

1Thessalonians 12-02-17b

To speak of our study in 1 Thessalonians, we reviewed sort of the situation in which Paul is writing this letter. He and Silas had been in Thessalonica and had been driven out. Remember the story of Jason's household and the bail money and so on.

And so they left and sort of split up. Paul went to Athens alone. He sent Timothy back to Thessalonica because apparently Timothy was not with them during that visit.

And so Timothy could return to the city sort of incognito and represent Paul, where Paul and Silas could not even show their faces. And so Paul sends Timothy back as his agent, so to speak. And under the radar, he reconnects with the Thessalonian believers and encourages them and confirms them and assures them of Paul's concern and finds out how they are doing.

Paul goes on to Athens alone and while Timothy is back in Thessalonica, then Paul travels on to Corinth. And Silas rejoins him at Corinth and eventually Timothy comes back and gives his report from Thessalonica at Corinth. And you can see this if you look at a map of the second missionary journey.

And it is from Corinth, weeks or months later, that Paul writes this letter back. So he says, 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. This now is the third time that he has mentioned God the Father.

Remember he opened with it. He is writing to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God, i.e., God the Father, for you, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work, labor, and patience in faith, love, and hope in the sight of our God and Father.

This does two things. What was it that attracted these, and remember, we know from Acts 17 that most of the people who responded to Paul's teaching in Thessalonica were Gentiles, they were Greeks. There were a few in the synagogue, but most of the Jews in the synagogue got all rigidified and upset because their apple cart was being spilt, and they felt like they needed to defend the old faith, and this was an innovation and a threat to their standing and their hegemony and their influence in their sphere there.

And so they react and cause all of this grief. And when they find out that Paul and Silas have moved on to Berea, remember they went to Berea before they split up, well, when the Thessalonian Jews find out that Paul is in Berea trying to teach these same things, they follow him to Berea and raise a ruckus and he has to leave there. So Paul does two things here when he says, look, God the Father is in his heaven.

I preached to you from the beginning that God is the creator, and this is something you already

knew. This is what first drew you to the faith of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was God, the God of Israel, God the Father, and you're advancing in that understanding. It's the same God to whom you were initially attracted and drawn, and you're getting more information about him.

You are before him. You are in him, and we thank him for you. At the same time, this is a strong expression of Paul's concern because as soon as he left and then they chased him out of Berea, the Jews came back and said, oh, that Paul is just here to take advantage of you anyway.

He didn't really care about you. He was just trying to get into your pockets. He was a flim-flam artist.

He's a conniver and some sort of a ne'er-do-well, and Paul says, we think about you constantly. We pray to the Father for you constantly, and he gives them multiple assurances that they are concerned, but it's indirect. He's not directly answering these accusations so much as demonstrating their falsehood, and I'm sure that Timothy has also assured them by now in person of how Paul was grieving that he couldn't be there to finish his teaching and so on.

Knowing, beloved brethren, your choosing by God, your election, your choosing, and he says, we do all of these things remembering in the sight of God and Father, knowing, as we think of you, as we pray for you, knowing that God has chosen you. Now, in what sense are they chosen? This choosing can turn into a big issue real quickly, but what is it in context? What is Paul talking about when he says, you Thessalonians were chosen by God? You remember that famous old movie line, of all the gin joints in all the towns in the world, you know, I run into you here. Of all of the places where Paul could have gone, what did God do? God sent Paul the vision of the man from Macedonia, come here.

He's on the Ignatian Way. He doesn't find synagogues until he gets to Thessalonica, once he leaves Philippi, and this is an ordained stopping place. God made sure there was a synagogue put there years and years and years before, and that there would be sufficient information about God to draw these people there.

God laid the plan. God made this available, and we've seen this other places in Acts, where Peter says, you know, it's as many as were appointed unto salvation believed, and you know, it sounds one way, and when you look at it in Greek, what does it say? God made sure that at this day of preaching of the gospel, these people who were interested and wanted to hear it were there. He delayed their caravan.

He accelerated their schedule. Somebody got sick and couldn't make it for a while, and all of these things work together. Now I'll give you a prime example from right here in this Thessalonian episode.

Think about this. If you're listening to the mellifluous tones of my voice, wake up and pay attention to this now. Think about this.

What do you think it was like when Paul and Silas were just really getting up a good head of steam in Thessalonica, and these thugs were hired to run them out of town and beat and take the possessions of Jason and do all of this damage, and then chase them out of Berea as well? Think about Paul and Silas and their frustration and their temptation to be really, really angry and bitter toward these Jews. This is very unfair. It's uncalled for.

These are God's people who ought to be embracing Christ, and instead they're doing the same thing to the apostles they did to Jesus himself. Very, very frustrating. But think about this.

If there had not been opposition in Thessalonica, chances are we wouldn't have this letter with its content. The reason Paul has occasion to write this content in this letter is because he had to leave the city early, for all the reasons we talked about in the first session. The content that he needs to finish giving them, he's covered several of those subjects, but he didn't get to finish with the return of the Lord Jesus.

And he's writing this letter. We wouldn't have this letter, inspired scripture for 2,000 years, if Paul didn't get run out of town. God works things together for good, and it doesn't seem like any good can come of it.

You imagine Paul and Silas saying, why would God let us be run out of Thessalonica? Look at the people there, their faith and their hope and their love. Why would God separate us from them just when we were really getting to the good stuff? Because God, from his vantage point, had a greater and grander purpose. Now we get to hear the end of the Thessalonian preaching series.

What a blessing that has been for all of us for centuries. But Paul couldn't see that coming when he got run out of town, and then chased out of Berea as well. And he's writing from Corinth saying, it's so frustrating, I wish I could be back there, but I'm just going to have to do it in a letter.

And probably unbeknownst to him, the letter is going to surpass. We don't have word one of what he preached in Thessalonica except by inference, by example from other preaching, but here we've got this letter. So by way of application, when really frustrating, embittering, angering things happen to us, it's the same God in heaven with the same grand vision and design in our lives.

We cannot see, we can't even suspect sometimes, what God is doing for those who love him. We have to trust that he knows what he's doing. It's way beyond our limited comprehension.

We can't see a way in the world that it makes any sense to be sick, to be discommoded, to be inconvenienced, to be thwarted, to be treated unfairly, to get the short end of the stick, to have to endure all kinds of things. We think, I don't see any good coming from this, I don't see the light of Christ shining to the world or the nations, or it just looks like a big hardship to me. You think about Paul, could not have possibly imagined what this pair of letters that he's going to write back to Thessalonica would mean to the church and the world, and as a part of the living and abiding word of God, will last forever.

Couldn't have known it. It was just a frustration. So keep in mind, this background is really helpful.

Keep in mind also, what we talked about in the first session, these people probably have few, if any, biographical details about Jesus. Paul comes and preaches this stuff, where is his second and third witness? Our gospel did not come to you in word only, it wasn't just me talking and you had to either take my word for it, just like you might take the word of the oracle at Delphi or the priestess down at the temple of Athena, I'm just another guy with another religious fable, take it or leave it, if you kind of like it, go for it. He says, it wasn't just me, I didn't just give you the word, it was confirmed by power and the Holy Spirit.

Now, there's two kinds of evidence that we can receive when we're entertaining a notion. You think about the, I was talking about the apostles, you know, the disciples earlier this evening and their eventual fate. And you remember when Jesus is talking to Peter and they're going down the road and Peter, do you love me? Feed my lambs, feed my sheep and so on.

And Peter looks over his shoulder and John is following behind and he says, well, what about him? And Jesus says, well, what is it to you if he tarry till I come? Well, this gave rise at the time and ever since to speculations that John the apostle would not die until the Lord Jesus came back. And there are a few people, including one of our presidential candidates, who believes that John the apostle is alive and well somewhere on the planet. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes the apostle John never died and that he's over there somewhere.

It's part of the official doctrine of the LDS church. I'm just saying. So, you know, it goes to credibility, gullibility, whatever.

But it's a misunderstanding of scripture. And to be fair, the disciples themselves said, well, I guess John's not going to die until Jesus comes back. Because what is it to you? How was that actually fulfilled? It's one of the reasons we know that Revelation wasn't written to some other John or by some other John or revealed to some other John.

They say, well, there was the apostle John, but there's no way he could live that long. This is John the revelator. This is some other John.

No, it's not. Because what Jesus said, what is it to you if he lives until he sees me coming back? Well, he saw it. He lived until he saw the revelation.

And that's, you know, Jesus loves. It's part of the Jewish mind, especially in those ancient Middle Eastern days, to do these resonant sayings. You say a thing and you kind of mean what it sounds like, but you mostly mean something else.

And Jesus says, well, you know, Jesus told the disciples, you will see the son of man coming in his glory, not three days hence. Well, they didn't see the actual second coming. What did they see? The transfiguration, which is in essence a time travel of the Lord in his returning glory.

And you will see the son of man in his glory, not three days hence. And they did sort of. It's true, but it's not totally fulfilled.

Same thing with John. So say all of that to say this. Our gospel does not come to you in word only, but also in power.

Because there was not a completed canon of scripture, because there weren't synoptic gospels in the gospel of John and the whole rest of the testimony of scripture available because the Jews in that synagogue weren't doing a real good job of communicating the entire testimony of Old Testament scripture. God gave additional witness. And when Paul preached, remember in these apostolic days, God would confirm the word with signs following.

And it isn't mentioned in Acts 17. It isn't mentioned here. But Paul says there was power when I preached.

Now, this isn't something the Thessalonians heard about. This is something they experienced. It is first person witness to them.

They heard Paul with their own ears. They saw the manifestations of God's power with their own eyes. And they felt in their spirit, the witness of the Holy Spirit, who is the third witness here.

In the Holy Spirit and much assurance, people said, you know what, this gospel of Paul makes sense. Nobody but God could do these things that are happening. And I affirm and respond to this inner witness of the Holy Spirit, just like I did when I first heard of the God of Abraham.

There was an inner witness to me that I do need to deal with my sin. There is a standard of righteousness. I think there is a coming judgment.

And I need to find out about that. This synagogue seems to have a clue, to have some information. And here's that same Holy Spirit.

And it's a familiar testimony. It's a familiar voice to these God-fearing Gentiles. And so these three witnesses, God gives them abundant testimony.

And they are full of assurance, much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. Now, this is interesting. Why didn't he just put a period after much assurance? We came and preached, Holy Spirit confirmed it, there were signs following, three witnesses, thing is established, period.

He says, and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were. Why does he say this? There's a lot of people that come to this verse and say, well, this is lifestyle evangelism. You have got to model the Christian life in front of people so that they will be drawn to the light.

You need to make a point of manifesting your righteousness. Let your light so shine before men

that they may see your good works. They'll put that with this and say, it's lifestyle evangelism.

You need to model and mentor and put yourself out there as a worthy example to draw people to the light. Now, this is an understandable construction, but think about the context. I have laboriously laid again the foundation that we've seen since we started Thessalonians about the situation here.

Why would Paul say this? Right here. We came and we preached. You saw confirming power and the confirmation of the Holy Spirit so that when you hear these Jews and this libelous, slanderous press going around Thessalonica, anytime the name of Paul or Silas is mentioned, here's the black eye, here's the mudslinging, here's the misconstruing of motives and the innuendos and the accusations and just slanderous vilification everywhere.

Paul says, you remember when we preached and the power of God was manifest and you felt the witness of the Holy Spirit in your soul, you know what kind of men we really are. We are not as we are pictured. He's not giving this as a model for any old witness.

He's talking specifically about the fact that they are being slandered and their motives are being maligned. And Paul says, look, we remember you constantly. We pray for you.

You remember us as well. And you know what kind of men we were among you. We weren't trying to get our hands in your pocket.

We weren't greedy. We weren't selfish. We weren't trying to co-opt some kind of power.

We weren't trying to build some kind of little kingdom in your midst. You know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. Love that is sacrificial towards self, beneficial toward others.

That's what was in evidence. And that's the reason that it said here. And I just point this out so that we don't come to this passage and say, well, all of us should try to get in the middle of a bunch of unbelievers and live a really righteous life and, and try to model Christianity so that because that's what Paul did.

That's not what he's saying at all. This is an answer to very vicious criticism. And he's just reminding them.

He doesn't have to answer these accusations directly. He says, you know, you remember what we were like when we were with you. Just figure it out for yourself.

You've got the Holy Spirit and the word of God. You know what to do with these accusations. You know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

We were there for your sake. We preached for your sake. We endured this persecution for your sake.

We traveled here for your sake, not for ours. So then he picks up in verse six and you became followers of us and of the Lord having received the word in much affliction. If, if our goal was to wow everybody with a prosperity gospel or something, then why not only we were afflicted, you were afflicted.

And yet you received the word anyway. And this goes back to the preaching that he did while he was there. What did he preach about? Sin, self-control and judgment.

And we are, Jesus said, if they have hated me, they will hate you. If you try to lead a righteous life, there are those who are going to attack you. They are going to hate you because they hate Christ.

