

1Thessalonians 12-02-10a

This is Friday, the 10th of February, 2012. We're in our second evening of looking at the book of 1 Thessalonians. We'll take a moment at the outset to prepare our hearts and minds for the study of God's word by going to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we're thankful for this time and for this opportunity. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this evening, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart. May we each find in it the truth that is fitting and pertinent and applicable, meaningful, strengthening and encouraging for the tasks that face us in the immediate future and our long term service for you, both in this life and in the ages to come.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. We surveyed the situation and the occasion for the writing of this letter last time.

Paul is writing from Corinth, more than likely, back to the Thessalonians. He had been there, had to leave somewhat precipitously before he had quite finished everything that he wanted to say to them. There is some debate about how long he was there.

When you read Acts chapter 17, it says that he preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, which would imply a short stay of less than a month. But there are other intimations that he was there longer. He seems to have developed a very strong bond with the believers in this city.

We will see later on in the letter that he is going to ply his trade to support himself while he's there and whether he just did this for a few days to crank up some logistical cash or whether he actually spent something measured in months there is something we really can't quite figure out. There's evidence for both sides. But we do know that opposition from the synagogue, the Jews who were opposed to the message of Christ and who stirred up mobs, who associated and found evil men to raise a ruckus, caused them to have to leave and made it unable for them to return by putting part of the blame on Jason, Paul's host in the city, and pretty much put all of his possessions and livelihood in jeopardy should Paul ever try to return.

So he writes this letter back. If you look at the letter, let's just take a look at the first half dozen verses here. Paul begins the letter in typical fashion.

Paul, Silvanus, this is Silas, of course, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit. And in

much assurance, as you know, what kind of men we were among you for your sake. Well, there's more to this than meets the eye.

It looks like a pretty standard greeting. When you get a letter in the mail from a friend or relative, you tear the envelope open. Or if you're like me, you carefully cut the envelope open because there's something about ragged envelopes that just bug me.

So I'll get my little pocket knife out and slit the thing open in a neat fashion. I have often sliced the top off of letters doing that, by the way. You know, you've got to make sure it's an advantage when you have to hold the pieces of the letter together.

But as you begin to read it, it will say, Dear Sam. And then there's some sort of effluvia at the beginning, some sort of, you know, not nobody gets directly to the point. There's always some sort of benign greetings at the beginning that don't really say much.

It was nice to see you last Christmas. I really enjoyed the whatever it was. Then you kind of get down to if there's a real reason.

And this goes to our social conventions of conversation. And it's much more so in other parts of the world where you have to go through some conventional pleasantries before you get down to the actual issue at hand. And even as as gentle as we are in this respect as Americans, there are people in other countries who think we are very brusque and very rude because we'll walk in and say, Hi, how are you doing? Hey, you know that car you said you had for sale? You know, I'd really like to buy it.

And we just jump right into the business. If you try that in a traditional Middle Eastern culture, you'll be looked at with shock and dismay because you first 20 minutes, you can't bring up anything related to your actual purpose. It's pleasantries and have a cup of coffee.

And isn't the weather nice? And how comfortable is your hotel room? And, you know, did you get that rip in your tent repaired or whatever it might be? And then you work your way down to it and you generally wait for the host to inquire, well, what brings you here on this fine day at 20, 25, 30 minutes later? And then you can say, well, we noticed your back pasture is on fire. We thought we'd let you know, you know, but you just can't jump right in. Well, it's the same thing.

And because we're used to this, we tend to kind of gloss over the greetings in even these ancient letters. And we say, well, Paul says, hello, how are you? This is me writing to you. Grace and peace, God, the Father, Lord Jesus Christ, you know, some little bit of holy language.

And then he'll eventually get down to what he wants to say. But there's actually a lot of meat in these. And there's, as you know, there's not a wasted word in scripture.

And you cannot get out of the first verse before you find some pretty dense theological meat here. So let's begin. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy.

Now, right away, we notice that there's more than one person listed. This is not one of my deeper observations for you, but we've got multiple names. But think about this.

You think about the doctrine of inspiration and, you know, letters should come from an apostle and moved by the Holy Spirit, one thing and another. Why wouldn't Paul just say, Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then move on? He doesn't mention his apostolic office and he includes two other men who are not formally Christ commissioned apostles. Why would he do this? Why does he start with these three names? And he says nothing related to his bona fides, his resume, his apostolic authority.

There's a reason for everything. And this goes back to what we saw last week. These people are not interested in what Paul has to say because he is wielding apostolic authority.

