

## 1Thessalonians 12-03-09a

This is Friday the 9th of March 2012. We're in Paul's first letter to Thessalonica and we are in Chapter 2. We will be resuming in the vicinity of verse 10. We'll take a moment as usual to ensure that we're prepared for the study of God's Word.

We take the opportunity to lay aside the distractions and cares of the day and the hats that may have come in on our heads and the other distractions that might have a tendency to divert our attention from this most important time of nourishment and encouragement from God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, what a blessing it is for us to have the privilege of coming to the oasis, the fountain of living water that we find in your Word, and to refresh ourselves and to be renewed and given a fresh look at the eternal perspective as you present it to us from your throne in heaven. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, the life that we have in Him, the opportunities, the hope, the expectation, and the meaning that is invested in our lives day by day in knowing that we will soon be united with Him and with you and move into the future phases of your plan and purpose.

We know that this is a great opportunity in the time we now occupy to learn and to grow and to prepare ourselves for that wonderful future, to overcome the weights and the sins that entangle us and beset us, and to run with patience the race that is set before us. We thank you for the passage that we have before us this evening, and we ask that as we look at it together, God the Holy Spirit will present it to us in a way that is meaningful and applicable, that will remain in our minds and be a source of inspiration and challenge to us in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. You remember the situation. It's very helpful, and we're sort of uniquely gifted, uniquely situated in looking at this letter to know so much of the background and circumstance in which it was written.

Some of Paul's other epistles, we don't know exactly when they were written. We don't know exactly what was going on or what else was said. We have sort of a fragment of a conversation.

Paul has visited a church or a city, a group of believers, and has taught them, has spent time with them, has invested himself in them, as he says here, as a father does with his dear children, encouraging and exhorting and instructing them. Then he has left, and then later on he would perhaps hear from that church there might be a question or a conflict or a challenge, and he would write a letter back. We just have a portion of the conversation, a quick snapshot of something that is much larger.

From a human perspective, this has puzzled Bible scholars and frustrated them, because they say, well, how can I get the Sitz im Leben, and how can I get the Heilgeschichte, and all the other stuff that's necessary to interpret this? I need all of the pieces of the puzzle. I must know the entire situation. Well, this is all a lot of German rhetorical fantasizing, in my opinion.

God has given us these portions of Paul's correspondence. He wrote many, many more letters than what we have in the Bible. Many more.

But these are sufficient. In these letters, God the Holy Spirit, I have no doubt that God the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Paul's non-extant letters. When he wrote to other letters to Corinth or other letters to other churches, he was functioning as an apostle.

We hope that God the Holy Spirit is always active in the communication process. Every time we have a Bible class, not at the level of inspiration, but hopefully at the level of communication, we ask God's blessing on us. We ask that the Holy Spirit will superintend.

So, not to worry when you're looking at Corinthians or Philippians or Titus. We might not have a lot of the background and a lot of the preceding and following conversational pieces, but what we have has been given to us specifically by God because it is sufficient. That seems obvious, doesn't it? Wouldn't you say? If God put it in the Bible, it's sufficient.

Well, if you believe that, you are a tiny minority in the world of Bible scholarship because the modern-day view is that this is a largely human production and that it needs to be analyzed with human tools and looked at from a human perspective. You're getting this because you gave me these CDs now, and so now I'm on disc eight, and so you're reaping the fruits. I was given a wonderful gift, which is sort of a seminary lecture course on the Apostle Paul, and the disc I finished this morning, he just went through, this former Catholic priest guy who's teaching the course just went through 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

Man, I thought I was going to run off the road, but be that as it may, it is sufficient. What we have here, by the way, and thank you, it's been great, I really enjoy it, but I enjoy it in a certain way. It's a great thing to help you winnow the wheat from the chaff, and there's some great stuff in it, and there's some things that just, as I say, I almost need to stop and breathe.

But in eight discs, two lectures per disc, 16 total lectures now, what I have just mentioned about the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in the entire ministry of Paul, and in the letters that have been covered thus far, never mentioned, never mentioned. This is a divinity school, this is a theological course taught by a theological professor, former Catholic monk who has ostensibly devoted himself to a huge extent. He's got doctoral degrees and other pieces of paper and so on.