And he says, you received this word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit. Paul hasn't been there in a while. Timothy has been there and come back, but they're sort of on their own.

They're having to live on that. Those brief exposures, those brief preaching episodes. And so he's saying, you know, remember the authenticity of this message.

It's not based on its rationality. It's not based on its documentation in the canonical gospels. You recognized it when you heard it and the Holy Spirit filled you with joy.

When you heard it, this is a testimony. Nobody can, can second guess. Nobody can, can deny you heard it.

You felt the witness of the Holy Spirit and it created joy in you. And nobody can explain away that joy. So that verse seven, you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

And in this fairly short amount of time and with this intense persecution and this, this raised a ruckus. This is like any other, it's like Occupy Wall Street, you know, where there's a conflagration and a conflict, it gets noised and people talk. Caravans, they're on the Ignatian way.

And so this news travels all up and down the highway with every traveler and in every inn and every way station and every campfire and every, every stopping place where people congregate. They're saying, wow, you know, did you hear about that riot in Thessalonica? And, oh yeah, there were a bunch of guys talking about this Christos and, and some guy over in Israel and he supposedly died. And these people believe that he's, he's the king of Israel and he's the son of the, this God of the Jews and the people are talking and there's all kinds of misinformation floating around.

But what people are impressed with is he said, you know, in spite of the fact that these Jews were trying to stamp these people out and the government got upset and they were afraid they were going to lose their free status as a city in, in, in the Roman empire and all that. These people are just clinging tenaciously to this belief. I mean, they've, they're, and, and it's just

transformed them.

Why I had a business dealing with one of them and, and I was going to try to cheat him and he just smiled and didn't get upset. And, and there, these people are just changed. I've been dealing with this guy for years and now that he's become one of these Christians, he's, he's just a changed man.

I couldn't ruffle his feathers. I couldn't get under his skin. He's, he's got a joy and a peace.

It's, it's just astonishing. And this, this is the stuff of, of news and of, of rumor and of, of traveling tongues all over the place. And, and Paul says, now we got to Berea.

I went to Athens, came back to Corinth. People are all over the place are talking about you. You know, these caravans are traveling faster than me.

And when I get to a place, they're talking about the people in Thessalonica and how strong their faith is in this Christ and, and what a change it has made in them. And he says, you all are an example to everybody. When I get there and say, let me tell you about Christ.

They say, Oh, you mean the guy you preached about in Thessalonica? I heard about that. That really shook the earth over there. Tell me about him.

And so Paul says, you become an example for all of those in Macedonia who believe for from you, the word of the Lord has sounded forth. Now, again, Paul says, you received this in much affliction, but because of the affliction, this has become a notorious story. The affliction has created a buzz throughout the region.

God is working this persecution out for good. If they had not been persecuted, it wouldn't be the talk of the area. It wouldn't be noised up and down.

So look at the way Paul is subtly reminding them that God is in it. And Paul may not know that his letter that comes out of this persecution and affliction is going to do what it does. But he knows that even in the short term, God is working this out for blessing to those who believe from you.

The word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaëa, but in every place people are getting on ships and crossing the Mediterranean, talking about what's going on in Thessalonica. People are moving up the boot of Italy. People are going into Asia minor.

People are going all over the area. And, you know, when they sit around at night thinking of something to talk about, they say, well, did you hear what happened in Thessalonica? And here it goes. And it is laying the groundwork.

And there are people who are interested in God and saying, I never did go for this whole Pantheon thing and all of these glorified dress up dolls that they say are the gods, you know,

there's got to be something more than this going on. And, you know, this sounds like it might be it. And God, the Holy Spirit starts to work on them and convict them of sin and righteousness.

And they're curious. By the time Paul or one of the other apostles or apostle trained preachers gets there, they're primed. They're ready.

God, the Holy Spirit has already been plowing the ground and he used the Thessalonians. So what does this do for the Thessalonians? They're under persecution. It's tough.

They're being blacklisted. They're being shut out of businesses. They're suffering.

They're losing their goods. And Paul says, look, just know that God is using your receiving of the word under affliction to make a big difference in areas you haven't even heard of and don't know about. And it's a lesson for all of us.

We think that our quiet suffering and our ongoing trials and difficulties. Well, nobody knows about this. It doesn't have anything to do with the great forward movement of the plan of God in history.

Yes, it does. Yes, it does. Don't sell God short.