And if you remember what we just read in these first verses, Paul says, you remember what it was like when we came. You saw power. You saw the Holy Spirit.

You saw results in your own life. And Paul doesn't have to invoke his authority. And it's a good thing to remember that there is a time and a place to reference such things.

In the letters where Paul is going to do some rebuking and correcting and instruction in righteousness, he lays the groundwork by reminding his audience that he is, in fact, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, representing the truth of God to these people in a more or less formal fashion. This letter has a different purpose. And you remember from our review of the occasion that Paul is going to answer some attacks that are being made on his person and on his character.

And part of that attack is, in fact, on whether he is a legitimate messenger at all. So it's not going to do much good to say Paul an apostle when what he's about to do is establish the basis for his legitimacy. So this is conscious.

Paul stops and thinks, and people used to do this much more before the days of instant everything. And before he ever sat down and had an amanuensis, get a piece of manuscript and a bottle of ink and a quill, he thought about how he would approach this, how he would begin. And this is very carefully worded.

And under the inspiration of the Spirit, he not only mentions himself, but also Silas and Timothy. As I mentioned last time, we're not real sure. There's not firm evidence one way or the other.

If Timothy was there during the visit, we know that he was there later. But looking at Acts 17, this would argue that maybe he was there and that they knew him. If I was going to write a letter to some people that I had recently visited, I wouldn't say, and if Patty and I had been there, I wouldn't say, Sam, Patty and Bob.

And they don't know who Bob is. Sam, Patty and Bob. Right.

So as you can see, this would argue that maybe Timothy was there, but maybe he was not as recognized or not as prominent because we know that Paul can send him back. He himself cannot go. So some kind of way, Timothy seems to be under the radar, not as well known to the opponents.

Paul, Silas and Timothy. This is a group of men writing, a small group, and Paul is going to continue this idea by using plural verbs. We thank God.

And this is not a plural of majesty or a plural of authorship. You know, sometimes an author will use sort of a plural just to avoid drawing attention to himself. But this this is truly referencing the group.

So there is a here's here's the bottom line. This begins right in the very first couple of words with establishing familiarity and community. Here's three of us writing to a bunch of you.

Paul isn't up here talking as an apostle to those who must recognize his authority. He says, hey, we were there not that long ago. You remember us.

We're all friends. And I want you to know that Silas and Timothy are with me and we are all expressing our happiness at knowing you and knowing what God is doing in your midst. So there is immediately established a an environment for what follows a an attitude, an approach that is not adversarial.

Certainly it's not authoritarian. It isn't preachy. It's personal and informal.

And this is important because when we start looking at language and at thoughts that are expressed and so on, this is part of the context. Is someone speaking formally or informally? Are they speaking authoritatively or familiarly? It makes a difference in the way we parse and interpret certain things. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to the Church of the Thessalonians in God.

You have ecclesia here, which is our common Greek word translated church. And then you have in the us vocabulary form in in God. Well, a couple of things to remember, ecclesia or church did not mean then what it means now.

When you say church now, it carries quite a bit of baggage. We think depending on your frame of reference, we think of parking lots and steeples and brick buildings and choir lofts and baptisteries and education buildings and pews and so on. Or we think at least of a of a large congregation.

When you say church, you're thinking, well, these are Christians. There's a cross involved. There's a pastor, there's deacons, et cetera.

Ecclesia was a common Greek word and it was used for all kinds of groups. It's the best coin, a transfer into English would just be the word group to the group in Thessalonica. Remember, this is all shiny and new to these people.

Christianity is a fresh concept and an ecclesia could be the synagogue and ecclesia could be the group that worships Diana or Apollo or Nike or any of the other gods and goddesses of the ancient world. It was just a word that meant collection, assembly, group, bunch, gathering. And so it didn't have all of the theological weight that comes with it now.

So Paul Silas and Timothy are writing to the group of Thessalonians in God the father. Now you see why there is this additional phrase in God. And we used Kenneth Weist has a great little commentary on this in Thaos idea here, because this is a locative and it's an interesting idea.

He includes this passage in a discussion based out of Titus 2.14, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. And he's talking about the peculiar people, the unique or special people and what that word translated peculiar actually means. It's a compound word made of two parts that basically means there's something in the middle and there's something that surrounds it.

It is unique because it is set apart and that which surrounds it is what it belongs to. My computer is in my house. It's mine because it's in my house.

You know it's mine because you find it in my house, not somebody else's computer in my house unless I'm fixing it. But stuff in my house belongs to me. I am in my house because it belongs to me.