But in all of this time, where's the Holy Spirit? If you don't remember anything else we cover tonight, please remember this. The Bible, as Peter was at pains to tell us in our last study, was not produced by men thinking their own thoughts. These men were carried along, moved by God the Holy Spirit.

When we look at these words, these pieces of correspondence, they're not just fragmentary letters that we've got to try to speculate and interpolate and triangulate and philosophize about and psychoanalyze. Well, was Paul bipolar? Because in one minute he's saying, I love you to

death, I wish I was there, and the next minute he's castigating and excoriating and chastising and disciplining and you'd better straighten up because I don't want to have to swing the rod when I get there. So Paul is suspected of having psychological problems.

And he has to correct in second whatever the mistakes that he made in first whatever. The first Thessalonians, he encourages them, as we will see, to have a great solid expectation of the Lord's return. Well, they went overboard with that, so in second Thessalonians he's got to rein them in and say, now, don't be so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good.

And it just makes me want to emphasize that God, our Heavenly Father, using the human personality and situations, whether it is an apostle or a prophet or an evangelist or a pastor or a teacher or whoever it might be that's involved in the scripture that we have before us, this is God, our Heavenly Father, through the agency of God the Holy Spirit, manifesting to us God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is the one with whom we have to do.

God. It is not important to figure out what may or may not have been in Paul's mind unless God gives it to us. And that's the situation that we have here.

Having looked at Acts 16-19, we have a great background for this letter and it explains to us the ways in which this can be applied. Now, we're here in Bible class. We've got our Bibles.

I'm talking at the moment. You're listening. By the way, if you have a question, stick up your hand.

But the purpose of it isn't just to get a Bible class done, right? We're not just doing this because, well, we've been doing it a long time. Let's just keep on doing it. It's kind of fun.

There are snacks. Let's just keep doing this. Why are we here? You know why you're here.

I know why I'm here. Hopefully, we understand that there is a result. There are seeds that are planted.

There is water and cultivation that is applied. I started to say fertilizer, and I thought, well, that's not really where I want to go. There is cultivation.

The Word of God, the Lord Jesus himself compares it to good seeds scattered by someone who is looking for a crop. When all is said and done, and we've finished listening and studying and snacking and fellowshiping and everything that we do, there ought to be a difference. It should be producing fruit in our lives, right? Well, the great thing, and I think one of the reasons that this particular letter is given to us with so much accompanying background, is that it greatly helps us in the application phase.

So you would expect that, well, when it comes to applying what is in this letter, what we're looking at tonight, especially in Chapter 2, it would be comparable. It would be comparable, and I'm using

that word comparable on purpose, because comparable is my suggested translation for the Greek word M-I-M-E-T-A-I, mimetai, imitators. Remember we talked about this last week, imitators.

Paul has already used it twice, and this is something we're going to look at tonight. What does it mean to be an imitator? What does it mean to be an imitator? Is it to be an imitation? Is it to give an imitation, an impersonation? One of the great unsung heroes of impersonation was Frank Gorshin, who was, I think, the Riddler on Batman. That guy was one of the best impersonators.

If you ever catch an old episode of The Ed Sullivan Show or something, and you ever see Frank Gorshin, the Riddler, just doing his stand-up impersonations, the guy was a genius, the best I have ever seen at evoking. He was just a little guy. I mean, if you've seen Batman, you know what he looks like.

But he could evoke. He could suddenly just turn around and become these people, just nail it. Well, is that what we're talking about with memetai? You can suddenly put on a John Wayne, or you can put on a Cary Grant, or you can do an Edward G. Robinson or something.

What does memetai mean? Because the scriptures tell us that we should be, you should be, when we leave here and fold everything up and go away, we should be imitators, memetai. So we want to take a look at this. We have seen it twice already in 1 Thessalonians.

You remember at the beginning he says that the people in the Thessalonian church, you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake back in chapter 1, and you became followers of us and of the Lord in verse 6. You became followers, memetai, of us and of the Lord. How? In what way? There are people who try to imitate the Lord by dragging a cross through the streets and having themselves hung on it normally without nails around Easter time. Is this? Well, seriously, there are a few nutty guys that I've seen actually have themselves nailed.

