will testify of Me. And so, it is sufficient that in the inspiring of this writing by the Holy Spirit, that there is joined those two Persons of the Godhead, the Father and the Son. Paul's grace and peace unto you are the typical Pauline greetings.

The grace and peace, the Siamese twins of the New Testament, they're always coupled together. Wherever you find one, you find the other. And they are always in that order, grace and peace.

Because you cannot experience the peace of God until you understand and have received the grace of God. The understanding of the grace of God is essential to knowing the peace of God in your heart and life. For years, I had peace with God, but I did not have the peace of God because I did not know the grace of God.

I related to God in a legal way. My righteousness was predicated upon my good efforts, my devotional time, my prayer life and my study of the Word. I had a legal relationship with God.

Then I came to an understanding of the grace of God and I came into a loving relationship with God. And when I did, I suddenly experienced the peace of God, something I'd never known in my Christian life. And what a blessing it was to know the peace of God within my heart as I now rest where God rests in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

And so the Gospel came to me with much assurance only after I experienced the grace of God. Up until that time, I had no assurance in the Gospel. I didn't really know if I was saved or not from one week to the next.

But the much assurance came with the grace. So, we give thanks unto God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers. And again, how Paul does refer to his prayer life in each of his epistles.

Paul was a man of prayer. As we look at the men that God has used in the New Testament, those men that were used mightily of God, we find that there are certain things that are endemic to all of them. And one is that they were men of prayer.

If you want God to really use your life, it is necessary that you be in close communion with God. And prayer, of course, is that means by which we remain in close touch with Him. Prayer is not a monologue, though so often we make it such.

But prayer should always be a dialogue. In fact, as the years have passed, I have spent more time in the listening side of prayer than I have the talking side of prayer. When I first started my communication with God, I did all the talking, very little listening.

But as years went by and my relationship with God grew, I did less talking and more listening. For I am convinced that what God has to say to me is much more important than anything I'd have to say to Him. And so I've learned to listen to God.

And I've sought to listen before I speak in order that God might speak to my heart what is His purpose, His will, His desire in a particular matter so that I may make that my prayer. Paul, a man of prayer, and thus God used him, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope. Again, as in Galatians, as in Ephesians, and as in the Corinthian epistles, Paul links these three, faith, hope, love.

You remember in 1 Corinthians 13, and now abide these three, faith, hope, love. And so he is constantly relating these three things. First of all, they had the work of faith.

If you have true faith, there is that work that is the natural result of faith. And if the faith does not affect your actions, then it is not a true faith. A person with true faith, that faith will affect what they do.

It has an effect upon their actions, upon their works. It is producing a work in their life. And so, the work of faith.

Faith is not a work, but faith does produce a certain result in us. The work of faith. The labor of love.

Now, the word labor, as we pointed out to you last Thursday night as we studied this word in the message of Jesus to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2, the word means to labor to the point of weariness or exhaustion. And only love can bring that kind of labor. And how many times do we see this exemplified in a mother going around the house laboring to the point of exhaustion.

Especially when the children are little. And there are all those responsibilities. And yet, it's a labor of love.

Because you look at those beautiful little faces and you don't really think, oh my, I'm so tired and all. That dirty little face, just throw it in bed, you know, and let it go. But you can't help it.

Just go in and get the warm wash rag and the towel and come and wash the hands and wash the face and kiss the cheek, though you're as tired as can be because all that you've done all day long. But that's the labor of love. And how glorious when our love for God is such that we don't really consider the weariness of our own bodies.

But as Paul, the love of Christ just constrains me. And that labor of love, and again, that's the only motive that God will really accept. Remember, that was the problem of the church in Ephesus.

They were laboring, but without love. And that's what the Lord really spoke to them about. And He said, unless you begin to love, unless you return to that first love, I'm going to take the candlestick and move it out of its place.

And so the only labor that God really accepts from us is the labor of love. For though I give my body to be burned, sell all I have and bestow on the poor if I have not love. Prophets mean nothing.

