

1Thessalonians 12-02-03b

We pick up our study now in the introduction to the book of First Thessalonians. We are in Acts chapter 17. We pick up at verse five.

We saw that Paul is on his journey. He is going along this major Roman thoroughfare. He passes through several towns, but he stops at Thessalonica, preaches in the synagogue for several weeks, and this provokes a reaction.

Some of them were persuaded. A great multitude of the devout Greeks and a few of the leading women joined Paul and Silas. But, verse five, the Jews who were not persuaded becoming envious.

I just did the radio version of a sermon that will play this Sunday night from Dr. Criswell out of the Daniel series. When you get to the story of Daniel being attacked in the days of Darius for his faith and the ministers were jealous of his success. And Dr. Criswell spent some time talking about jealousy.

He gives the example of King Saul when the women were singing, Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands. And the brothers of Joseph who became envious when their father lavished his attention on Joseph because Joseph was a more upstanding man after his father's own heart. He had integrity.

He loved the Lord. He just Jacob felt a great kinship with him because they were like minded when it came to God and the things of God. And I'm sure Jacob had longed for a son with Rachel.

And here Joseph came. And after all of these other individuals had showed up in his family, finally, he and Rachel have a son together. And it's Joseph.

And he's everything Jacob had hoped for. Well, the other ten brothers are just incensed. The power of envy, the power of jealousy to wreck any objectivity, to destroy relationships, to destroy balance is just immeasurable.

And it is illustrated time and again through history. It creates rifts. It divides families.

It breaks up marriages. It causes dissension and conflict in the workplace. Envy, jealousy.

These Jews have got a little thing going there in Thessalonica. They kind of like their exclusivity. They are the one-stop shop if you're interested in something besides the Greek pantheon.

You can go to the synagogue. And there's a lot of people who are looking for something. And they are either sort of general God-fearers.

And Dan Wallace makes an interesting point about this, that the term is just the Greek word for a sort of a religious person. It doesn't say it's not accompanied by *tantheon*, a seeker of the God. They're just sort of a general spiritual seeker.

But they have been attracted to the synagogue because there are hints and echoes. And they feel like they're on the right track. They're getting warm.

They're getting close. And so they're in the periphery. But they're not really committed.

They haven't been baptized into Judaism. They haven't gotten circumcised and begun observing the feasts and the laws and wearing the curlicues and whatever else was going on. They're just hanging around.

They're like moths being drawn to the light. But they haven't landed and committed yet. So when Paul comes and preaches from the scriptures, so many of these people say, that's what I'm looking for.

That's the missing piece. It's Jesus Christ. Now this makes sense to me.

My spirit is in harmony with God's spirit and with the words of this man. This is what I'm after. And so they flock to Paul and Silas in droves.

Well, instead of celebrating, instead of the Jews saying, praise God that these Gentiles have left their former idolatry and pagan ways and are leaving this degenerate culture and lifestyle and coming to the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Well, they say, well, I'm not convinced about this, Jesus. And this isn't in my Old Testament.

And they're jealous. They see people leaving the synagogue and going to Paul and Silas. This, by the way, is why it's important to understand exactly what happened during those weeks.

And you can get clues from phrases like this. The Jews who were not persuaded, not persuaded. There's a hymn that's been sung and a million Baptist invitations, almost persuaded.

It's the most dreary dirge. There's five or six of them that'll just absolutely depress you into palpitating liquid mush and almost persuaded. Well, these people are almost persuaded, but not they're not persuaded, not persuaded at all, almost or any other way.

They're envious. They're jealous. They're saying, wait a minute, this guy's coming in and messing up a good thing.

We were getting some offerings. We had some influence. We felt important.

These people looked up to us and saw us as a source of information, and now they're leaving. They're not happy about their progress or anything other than having people in their own group.

So they took some of the evil men from the marketplace.

Not going to get their hands dirty, not going to defile myself on the Sabbath or any other day. I'll attack by proxy. This is what candidates do.

I'm not going to run the ad and say this ad was approved by Sam Hall. I'm going to get my super PAC to run all kinds of nasty, nefarious stuff. And I don't have to.

You know, I have no control over them. They let them attack you. So they hire thugs from the marketplace.

Notice there's the synagogue where the God seekers and God fearers congregate. And there is the Agora, the marketplace where the evil men, the nefarious muggers and thugs congregate. Do you think there's a reason why Paul and Silas did not stand up in the marketplace in Amphipolis or Apollonia? Not going to get very many thug mugger converts.

You're going to get beaten and robbed and left stewing in your own juice. So they just passed right through those towns, came on down to where there are some people who have manifested an interest. So these Jews and notice when you are attacking things that are right, you become complicit with that which is evil.

And one of the ways if you're not real sure which side of an issue is right, look at the friends of that side. People are saying, you know, I'm not really sure when life begins, I don't know if it's OK to have an abortion or not. You know, does life begin at the womb? There's biblical evidence that life begins at birth.

So isn't it OK to go in there and, you know, tear the thing apart and flush it down the drain and whatnot? Well, if you can't make up your mind about the moral issue of interrupting the formation of a human being that has already been fully architected and is in the process of being built, you know, they're building buildings around us all the time. We've got a big one going in across the way from us downtown. And it's one thing to say, you know, you want to build this 42 story building and it's going to block the view of the Petroleum Club.

And I really like to see the Petroleum Club. I don't want you to build here. So just don't even start.

Don't break any ground. Don't knock anything down. Don't want you building that building here.

Can't see the Petroleum Club. Well, that's fine. But once they bulldoze everything away, they clear the ground, they pour the foundations, they put in the girders and the structure and they start pouring and building and raising and craning and things are going up.

And you say, I don't want that building there. I'm going to go blow it up. I'm going to dynamite the thing.

I'm going to destroy it. That's a different thing, is it not? You can go to the city council and argue zoning laws and say, I don't want a new development in my neighborhood. Look what it will do to my property values.

But once the decision is made, once they begin construction of the new homes in your neighborhood, you don't go down there and sabotage them. You don't blow them up. We see a clear distinction, right? Well, I would argue that this is sort of an analogy.

But if you're not real sure, one thing you can do is look at the friends of a thing. If it seems a little bit murky, a little bit nebulous, well, where do the evil men congregate? Are the evil men on the side of right to life? Or are the evil people on the side of, you know, right to kill? Where are they found? Well, that's an easy answer. Look at the nastiness that has ensued because the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation decided to withdraw their support from Planned Parenthood.

It's all over the net. It's all over the media. They are being pilloried.

They are being vilified. They are being castigated. They are being attacked on every side.

People are rising up and look at the people who are rising up to condemn for crying out loud. Susan G. Komen done more to advance the cause of breast cancer research and prevention than anybody. Wonderful.

People trying to do a good thing, and they have just been pilloried, they are just being assassinated from all sides. How dare you pull money away from Planned Parenthood? And the reasons for it are a bit murky, but look at where the evil men congregate. The Jews who were not persuaded becoming envious took the evil men from the marketplace and gathering a mob.

We're not going to reason, we're not going to offer an alternative, we're not going to outreach, we're not going to demonstrate the superiority of our message, we're not going to meet you on scriptural grounds. We're going to hire evil men, form a mob and lynch you. That's how we're going to respond.

Well, is it difficult to see where the moral right and where the moral wrong is becomes quickly evident. Gathering a mob set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people. Jason was graciously hosting Paul and Silas.

Well, Paul and Silas were apparently off having a Bible class at some unknown location and the Jews couldn't find them. So here's a guy who's just being a nice guy. He's putting them up, he's feeding them and giving them a place to stay.

And the Jews say, well, guilt by association. So they roused him out and bring him out to the people and they could not find Paul and Silas. So they dragged Jason and other brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, these who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Jason has harbored them. He's a criminal for being hospitable. He's a Christian.

They're all in the same boat. These are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar saying there is another King Jesus. This by the way is a fascinating detail.

There's, you know, is some of these kind of behind the scenes debates that biblical scholars have about stuff that isn't really pertinent, doesn't have any a real application, but it's kind of fun to delve into it. There's sort of a friendly debate amongst scholars trying to figure out how long was Paul in Thessalonica. And there's two camps.

And they're not at each other's throats, they just disagree. There are those who think that Paul was only here three weeks, three Sabbaths, and then he left. But there's some difficulties with that when we get to the book of 1 Thessalonians.