They are reenactors. They will reenact Via Dolorosa and the stations and repeat the sayings of Christ. I think every year in Jerusalem around Passover, somebody drags a cross through the streets and they try to reenact this.

Is that what it means to be an imitator of Christ? Obviously not. Why would Paul the Apostle say, you were imitators of me? Or in other places he says, be an imitator of me. What does it mean to be an imitator? Well, and then of course here in chapter 2, the passage that we have just seen where Paul says, you know how devotedly we acted among you and we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you and you received the word not as the word of men but as it is in truth the word of God.

This is what we opened with this evening, verse 13. We thank God without ceasing because when you received the word of God. Remember in chapter 1 he said, you became followers of us having received the word.

That would be something to note, the association. In verse 6, you became followers of us and of the Lord having received the word. In much affliction.

Chapter 2, verse 6, I'm sorry, verse 13. We thank God without ceasing because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men but as it is in truth the word of God which also effectively works in you who believe. The word of God effectively works and you brethren became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.

Chances are many of these believers in Thessalonica and God-fearers who became believers and responded to Paul's gospel probably had no notion of what might have gone on in the churches in Judea and yet Paul says you became imitators. Can you imitate something without knowing what it is? Without consciously choosing to follow it? Well, you can if the word of God is effectively working in you because this is the source of the change. This is the source of the power that makes us act differently than we would left to ourselves.

So we want to take a look at this tonight and see exactly what it means. I've pulled up some analysis of this word in some of the resources, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament for example and there's a huge long article on this because it's a pretty major word. I just want to give you a few excerpts from the portion, this is section 5 after pages and pages and pages on the Septuagint and the Old Testament.

By the way, *memetai* is virtually unknown in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. You don't find it used. It isn't an inherited word that carries a lot of freight to these people from their Old Testament scriptures.

In fact, the only place in the Septuagint that it occurs is in the apocryphal books and the pseudepigrapha and so on. In the canonical Old Testament books, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, you just don't find this word. So what did it mean when it came down to these people? What would they understand when Paul said you are a *memetai*? Well, it began to be used in about the 6th century by Plato and there was things in terms of what happens on earth versus what happens out in the cosmos.

In Plato, it's analogous to what we see when you see references made in the Bible to your tabernacle, your Ark of the Covenant are earthly copies of heavenly realities. The lamb and the sacrifices, these are tangible representations of invisible, higher, grander realities. There's a similar sort of a usage of the word *memetai* by the Platonic philosophy school and this goes on for a couple of hundred years that, well, human artificers, human, what am I trying to say, workmen, men that do things, make stuff, carpenters and blacksmiths have looked at the functions of the human body and they have turned these into businesses.

We see the way an arm works or a leg works as we lift and as we carry and so now you have

men making levers and making machinery, making carts to bear and yokes to carry things and this is memetai. We're observing how something works and we're doing something with it in a different context. That's sort of how it evolved out of the Platonic world.

Well, this informs how it's used in the New Testament and one of the interesting things is that as a noun, memetai, as we have it here, and this is where if you've been kind of listening to the drone of my voice now, you really need to kind of start grabbing hold of these things. Memetai is never found as a noun in the New Testament without another word. Did you spot it in the two verses here in 1 Thessalonians? What did he say in 1 Thessalonians 6? And you, what followers of us? Became, which in Greek is? My Greek students? Ginnomai, ginnomai.

Memetai in the New Testament as a noun is never found without ginnomai. This is something that you become. Even in the imperative, when Paul says, and you'll find this in the New King James, it'll say imitate me even as I imitate Christ in another passage.

It doesn't say imitate. It doesn't say memeto or memetomai in an imperative. The imperative is become.

Become an imitator of me. And they've just left out the become when they say imitate. Become.

So, as soon as you start using ginnomai, as soon as you start saying become something, what do you know? How fast can I become a guitarist? How fast can I become a pianist? How fast can I become a pole vaulter? How fast can I become a place kicker? When I say ginnomai something, become something, what's implied? Is this an event or a process? Event or process? Take a vote. Which do you think it is? It's a process, right? It's a process. To become an imitator isn't something that we're going to decide to do tonight.

We'll bow our heads. