

The Freshness of Faith 1 Thessalonians 1

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the transformative power of faith in the lives of the Thessalonians and its implications for Christians today.

Topics: "Faith in Action", "Awaiting Christ's Return"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the transformative power of faith as demonstrated in 1 Thessalonians 1, where the Thessalonians' faith, hope, and love were evident despite persecution. Their genuine conversion led to a distinct separation from worldly idols, as they turned to serve the living God and awaited the return of His Son, Jesus Christ. This active faith was not merely theoretical but was manifested in their daily lives, showcasing the divine energy that connected them to God. Darby highlights that true assurance in faith leads to a powerful witness that can attract both admiration and opposition from the world. Ultimately, the sermon calls believers to live in the light of Christ's return, finding joy and purpose in their relationship with Him.

Transcript

There is great power of walk shewn forth in this chapter. It brought persecution, but the word had power in them. The world's hatred of them was a proof that there was testimony to the truth. There was the witness of it constantly brought before others, as well as this inward life in power and suffering. There were faith, hope, charity (or love) (v. 3), these three great elements of the power of life in exercise. They were laying hold of things unseen, which was faith. They were waiting in hope for what was to come. And there was the activity of love. They were not going on listlessly, but divine energy was manifested in their everyday life. When patience was exercised, it was the "patience of hope," and what they had to do was done in faith. How strong a link this was between them and every other Christian! When the living power was seen, they were recognised as God's children: the stamp of God was upon them. We know that divine counsels and thoughts of grace were the spring of it all; but there was that which could be seen.

The word was in the Holy Ghost on hearts; it was not in word only, for there was power. There must be unhesitating confidence in the things laid hold of; then there is power. If I say merely, "I suppose these things are true," this is not assurance. But they received the gospel "in much assurance." The result was complete distinctness from the world, which became their enemies. This was not the most pleasant part. They had "much affliction"; but then there was also "joy in the Holy Ghost." To the Corinthians he says, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

These Thessalonians were living in another world after the word came to them in power. There was a divine spring in them that nothing could touch. In other places they might be getting on more quietly; but there was power here, and all they did was connected with God: all was done under God. This is what we have to seek. Then the testimony went forth, they scarcely knew how; but people saw there was this link with God. They did not trouble themselves about what was said of them. "Your faith to Godward is spread abroad so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves shew of us," etc. That is, the world became a constant witness of what Paul's preaching was. It could be seen from the conduct of those who received it.

359 If we were all thoroughly faithful, the world would begin to talk about it, and there would be persecution, no doubt. "Let your light so shine before men," etc.; not, let your good works shine, but "your light." "Holding forth the word of life," etc. They saw not only what the Thessalonians were doing, but they took knowledge of the new truth Paul was preaching to them. They "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven."

First, there was a total break with all they were going on in before. Not only did they abandon all the wickedness the heathen were living in, but next they served "the living and true God." They had a new centre of all they did. They "turned to God," the living God. "They turned . . . from idols." The characteristic of these was something for and suited the flesh. Men were looking to that which the flesh likes, and averting what the flesh did not like. There was no connection with God, nor link for the conscience in having to do with idols; but a licence for lust, and all that is agreeable to the flesh. There are those now who look to their idols to help them to pleasure and money: where is the moral difference between stocks and stones, and what is of a more refined kind now in our day? The Thessalonians turned to God, who gave perfect present blessedness. He is a true God for the conscience as well as for the heart. The world at once sees if God is the centre of a person. The heart is not morbid, but thoroughly happy in God; it has perfect satisfaction in Him. This is what makes such a difference in life. When a man is happy - happy in that which is eternal, what he cannot be deprived of, and which prevents his desiring other things - this is the spring of all he has to do. He acts for the glory of God, whether eating or drinking, or whatever he does.

Besides this new spring and centre for the present, there is something else waited for which gives a form and character to this blessing, "waiting for his Son from heaven." A most extraordinary thing to do! Waiting for God's Son! that is, all our hopes are clean out of this world. Do not expect anything from earth, but look for something from heaven, and this God's Son Himself, "even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come." This forms a background in all the scene. There is a wrath to come to get out of. Not merely was man to be judged, but the whole scene is to be judged. When Christ returns to this earth, it will be to judge it; and they had nothing to say to the judgment. They were looking for Christ. They knew there was wrath coming, but they had nothing to say to it. Those who were looking for Christ were entirely delivered "from the wrath to come." This gives a very distinct position to the Christian.

360 There was of course very little depth of doctrine among the Thessalonians. They had been only just converted; and this letter was written to them directly after. But there is a great deal of the present living power of faith. "Your faith groweth exceedingly," 2 Thess. 1. Truth, when a person is walking in the spiritual joy and energy of the Holy Ghost after being newly converted, is very different from people holding dull doctrine merely. Here is the historical fact of wrath passed. At Christ's first coming He had taken up the whole question of wrath; and they had turned to God who had laid all their iniquities on another. A divine Person had taken all upon Himself - put all away entirely. All the question is totally and

finally settled: sin is borne once, and He who bore it is raised from the dead. This is what proves my sin put away before God. The fact that God will judge the world, by that Man whom He hath ordained in resurrection, is what gives me the consciousness of being entirely free from it, because it proves He is risen from the dead.