The labor of love. And then, the patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and the Father. So that patience.

Learning to wait upon God. Boy, what a time I have with that. I don't know why that should be so difficult, and yet to me, it's one of the most difficult things in my Christian experience, to wait upon God.

I so often am giving God time limits. Lord, I'll give you until Saturday to work this thing out. And if you don't do something by Saturday, then I'm going to have to step in and do something myself.

But to just wait upon God, you see, to wait upon God takes great faith. I have to believe that God is in control and that God is working, though I may not see it. How many problems have been created because we didn't wait upon God.

How many times with Abraham do we move to take things into our own hands, knowing what God has purposed, knowing what God has planned? God has not done it in the time frame that I feel He ought to do it. And so, Lord, we know You want to do it, but obviously You can't do it without our help. And so, we're going to help You out, Lord.

And oh my, what problems we create when we step in to help God out. But that's been the problem, I think, through the centuries is that patience of hope. Just waiting upon God.

Waiting upon His time. Waiting on Him to work in His time. Knowing that He is going to work.

Confident that God is going to work. Now, there are many exhortations to patience. You have need of patience, we are told in Hebrews, that after you have done the will of God, you might obtain the promise.

We are told of those of the Old Testament who through faith and patience inherited the promises of God. And then James exhorts us to patience into waiting for the coming of the Lord. Establish your souls.

Be patient. For the Lord is waiting for the complete fruit of harvest. So, they were patient in their hope.

Laboring in love. They had the works of faith. And all of this after just one month of Paul's ministry to them.

Knowing, brethren, beloved, your election of God. Now, this is a doctrine that we usually don't teach new believers. We usually wait until a person is pretty well founded in the Scriptures before we broach this

theological problem of divine election.

But Paul saw it necessary to teach divine election unto these new believers in Thessalonica. He speaks of them knowing the fact that they were elected by God. People have problems with divine election.

They have a problem with God making choices. However, we surely do appreciate the fact that God has given to us the capacity of choice. I was glad that the Lord allowed me to choose the one I was to spend the rest of my life with as a companion.

He just didn't throw anybody at me and say, here, take that. But He allowed me the choice. And He also allowed her the choice when I gave it to her.

So that we're not forced into the company of someone with whom we might be completely incompatible. Or someone that we really have no real attraction to. Now, if God has given to us the choice of those whom we are going to have as our companions, our associates, why shouldn't God have the right to choose those He wanted to be with? And indeed, He has.

Now, that doesn't trouble me at all. It thrills me that He chose me. And so, knowing that God has elected, Jesus said to His disciples, You didn't choose me, I chose you.

And ordained that you should be my disciples, that you should bring forth fruit, that your fruit should remain. That whatsoever you should ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you. I've chosen you, He said.

And so the Scripture does teach divine election. It never teaches divine election apart from the foreknowledge of God, whom He did foreknow, He did also predestinate that they should be conformed to the image of His Son. And so Paul taught the doctrine of divine election to the church in just a month's time.

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. I think that that's probably the weakness of the gospel today. Is that so many times we are proclaiming the gospel in word only.

And it lacks the power and the work of the Holy Spirit and that assurance with it. Paul, you remember, went from here to Corinth later when he wrote to the Corinthians. He said to them, and my preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but with the demonstration of the Spirit and power.

We need more of that kind of preaching, which is a demonstration of the power of God. And so, the word came unto you, not in word only, the gospel came not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. As you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

So, what manner of men we were for your sakes. Men ministering through the power of the Spirit. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

And so, again, Paul here makes mention of the fact of his probably physical appearance, the beating that he had received at Philippi, and yet they received the word in the joy of the Holy Spirit. So that we were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God's word is spread abroad so

that we need not to speak anything.

Marvelous! The church here could not be more than six months old. And yet, from them already, the word of the Lord was sounding out to all of the area around them. Their faith toward God was spread abroad.

The reputation of their believers there. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you. So, it shows with what power the Holy Spirit was working in Paul and those companions of Paul as they came to this church.