Paul seems to know these people an awful lot better than three weeks would account for. And then there are those that say, no, he was there for a long period of time, but that runs into difficulties on the acts account. And you have to say, well, Luke left some things out.

It's not germane, it's just for guys like me, it's interesting. But one of the things that helps us figure out how long Paul was there is this verse. They are acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus.

Now, what did it tell us Paul was preaching up above? Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, right? This Jesus whom I preach is the Messiah. Well, how long does it take building on the scriptures, going to the Old Testament, which is all the scriptures that exist, for Paul to preach, let's say he's going daily, but at a minimum, these people have only heard what he preached in the synagogue. So in the first week, he says, let's open up to Isaiah.

Let's open up and look at the suffering servant. Let's look at these prophetic passages that talk about the need for a redeemer, the need for a sacrifice. Look at these Levitical offerings and the shadows.

Second week, he says, these things were fulfilled. Let me tell you what happened in Israel just a few years ago. Let me tell you about Jesus of Nazareth.

And you may have heard of him. Some of these stories may have come up here. Some of you Jews I know that have come up here from Israel have heard of this man, Jesus, and you heard of some of the miracles.

Well, let me tell you the whole story. And he relates that. And then in the third week, he says, now that I've laid the groundwork from the Old Testament, and I told you last week about this Jesus of Nazareth, let me tell you, not only has he come once, but he's coming back.

This is a time of opportunity for you because he offered the kingdom to the Jews and they did not

accept it. He was crucified instead. He came into his own and his own received him not.

And God has sent me to give you the good news that he's opening up the opportunity to enter into this future kingdom to you. Well, this is the point at which the Jews say, all right, we've had just about enough of this. I'm willing to listen if you think you found the Messiah, but when you start talking about the king and the kingdom, they've got the same reaction that the Jews in Israel had to the Lord Jesus.

Oh, no, you don't. We have no king but Caesar. You're gonna get us in trouble.

We've carved out a little niche here and we're in nice harmony. We've got a thing going here with these Greeks and the Romans are overlooking us. There's no garrison here.

They're not coming in and trying to take anything away from us. And now you're rabble rousing. Now you're troublemaking.

You're gonna implicate us with your weird doctrines. We don't believe what you're saying anyway. You lost us last week and we're sure not going with you this week sermon.

And so, and they're jealous because they're saying, hey, wait a minute. And all these people are leaving. So this is, I think he had not been there more than three weeks is my point.

Paul could have gotten there to the kingship of the Lord Jesus and the millennial kingdom teaching. And if the time is short, what are you gonna do with your life between now and the return of Christ in his third week? Especially if he had some Bible classes in between and said, as some of you know, I've been talking about this. Here I am on the third Sabbath.

So these guys take his message and twist it. Jason has harbored them. They're acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar.

Now, Paul would have been preaching this as we know from his extant letters and records of his preaching and acts. This is a future kingdom. Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world.

This is a kingdom that is future, but these people twist it. Evil men, mob mentality, we'll do whatever it takes. Our cause is just so any means is okay.

We'll get these guys out of here and then we'll clean up the mess later. It doesn't matter how we do it as long as we do it. They troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, in other words, Jason and the others that they seized had to post bail. And this is sizable money. This is big money to obtain their freedom.

They let them go. So they are out on bail. And the condition is you're on probation.

If any further mischief follows, we seize this money and you never get it back. We've got the mortgage to your house. We've got the deed to your business.

We've got all of your available cash in the bank. You keep your nose clean. If there's any more of this Paul and Silas nonsense, you're gonna lose everything.

You'll be out on the street corner with a can of pencils or clay tablets or whatever they would have. So then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. If you look at the map, Berea is not on the Via Ignatia.

It was kind of a backwater. It was, it would be like going to Whiteright instead of going to Dallas. Whiteright is up in the country.

It's not on 75. It's not on I-30. We're not talking about Greenville or Mesquite or Fort Worth or McKinney or Denton or any of these places.

You've got to kind of take the back roads to get to Whiteright. Well, you kind of had to take the back roads to get to Berea. It was a nice town and they had a synagogue.

Notice Paul still hitting these towns with synagogues. When they arrived at Berea, they went to the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair minded than those in Thessalonica.