I sleep there. I eat there. So this is the idea of peculiar and this locative or location idea of a dot inside a circle is what is found here in this locative case.

This is a group in God. What does that mean? It belongs to God. It is bounded within God and it is defined by its location in God.

Now that's you say, well, it's a grammatical point, but big deal. Well, think about it. Paul says, look, I am writing to the group of Thessalonians who are in God, who belong to God, who are circumscribed by God.

You remember the whole occasion here is there's a lot of opposition. There's threat, there is attack, there's harassment and persecution and vilification and conflict and controversy all around here. And Paul, his opening lines are, here's the three of us writing to those of you who are safe and secure in God.

That's your identity. That's what defines your particular group. Your particular ecclesia is defined not by necessarily what you do or what you say or what others say.

It is based in what we like to call positional truth. It's unchanging. It's new birth.

It's something God has done. When we express faith in Christ, we are in him and being in him makes us a possession of God and God gives us as a gift in this age to his son. So there's a lot of freight here and this isn't lost on the Thessalonians because Paul talked about this in his preaching.

He covered this ground. And so these people have a knowing look in their eye when they hear these words read from Paul's letter to the group in Thessalonica, Thessalonica who are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a double wall of protection.

They're double insulated. They're doubly secure, doubly identified. If any man be in Christ, new creation, new opportunities, new securities, new promises, new potentials.

And this is Paul's opening salvo to the group of Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, kurios. This is something else that we just take for granted. Don't give it two thoughts.

Think about the way kurios was typically used in Thessalonica before Paul came. Kurios, if it was used religiously, would have been the God of Israel, the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The other very common use of it was for the Roman emperor, which at this time I think is Claudius.

Kurios, he's the Lord of the empire. You've got the Lord of the Old Testament days of the Israelites and the prophets, and you've got the Lord of the current day who is the Lord of the Roman empire, kurios. Well, here when Paul says, you're a group in God the Father and the kurios, Jesus Christ, it falls quite differently on their ear than it does on ours.

Because they have come to know a new Lord. There's a shift in their view of the world because they're not trying to proselyte or be thinking about becoming a proselyte into Judaism and under the law and history that happened to some people a thousand years earlier. This is a present living Lord.

He's recent history, dead, buried, and raised again. And here is his representative who has met him and talked to him, who has come and preached him to them. And there's a new authority.

There is a new Lord, and it's this Jesus Christ. Paul introduced them to him. And you think about the leap that it would require for somebody to believe this message.

For many of the Greeks, it was a big leap just to come to Judaism and listen to the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures at the synagogue. Then here comes Paul, like a wind out of nowhere, saying, you know what, there's a new kurios. And he is the fulfillment of these Old Testament scriptures.

So they're interested and they come to hear him. And over the course of the weeks, he preaches

this truth and he teaches them about Christ from the Old Testament scriptures. There is no New Testament.

And when there finally is, it's going to be largely written by Paul. So he proves Jesus Christ from the Old Testament scriptures. He opens the scriptures to them and teaches them about this new Lord.

So they are in that Lord Jesus Christ. They are in God the Father. So there's continuity with what they learned in the synagogue.

And there is this new information and new revelation from God. Grace to you and peace. You think about all the uproar and controversy and chaotic treatment that happened during Paul's visit.

And he says, it reminds you of Jesus in John 14. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Peace I leave with you.

My peace I give to you, Jesus said. Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, grace and peace to you. Don't let this stuff ruffle you.

We look around in the world today. There's economic upheaval. There's political unrest.

There's social unrest. There's Arab Springs and Arab winters and Iranians with nukes and Koreans rattling their sabers and there's, you know, the price of gas is going up. There's just all kinds of unsettling circumstances near and far.

And what is the constant message from God to us? Grace to you and peace. Grace to you and peace. Your citizenship is not in this world.

Your happiness and your security and your safety and your blessing do not depend on earthly things. And it is tragic if we forget that and start to let subjectivity lay hold of us. Eyes on circumstances, eyes on people.

Who's going to get elected? Who's going to represent? Who's going to turn the tide? Who's going to get the country back to God? Well, nobody is. We can stay in God. We can stay in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's where our grace and peace is. And we can be in the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee with a violent storm raging and be asleep in the stern with the Lord Jesus. What are you waking me up for? Do you seriously think the boat with the Lord Jesus Christ is ever going to sink? It's not possible.