It was really miraculous that this church should be so effective and yet so young. And it can only be attributed to the fact of the power of the Holy Spirit in the church. What a mistake we make today when we try to relegate this power of the Spirit only to the biblical days.

What a mistake we make today when we place such an emphasis upon the enticing words of man's wisdom and seeking to establish people in the faith by just fancy speeches, clever talks. We need the dynamic of the Spirit that the word of God might come not just in word only, but in the power and the demonstration of the Spirit of God. And because of that, they turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God.

In Greece, they had many idols. Paul, when he came to Athens, he found his spirit just torn as he looked at this metropolis and saw this city that was wholly given over to idolatry. It just really ripped him up inside to see the idolatry there in Athens.

So, though he was really trying to cool things down, his reception in Europe wasn't with a lot of fanfare. They didn't have the band out to greet him and banners waving welcome, you know. But in Philippi, he was beaten and kicked out of town, came to Thessalonica, where he had to leave town and the people where he was staying got arrested and had to post bail just because they kept Paul.

Came to Berea and he had to leave Berea because of the riots that ensued in his ministry there. So, they said, hey, look, we'll stay and help establish this church here in Berea. You, Paul, go on down and get an R&R in Athens, you know.

Sort of lay low for a while. Tough sledding here in Greece. So, Paul went down to Athens and seeing a city wholly given over to idolatry, he couldn't just kick back and lie still.

His heart was burning and so he started sharing with the Athenians. They said, oh, come on up to Mars Hill and we'll give you your audience up there. You can speak to all of us and share this new religion.

For the Athenians, spent their whole lives just, you know, arguing and wanting to hear some new thing. So, they gave Paul his day there on Mars Hill. And as he began his speech to them, he said, I perceive that you are very religious people because as I've been going through your city down here, I have noticed all of the gods that you have.

And he said, I came across one little altar and it was inscribed to the unknown God. I'd like to tell you about that God. In Greece, they had deified all of the emotions of man.

The God of love, the God of hate, the God of fear, the God of peace, the God of joy. They deified everything. Some fellow thought, well, we may have missed one and we don't want him to be angry with us, so let's build an altar to the unknown God so he won't feel neglected, you know.

But they worshipped Aphrodite, they worshipped Narcissus, they worshipped Bacchus, they worshipped Zeus, all of the various idols. But these people had turned from the idols to worship the true and the living God. We usually think of idolatry as something of a past history of man or something that is only found in primitive cultures.

Not so. We can even find idols in churches, images, statuary. Though it has been specifically forbidden in the Scriptures, yet it does exist.

When a person begins to worship an idol or a relic, it is a sign that that person has lost the consciousness of God and the presence of God. God oftentimes works through instruments. God works through the cross to bring our salvation.

But then to take splinters of the cross and begin to venerate splinters of the cross so that the people have lost the truth behind the cross. God used the brass serpent in the wilderness to bring healing to Israel from the bites of these poisonous snakes. But there came a time in the history of Israel when Hezekiah was king that they were worshipping this brass snake.

They had kept it. It had become a religious relic and people were coming and worshipping this brass snake. So that Hezekiah broke the thing and he said, Nehushtan.

It's just a thing of brass. It's not God. But the worship of it indicated the loss of the consciousness of God within their lives, but also a deep desire to experience God again.

Now, the idols that they had made to these various passions or to the various emotions or various concepts were more honest than people today. For we still have these as idols within our hearts many times, though we may not have made some little form that we set on a table and put little flowers around and kneel before each morning and light candles before each night. But we can be burning incense in our hearts.

There are those today who are worshipping Narcissus. There are those today who are worshipping Aphrodite. Those today who are worshipping Bacchus, Zeus.

They just don't have idols except within their hearts. Now, they had turned from these idols to the true and the living God. And they were waiting for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Now, it is interesting to me that at the end of each of the first four chapters, Paul makes reference to the coming again of Jesus Christ. An important part to a person's faith and belief system. For it is really the hope that sustains us.