In that they received the word with all readiness and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. What scriptures are they searching? They've got a copy of the Isaiah scroll. They've got a copy of the law of Moses.

They're looking at those Levitical offerings. They're reviewing the suffering servant passages. They're looking at behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and so on.

Therefore, many of them believed and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. And notice the hardheaded men in these towns seem to be the last to wake up and smell the coffee. The women recognize what the men, you know, what is the problem? Why is it that so many of the prominent, it doesn't say many of the prominent men believe, many of the prominent women believe.

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, what did they do? They came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away again to go to the sea. But both Silas and Timothy remained there.

This is where you get the mention of Timothy. Was Timothy in Thessalonica? Did he join them at Berea? It's not real clear. So these who conducted Paul brought him to Athens and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

And then you have Paul in Athens and the Acts account goes forward. Well, this is the background. Those believers that Paul had Bible class with, those few Jews in the synagogue who understood the message and received it and weren't a part of this rabble are the ones to whom Paul is writing.

Paul could not return, at least not easily, to Thessalonica during this time because of this hostility and because of the jeopardy that it would put Jason and these other individuals in who've got everything they own in hock. So for the benefit of those people, Paul cannot return. And we're gonna find out in the letter of 1 Thessalonians that because Paul cannot go back, he is going to send Timothy.

And Timothy is gonna kind of fly under the radar. And this is one of the arguments that maybe Timothy wasn't there the first time because the Jews of the synagogue are not gonna recognize him and immediately associate him with Paul. But again, we're kind of inferring, we're triangulating from outside points.

He might've been there and maybe they just ignored him. Maybe he was young and they didn't think he was consequential. But for whatever reason, it seems that Timothy can go where Paul cannot.

And so Paul will send Timothy back to see how the Thessalonians are doing. Well, Timothy goes and gets a wonderful report. These people were not fazed.

They weren't discouraged by the rabble and the mobs and the crowds and the treatment of Jason and the others. They've got a vibrant faith. They've got a strong interest.

They're pursuing the knowledge and the things that Paul taught them. And so Timothy comes back to Paul with a glowing report of how these relatively new Thessalonian believers are doing. And Paul is overjoyed to hear this.

And this is the occasion for writing the letter. These are the people to whom he is writing. This is what he is writing about.

And what we discover as we kind of work backwards from Paul's letter, it's kind of like Jeopardy where you've got the answer and you have to figure out the question. We know from Paul's statements in the book of 1 Thessalonians what the specific nature of the attacks was. The Jews in Thessalonica were attacking Paul and they based this attack kind of in a three-pronged way.

They were trying to discredit him and say his message should not be listened to. And the best way, in their opinion, to get rid of the message was to go ad hominem, attack the messenger, discredit him, undermine him. And of course, this is a time-honored tactic among the more nefarious.

So here's the three prongs of the attack as you can kind of reconstruct it from what we're about to study in this letter. Number one, the Thessalonians weren't really led to God. They were led away from God.

They were on the track to God in Judaism, but Paul, with this strange doctrine, has deflected them away. Their conversion, their recognition of the truth of Paul's preaching was a deception. And they need to abandon this Pauline infatuation and come back to the God of the Judaistic Old Testament preaching that they had heard at the synagogue.

So their conversion is not genuine. So Paul is not from God. And these two things kind of go together.

Paul's not from God, so his message is not from God. You're not really getting closer to God following his teaching. That's prong one.

Number two, if Paul's not from God and isn't preaching the truth, why is he there? Well, he's angling for money. He's there for self-aggrandizement. He wants to make a profit.

He's eventually gonna stick his hand in their pocket. He's gonna want something from them. Third, they say, if you don't believe anything else, if the guy is so interested in you and cares for you and is so anxious to bring you to God, why hasn't he come back? Which, of course, is an ironic argument.

These are the people that made it impossible for Paul to return, and they're saying, look, here's the best proof that he's not legit. He hasn't come back. Where is he? If he cares so much for you and wants you to come to God, why doesn't he come back and preach God to you? Well, they have made sure that he can't come back without causing all kinds of problems.

So, and this is so typical of the evil that insinuates itself into human dealings. People will accuse you of what they themselves are guilty of. You know, the best way to deflect guilt is to accuse the other guy of doing it first.