Don't limit the plan of God to what we can see. He knows the end from the beginning. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

He saw this coming centuries, millennia in the past, and he is weaving it into the perfect fabric of his plan. Don't think you're neglected. Don't think you're forgotten.

Don't think that it's meaningless. Don't think that it has no purpose, that it has no connection. Everything.

You are a child of God. You are a blood bought, sanctified member of the body of Christ. You have been purchased with a precious, precious price, and nothing about you is trivial.

Nothing about you is mundane. Nothing about you is meaningless or average or dismissive, uninteresting in the plan and purpose of God. Everything counts for those who love God and are the called according to his purpose.

All things, not just all big things, all things work together for good. These Thessalonians have a rough go. Paul says, look, let me just give you just an inkling of what God is doing.

Could they possibly know that we would be talking about them and thinking about them 2,000 years later? Can you imagine anybody thinking about you by name? Grace and Truth Bible Church, Plano, Texas in the year 4,012. Think about it. In the year 4,012, somebody would be referring back and saying, you know, that little church, there was all these big goings on and all this media and all these different things.

And yet, in hindsight, we can see things that God was doing in that little church and lessons he was teaching and what he did in and through those people that they couldn't have possibly imagined. Well, that's what it is. We are here right now.

God the Holy Spirit is in our midst. He is in our hearts and souls. The Word of God is present.

We are in God the Father. We are in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are not one iota less a part of the plan and purpose of God as the Apostle Paul, Silas, Timothy, and these people.

It's just the same. It's the same God. It's the same level of oppression from society and environment.

And it's the same degree of opportunity. We just can't be shortsighted. We can't get disinterested and apathetic.

The person God does not use is the apathetic, indifferent, disinterested believer. If these Thessalonians had not been a worthy example to their region, would God have been able to use them? Would Paul have been able to write these words? They endured. They had joy in the Holy Spirit despite their afflictions.

And God uses them in their region and down through the corridors of history to the present day and beyond because they didn't quit. They didn't give up. They had these things that Paul describes where they have work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what God can use. And He is not limited. He is not suppressed.

He is not held back. He's not driven out of town. He is not relegated and banished to some backwater ineffectiveness.

We have to remember this. It is no small thing to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and to be involved in and be woven into the plan and purpose of God. So Paul gives them just a taste, just an inkling here of what God is doing.

They are examples. Not just in Macedonia and Achaia, but every place. They are an example in Plano, Texas in the year 2012.

They are an example every place at all times because God has woven them into scripture. And trust me when I tell you this isn't the last inspired scripture that will ever be written. There is a record of this age and this time.

There are other records that we don't have access to. There is a lot of inspired scripture that we're going to have access to in the eternal future. We've just got the Reader's Digest short few books that we need to get by in this life.

But there's a lot more scripture available and there's a lot more scripture coming. Your faith toward God has gone out so that we do not need to say anything. We get to a place and they're telling us about your faith.

They themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you. You're the guys in Thessalonians. They already know the story.

You can imagine in the eternal future when we get a chance to talk to some of these people and talk to some of the apostles several thousand years into the Kingdom of the Father. We'll eventually work our way up in line and get to talk to the Apostle Paul. Oh yes, Paul, I know about when you went to Thessalonica.

We studied your visit to Philippi and we already know about this. You don't have to tell us. We already know.

People down through the ages know these things. What manner of entry we had to you. And this is what is under attack.

This is what is being vilified and distorted by their enemies. What kind of entry did they have? What kind of gospel did they preach? What kind of ministry did they engage in? It is under attack and it's under attack today. Look at the atheistic, agnostic, faithless believers even attacking Christianity, trying to redefine it, trying to say it's something else.

Oh, you're misogynistic. You hate women. Oh, you hate homosexuals and you're a bigot and you're this and you're that and you're the other because of adhering to Scripture.

It's twisted. It's distorted. It is trying to be turned around and used against us.

Paul says, look, you know the truth. People who are genuine believers on the road going through the straight gate know the truth. You know the truth.

The truth sets you free. Well, this brings us to verse 9 and following where we'll pick up next time. But just remember, nothing in your life is trivial.

Nothing. Nothing in your life as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is trivial. Nothing.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the blessings we receive as we study it and the teaching ministry of the enables us to remember it and see its pertinence and applicability. We pray that our lives will reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus, both now and forevermore.

We ask it in his name. Amen.