If they had been able to make one small connection of two dots in their mind, this is an unsinkable boat. I don't care how bad the storm gets. This ought to be fun.

It's like nothing we've ever seen and we're fishermen all our lives. But you know what? Jesus is in this boat. It can't sink.

And if it does, it's going to become some kind of submarine and we're all going to live anyway because you can't kill the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the Son of God. We're with him.

He's with us. We are in him. He is.

Jesus says in the upper room, I in you, you in me, all of us in the Father. That connection makes us impervious to the circumstances of life. What time I am afraid, I will trust it in thee.

So grace to you and peace. Chorus, Irenaeus. And this is our heritage.

This is the gift that the Lord Jesus Christ gives to us. And we don't want to give it away. We don't want to lose it.

We don't want to misplace it. Verse two, we give thanks to God always for you. We give thanks to God always for you.

This is a participle and it's a present active indicative. It's not a participle. We're going to get three participles coming up.

But he says, we are giving thanks. And it's what you call a durative or a constant idea. We're always giving thanks.

And he's going to amplify this, pantote. We are giving thanks all the time for you all. Constantly mentioning.

This is the first of the participles. In your English, it says making mention. If you look at verse three, remembering, and verse four, knowing.

So these three participles all connect back to the giving of thanks. We are thankful for you would be a good way to translate this because it's, there's never a time when they're not thankful, thankful all the time. We're always thankful to God for you.

So, making mention of you, remembering your three things and knowing your, as it says here, election by God. So there are three things that play into this. It's not just a rote citation or recitation of their names.

And it's a reminder to us that our prayers ought to be imbued with actual thought. And it says, I don't just say, Oh Lord, thank you for these people. Thank you for Aristarchus, and thank you for Butabulus, and thank you for Stoichea, and thank you for Alexander, and thank you for Phoebe.

And that, you know, it's kind of like when you're a little kid and you say, God bless mommy, God bless daddy, God bless grandpa, God bless grandma, God bless uncle this and aunt that. And

you just go down a list and you're not really grasping any conceptual truths about them. You just figure, well, shoot their names up into heaven, and God will have to put a little extra on them for good.

He says, when we are being thankful for you, we are mentioning you in our prayers. And this constant making mention doesn't mean citing. This is the Greek word from which we get mnemonic.

M-N-E-M, you know, name a new O. It means remembering, making remembrance of. This is conscious thought. When Paul is praying for these people, he's calling up their faces, calling up their character, calling up their circumstances, calling up what he knows of them.

And this is a principle of prayer. We've talked about it before. But effective prayer, you have knowledge, you have memory, you have contact.

It isn't somebody sending you a note. Well, you know, Sally and Steve in Rhode Island have a son with MS. Please pray for him. As wonderful as it sounds, I don't know Sally and Steve.

I don't know their son. I have no concept of what their circumstances are. I've never met them.

You know, people feel like if they put a chain letter out on the web and put everybody's email on it, that somehow the course of prayer is going to move God in a special way. This is the prayer that moves God. When we give thanks to God, making remembrance in our prayer, remembering consciously, because this is someone that's within our effective radius of knowledge.

We can pray intelligently. We can pray knowledgeably because we are in contact. If Sally and Steve and their son with MS need prayer, there will be believers in their periphery who can pray intelligently and effectively and fire rifle bullets at that target instead of trying to fire a shotgun halfway across the United States at an unknown target.

I personally, and if you disagree, God go with you. I don't hold it against me. I do not think you can make effective prayer for unknown situations and unknown people.

I just don't. The effectual fervent prayer that we make has to be something that we have effectual fervent knowledge of, not the abstract. So this is remembering you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing, remembering all the time.

Three things, your work of faith, your labor, love, and patience of hope. And right away you recognize that triad of Christian virtues, but you notice there is a noun associated with each one of those. We're going to pause here and take our break.

And we're going to pick up here in verse three. What is work of faith? What is labor of love? What is patience of hope? They sound like great attributes, great concepts, but what is it the Thessalonians are doing that Paul can remember these specific things? What is its substance?

What is its nature? How could we do this? How could we have an apostle Paul praying for us, for you and for me? And he would say, you know what? I remember your work of faith. What is my work of faith? What is my labor of love? What is my patience of hope? How is it visible? How is it expressed? What is it made of? How do we do that? When we come back from the break, we're going to look at this in detail and figure out exactly what it is.

And knowing what it is, we can then see our way clear to producing it because these are obviously positive qualities and positive types of production that God wants us to have. So let's stop here and take our break. We'll come back and resume in verse three.