So, this is the three-pronged nature of the attack. So, as an outline of the book, as an outline of the book, we're getting ready now to dive into our text. As an outline of the book, what do you think Paul is going to do? Paul is going to answer these three attacks.

He is going to confirm the genuineness of his apostolic call and his apostolic identity. Paul, an apostle, he's going to demonstrate to them that this attack that says he's not really from God and that therefore his message has no authenticity, he says, look, I am an apostle and here's why and here's how. So, he's going to, after the standard greeting and expression of thanks and sort of a subtle argument by saying, look what God has done in your midst since I came.

You yourself are aware of the growth and the presence of God and the vitality that has come into

your lives as a result of heeding and following this message. Look at where you are. I don't have to tell you how God has demonstrated the veracity of this message.

But then he's going to affirm his apostleship and remind them that they themselves recognized it from God in the same way that they recognize that God was somewhere to be found in the vicinity of the synagogue, they recognize even more so that God was to be found in this preaching. And then he is going to go on to detail those who malign the Thessalonians faith, those who reject the message and try to disparage anybody who preaches that message or believes in that message. He's going to remind them that they have suffered persecution just like the Lord Jesus suffered persecution from the Jews in Judea for the very same transgression and the very same sin and the very same truth and that God is going to recompense these attackers.

And then he's going to express his deep desire to visit them again. They were saying, well, why doesn't Paul come back? Paul is going to explain, I would love to come back and see you, but Satan hinders us. And he is tactful, but it's very clear how Satan is hindering them.

Satan is operating. You remember that Jesus comes right out and talks about the synagogue of Satan in Revelation. Two and three, remember that? Is that they are a synagogue of Satan? Well, you got a synagogue of Satan right here in Thessalonica, at least a portion of it.

So that's the first section of the epistle, the first section of 1 Thessalonians. And there's going to be sort of a little benediction in the middle of the letter that kind of encapsulates that. Paul has now addressed, and he doesn't want to spend his whole time on defense and on answering his critics and answering those who are attacking the Thessalonians for their faith.

That's just the first part of the letter. Then he's going to get onto the heart of things. And really chapters one, two, and three are what we've talked about so far.

Beginning in chapter four, he's going to get into the real meat of his letter, which is to finish. He didn't get a chance to finish his preaching of the coming of Christ. At the point that he got to the king returning, literally all hell broke loose.

And so he's going to say, look, here's what I didn't get a chance to tell you when I was in your midst. And he's going to pick up with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why you have these wonderful eschatological prophetic passages beginning in chapter four.

He's picking up the preaching that he did not get a chance to finish in person. So it's a wonderful letter. It's really interesting.

It's very pertinent because we find ourselves attacked and vilified for our faith all the time. The message we believe is not really from God. It's some man-made manufacture.

Preachers and churches just peddle this thing because they want you to give an offering and they want to control you. They're on some kind of a power trip and they want to dominate you and

you're dependent and you need a crutch. And all of these things.

This is the same kind of thing that Paul is going to address. He's going to say, look, let me tell you what God says about all of this. Then he's going to go on and who's not interested in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ? Who's not interested in where we're going when we complete the trials of this life? That's what he gets to in the latter part of the letter.

So it's a wonderful study. We're going to have a really good time. We're going to move through it in a very straightforward fashion without much delay.

So be ready to move out smartly when we get into the text at chapter one, verse one next week but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that even though the Lord Jesus has left this earth and is now with you in the heavenly realms awaiting the time of his return, we have not been left as orphans.

You have given us the manifold manifest witness and presence and ministry of your spirit. You've given us the powerful and profound truths of your word. And we have one another for encouragement and ministry and fellowship.

We thank you for the life that has been given to us in the light, out of the darkness, out of the grip of sin, out of the power of Satan and of evil and into the freedom of the Lord Jesus and into the opportunities that are ours through him. And we pray that as we spend time studying this letter together that God, the Holy Spirit will superintend both the presenting and the hearing that each of us will find in it great measures of strength and edification for our souls that we will be drawn closer together and closer to you as we learn the things that are in this epistle. And as a result, we will all both individually and collectively reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ to a greater and greater extent and be more fully prepared for service now and in the ages to come.

We pray these things in Jesus name, amen.