And so the patience of hope, and here he broadens that a bit, as they were waiting for God's Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. How much doctrine is involved in that little statement right there. The central message of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead by God the Father.

And the coming again of Jesus Christ to deliver us from the wrath to come. Now, we are waiting for Jesus to deliver us from the wrath to come. That wrath to come could be a reference to the eternal punishment that God is going to visit upon those who have rejected Him.

But it also could very well refer to the wrath to come during the great tribulation period. And as we go further into Thessalonians, we'll find that God has not appointed us unto wrath. Jesus is going to deliver us from the wrath to come during the period of the great tribulation when the sixth seal is opened.

And these cataclysmic judgments are taking place in the universe. Awesome, fearful things happening. And the kings of the earth and the chief captains and all will be hiding, calling unto the rocks and to the mountains, fall on us and hide us from the face of the Lamb.

For the day of His wrath has come and who shall be able to stand? The wrath to come. There is coming the wrath of God upon this earth in the great tribulation. And I do not believe that it would be proper scriptural exposition to not include that in the deliverance of the Lord for His saints.

I believe that it is an all-inclusive deliverance from the wrath to come, the great tribulation, as well as the future judgment of the unbeliever. More about that as we move into Revelation on Thursday nights. And more about that as we move into Thessalonians next Sunday night.

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you that it was not in vain. Now, Paul evidently had quite an entrance to the city of Thessalonica for he makes reference to it three times here in the opening part of this letter. But it was not in vain.

But even after that we had suffered before and were shamefully entreated, as you know, at Philippi. I mean, they had really suffered. There was no doubt a real beating that was inflicted on these fellows.

And having come directly from Philippi, the marks still quite obvious. So after we had suffered, were shamefully entreated, as you know at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God with much contention. Because there was a lot of contention raised by the unbelieving Jews there in Thessalonica against Paul.

We are told in the book of Acts that they were contentious because they were envious at the great crowds. By the time the third Sabbath came, the whole town had gathered together to listen to the message that Paul was proclaiming. And the Jews became envious, jealous.

And so they then stirred up a group of men who were of the base sort to beat them, to lie against them, to give false charges. These men are against Rome. They're rebelling against Rome.

And perpetrated, of course, the beatings of them and the imprisonment in the dungeon. So as they preached the Gospel in Thessalonica, these Jews stirred up contention there. And they were so contentious that when they heard that they'd gone to Berea, they came down to Berea to stir up trouble down in Berea.

Now, our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile. Paul said we were straightforward with you. We exhorted you in a straightforward manner.

There was no endeavor to deceive you. There was no kind of hidden meanings. No guile.

Straightforward. But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which tries our hearts. And so they had that sense of responsibility before God.

And how important that we have that sense of responsibility to God. I think that that's one of the problems today with a lot of people. The fear of God is not in their heart.

They are not really honest before God and before the people. A lot of exaggerations. A lot of deception.

Keith Ritter, who labored with us here at Calvary for many years and now is laboring for us in his ministry over in China, Japan, before coming to Calvary was attending another church in the area. And a part of Keith's ministry in the other church was to help frame the bulletin. And he was given the typed out messages of the pastor six months in advance.

And in a message that was to be preached six months down the road, the pastor would be using an illustration and in the illustration would say, last week my secretary came in and said this and this and this. And it was a sermon to be preached six months from now. Well, that bothered Keith.

In fact, it bothered him so much he left the church. Because there were a lot of illustrations that were not really true, relating of events that really didn't happen, but it made great sermon illustration. Paul said, I didn't have any of that.

We were straightforward because we know that God tries our hearts. God knows our hearts. That awareness and thus the honesty before God is so important.

For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, for God is witness. And they were aware of that fact that God was witness. The fear of God was in their heart.

And surely that's what we need today. That we have a true fear of God within our hearts. Nor of men did we seek glory, neither of you, nor yet of others.

When we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ, we didn't seek your support. Though as apostles we could have sought your support, but we didn't. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse who chooses her children.