This sets me in perfect freedom; and it does more, because it links me up with Christ in heaven. I know He is coming. Why? Because I know Him there. This divine Person before my soul - this Christ - the Man who, infinitely interested about my sins, died for me, He is waiting in heaven. It is now the patience of Christ. He is expecting until His enemies are made His footstool. So we are waiting. Our interests are entirely linked up with His, and thus we are waiting for Him, while He is waiting to come.

There are three ways in which Christ's coming is put before our souls in Scripture. First, it is the fulfilment of our hope. We are waiting, our bodies to be raised, when we are to see Him and be like Him. This gives a strong living link that takes the heart out of present things - one object before our souls, a living Man who is coming again. We are really waiting for something: for what? For the Person who has so loved us. This is connected with two great systems, the government of God, and the church of God.

361 Government under Christ is going to be set up. All things are to be put under His feet. This applies to the appearing of the New Testament, the day of the Lord, if you look at it as to wrath - "the brightness of his coming." I shall be happy long before that. Why then do I long for His appearing? Because Christ will then have His rights. It will be the setting up of divine power in goodness, the setting up of divine righteousness too in goodness. This will be the liberty of glory. We have the liberty of grace now, but not His glory. We wait for that. The great centre of all is Christ taking His rights. He has not these now. He has all His personal glory; but He will come in His own glory and in His Father's and of the holy angels. This is the heavenly part of the government of God, but there is that on earth also which will be the manifestation of God's power to put everything in order where Christ has been crucified and cast out.

Government also applies to the church, to the saints. Are we not under government? To be sure we are responsible. If we know to do good and do it not, we are guilty. We are to walk even as He walked. He was the display of divine life in a man. Not merely is there in Him the perfectness of a man before God, but the perfectness of God before man: therefore His example is far more than the law for us. Another thing is the Holy Ghost given. We are responsible for gifts bestowed by the Holy Ghost (as in the parable of the talents). If I have any service as a Christian, I must do it or I shall be chastened. He takes away what He has given if I do not use it. All this is connected with government. As His sons we are all alike saved; liable to judgment as regards our wrong ways, but in blessedness. The "day of the Lord" will be deliverance for all those waiting for Him. There will be the display of all previously gone through. We shall appear with Him. We always find responsibility connected with the appearing

Another, third thing, entirely distinct, is connected with the church's proper blessedness. He has taken it up and given it that same place as Himself. We are wrapped up with Christ as part of Himself - entirely outside, or rather inside, the question of His kingdom. No question of government as to that, but the outgoing of the heart of Christ - loved as Himself. It is as connected with this we are caught up to meet Him - His heart identified with mine - not a thought moving His heart that does not touch mine. This promise is given us in John 14. "I will come and receive you." There is no thought of anything to do with the world, judgment, or government there, but one single thing, "I will come and receive you unto myself." The secondary and inferior thing is the inheritance that we shall have.

362 Caught up into the Father's house first, we get the inheritance as Christ, and with Christ. "We have borne the image of the earthy," and we "shall also bear the image of the heavenly"; no question of degrees of blessedness or rewards, but all conformed to His image - He the "firstborn of many brethren." The next thing is, we come into the Father's delight, as Christ is - loved with the same love as He is (the full enjoyment in immediate presence); it is given us now in spirit - "thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me." We shall enjoy this blessedness along with Christ Himself, and be with Him forever. "So shall we ever be with the Lord," 1 Thess. 4.

There is, of course, a great inheritance, but not a word is here about that. "Comfort one another with these words." There is rest in this prospect. We cannot help resting there; and when He comes, we shall come with Him. Our joy is to be with Himself. We shall be displayed, but this is not our proper joy. The church's and saints' place (I speak of the church including all the members together, and the saints individually for themselves) is associated with Him as His body, and to be with Him when all is displayed. If we have entered into the reality of His love, and of our union with Him, it is the great joy and delight of our hearts to think of being with Him.

The consequence of all this is, that when He comes forth, the church, as the "armies which were in heaven," come with Him. They must be with Him before they come with Him. How have they got with Him? When He rises up from His present place, we shall go too. He is now hid in God, so are we. He is our life. When He shall appear, we shall also appear with Him in glory. He comes out, the Rider on the white horse, and we come with Him. We have the same portion as Himself. We are still waiting; but He is coming to take things into His hands. At His appearing everything must be in order. He cannot be in a world where all is disorder and going on in wilfulness. That will be "the day" - the display of His power; but besides and within this we have our own portion.

363 We love His appearing, but we love Himself better. Therefore we wait for Him to take us to Himself. If our hearts have known what Himself is, we cannot confound His taking us to Himself, with His appearing. We are "members of his body." "Our life is hid with Christ." He is to take us up to the Father's house, the fulness of His own blessedness - with Christ; the blessed outshining of His Father's love connects itself with the church's position. All through there is an identity of blessedness with Christ in life, hope, object, all. If this hope is let into the heart, there must be a break with the world. I cannot be waiting for God's Son from heaven if I am expecting wrath; and I cannot be waiting for God's Son from heaven if I am linked up with the world. If this world is the scene where my heart is building itself up, if I have an object in this world, Christ will spoil it all.

Suppose God said, "Tonight," etc., would you say, This is what I want? If not, there is something between your affections and Christ.

No trial can touch a person who has Christ for his all. He may have lost this or lost that; but if he has Christ, he has that which he cannot lose.

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