And so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you not the Gospel of God only, but our own souls, because you were dear unto us. Now again, we have a beautiful insight into the heart of the apostle here. And no wonder he was so effective.

He was clean. He was honest. He was straightforward.

He wasn't there to make a buck for himself. He wasn't there to enrich himself or to get glory for himself. He was there because he loved them earnestly with a godly love and wanted to bring them the glorious truth of Jesus Christ, which had transformed his own life.

And so you remember, brethren, that our labor and travail, that word labor again, toiling into the point of weariness and travail, for laboring night and day because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God. So he worked night and day in order that he might provide for his own needs, in order that he might preach to them the Gospel of God, so that no one would actually accuse him of being a mercenary. Well, you're just in it, Paul, for the money.

You know, you come in and you take a big offering and then you leave town. No way. He labored with his own hands to provide for the needs of his group that he would not be chargeable to any of them.

You are witnesses, and God also, how wholly and justly and unblameably we behaved ourself among you that believed. I mean, they lived straight, circumspect lives. They lived holy lives.

They lived unblameable kind of lives. God help us. No wonder the witness of the church is so weak and so anemic because of the lives of many of those who are out running the circuit, doing such damage.

God help us. As you know, how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father does his children. Paul's ministry, I love it.

Here is the insight, really, to the true minister. One who travails and labors among the people. One who is not seeking the glory of the people.

One who just is gentle with them as a nurse cherishing her children, and now as a father his children, teaching, exhorting, comforting that you would walk worthy of God who has called you unto His kingdom and glory. In other words, you are a prince, a princess. You're children of the King.

Walk worthy of God's kingdom and God's glory. And this beautiful exhortation to them. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when you receive the Word of God which you heard of us, you didn't receive it as the Word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God which effectually works also in you that believe.

So they received it as God's Word. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus. For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.

The church was experiencing persecution in Israel, in Judea. They had already had several persecutions by which the church was scattered. And so here these in Thessalonica were having problems even as the church in Jerusalem had had problems.

Suffering from their own countrymen. Speaking of the church in Jerusalem and of the Jews who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us and please not God and are contrary to all men. Quite an indictment that Paul makes against the Jews here.

They killed the Lord Jesus. They killed their own prophets. They persecuted us and they're contrary to all men.

I have in my mind been writing a book. I don't know if it will ever get on paper. But I have been writing a book addressed to the Jewish people and I was thinking of a title, Do You Always Crucify Those Who Love You? Here is a group of people that somehow find it very difficult to receive love without being suspicious, without looking for some ulterior motive and perhaps for good reason because of the treatment that they have received from the world and so much anti-Semitism and all that whenever anyone shows a genuine concern or love for them they seem to get suspicious but then they begin to almost deliberately cut those persons off.

Just recently I've started getting a lot of bad press in Israel. Totally false. Accusations being made that are completely spurious.

People are writing things about me that I've never done, I've never been, they've never happened and yet for some reason or other I've started to get it of late in the press in Israel. And it's interesting because all I've ever had is a tremendous love for Israel and yet they always look with suspicion. Why do you love us? Why do you give to us? Why do you support us? And they begin then to interpret all kinds of false motives.

Well, you're just trying to get close to us so you can missionize us or convert us. Or you're only doing it, you know, because you're trying to fulfill prophecy and get the Lord to come back or, you know, they can't just accept love because, you know, you are God's people and we love you because you're God's people. I personally do not have any great burden to evangelize the Jews any more than I do any other race or group of people.

I feel that evangelism of the Jews is something that's totally in God's hands. If He's blinded their eyes, only He can take away the blinding of the eyes of the Jews. So I leave their evangelism to God.

I can't undo what God has done. And if blindness has happened in part to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles become in, then I'm not going to waste my efforts trying to undo what God has done. Let God undo that.

And my ministry is not to the Jews but to the church which is comprised of people from all backgrounds for there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but Christ is all and in all. So, evangelism of Israel is not my motive in loving them. And I am also convinced that as far as prophecy is concerned, it's in God's hands and He's going to fulfill what He has said He's going to do without my help.

I do not have any grandiose concept of myself as, you know, God has chosen me to fulfill His prophecies in these last days. I don't feel like I'm any special instrument of God any more than anybody else who has committed their life to God. You know, and so I don't feel any divine calling to go blow up the dome of the rock or anything else, you know, which I've been accused of in the press of, like, supporting the terrorist groups and all who are wanting to blow up the dome of the rock and this kind of stuff.

And somehow they've got my name in with a bunch of other people's names who I don't really know. They got me meeting regularly with them and I didn't even know they met. It'll be interesting to see what comes of it.

But are contrary to all men, even those that love them. They have difficulty receiving it. And so, they would forbid Paul to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

And they fill up their sin always for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. And so, these people who through their rejection of Jesus Christ and God's provision for their salvation have brought such hardships upon themselves. But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, but not in heart, endeavor the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

So, Paul said, I had to leave in a hurry, actually. He got out of there just before the officers came to Jason's house to arrest him. Though I left my body, my heart's still there, man.

I'd long to see. I'd really desire to be there and to be with you. Wherefore, we would have come to you, even I, Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us.

For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ that is coming? Isn't this our hope? Isn't this our joy? Isn't this the crown of our ministry? That when the Lord comes, you're going to be there and we'll be meeting together with Him in His kingdom. That's the purpose. That's the joy.

That's the crown of our ministry. John, in writing his epistle, said, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. And so for the minister, the real joy, the real hope, the real reward, the crown of the

ministry is in the lives of the people who through the Word of God have been transformed and now have that glorious hope of being in Christ in His kingdom.

And our joy and crown will be fulfilled when we sit there together before the throne of the Lamb, worshipping together, and we look around and we see those who God brought into our lives that we might impact them with His love and with His truth. And there will be all the reward ever necessary for the ministry. And so Paul said, That's my joy.

That's my hope. That's the crown of my ministry. You.

Being there in the presence of the Lord at His coming. For you are our glory and joy. Wherefore, when we couldn't stand it any longer, we thought it would be good to be left at Athens alone.

And we sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ to establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith. Paul was there in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive. He was discouraged.

When Timothy came, he was concerned about the church in Thessalonica. We were there such a short time. Go back, Timothy.

I'm going to go on down to Corinth. You go back. Find out how they're doing.

So when I couldn't take it any longer, I was so concerned about you, worried and concerned for you, I sent Timothy, our brother, that he might establish you and comfort you concerning your faith. That no man should be moved by these afflictions or by the tribulation, by the efforts of the enemy to destroy them. For yourselves know that we were appointed thereunto.

In other words, don't be discouraged because I've had such a bad time. I've been afflicted. God's appointed me for that.

For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation even as it came to pass. And you know, Paul, as he's there, saying, hey, I'm going to suffer tribulation, man. He prophesied it and he said it came to pass.

Now this is an interesting thing to me. Paul said I was appointed to this. When Paul was converted on the way to Damascus and the Lord spoke to Paul and called him to go to the Gentiles, the Lord told Paul on the road to Damascus all of the things that Paul was going to have to suffer for Jesus' sake.

Now, that's no way to call a man into a ministry in my estimation. You know, when we seek to inspire men to the ministry, we try and tell them of all of the glorious things that will happen to you as a servant of Jesus Christ. Oh, you'll have the joy of seeing lives transformed.

You'll have the thrill of being able to share God's love with people. And the people are out there hungry. They're wanting to hear the Gospel.

They're waiting to hear. And oh, you'll have the chance of just... And that's not the way the Lord called Paul. When he called Paul to his ministry, he said, now Paul, these are the things that you're going to suffer for my name's sake.

You're going to be beaten. You're going to be stoned. And he went on and laid out for Paul all of the sufferings.

Jesus, when he called Ananias to go pray for Paul there in Damascus, and Ananias said, oh no, Lord, not Paul. You've made a mistake. I've heard about that guy.

He's a terror. He's been ripping up the church in Jerusalem, and he's come down here to imprison everybody that's calling on your name. And Jesus said, he is a chosen vessel unto me, and I have showed him all of the things that he is going to suffer for my name's sake.

So for whatever reason or purposes, God chose Paul to suffer affliction. He told him in advance. Now, I do believe that at that point, Paul did have the power of choice, and he could say, Lord, call someone else.

I don't think I like that. I think I'd just as soon spend the rest of my life making tents in Tarsus and living a quiet, peaceable life. You know, get someone else to do your dirty work.

Paul went, knowing that it was going to be affliction, knowing that he was going to suffer, knowing that he was going to be persecuted, God help us, who are looking for the easy path. Lord, can't you plant roses along the side, you know, and just, you know, sort of carry me along and make it easy. And Lord, as long as things are going smooth, I'm going to serve you with all my heart.

But the moment some affliction or trouble comes, you know, oh, wait a minute, you know, I didn't bargain for this. No wonder the writer of the Hebrews wrote to those who were complaining and said, what have you got to complain about? You've not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin. Show me your scars.

So, don't be upset, Paul said, because of the affliction that came. I told you it was going to happen. You remember that.

For this cause, because I couldn't really take it any longer, I sent to know of your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you and our labor be in vain. I sent to know about how your faith was doing, because I didn't want your faith to be in vain by Satan coming in and ripping you off. But now, when Timothy came from you to us, and he brought us the good tidings of your faith and of your love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us as we also to see you.

Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all of our afflictions and the distress by your faith. So, when Timothy came to Paul in Corinth and said, oh, Paul, they're going on, they're doing great. And oh, how much they love you, Paul, and how they long to see you.

Oh, it was just such an encouragement to Paul's heart. And he was strengthened and encouraged by that. Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all of our affliction and distress by your faith.

For now we live, or are satisfied as long as you stand fast to the Lord. That's what we're really concerned about. For what thanks can we render to God again for you for all of the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God? Night and day, praying exceedingly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.

So, Paul was praying night and day for the opportunity of going back and ministering to them again. For he had been with them such a short time, he had not been able to establish them fully in the faith, the understanding of the Word. And so, I'm praying and seeking God that somehow I might be able to come

back and complete my ministry to you.

Now, God Himself and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you. Paul's prayer and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, men even as we do you. To the end, that He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints.

Again, notice at the end of each chapter, he brings you again to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 1, they were waiting for God's Son to come from Heaven to deliver them from the wrath to come. The great tribulation that was going to come.

They were waiting for the Lord to come and deliver them. Chapter 2, the end of the chapter, Paul's joy and reward, crown, was that they might be with Him there in the presence of Christ at His coming. Now, in chapter 3, that God would establish their hearts unblameable in holiness, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints.

When Jesus comes, He is coming with the saints. Which means that the saints have to be with Him before they can come with Him. Now, we'll get into this as we move into chapter 4 and we come to the end of chapter 4. Paul is going to spend a great deal of time talking about the coming of the Lord with the saints and for the saints.

And so we'll be dealing with the subject of the rapture of the church next Sunday night as we finish the book of 1 Thessalonians dealing with chapters 4 and 5. And we deal with those passages that do relate to the rapture of the church being caught up to meet the Lord. And hopefully, we'll be able to clear up some confusion that has arisen by taking some of the Scripture out of its context. And so, next week, continue and finish the book of Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5. Not that much reading, but surely important teaching in regards to the coming again of Jesus Christ for His church.

Father, we thank You again tonight for the privilege of studying the Word of God. Thank You, Father, for the hope, the blessed hope of the coming of our Lord to save us and deliver us from the wrath to come. Lord, do establish our hearts in Your love.

And may we walk in love as You would have us to walk, Father. In holiness. In purity.

In honesty. Unblameable. Oh, God, do Thy work in our lives.

And glorify Thy name. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

May the Lord bless and give you a beautiful week. God bless. God strengthen.

And fill you with His love in Jesus' name.

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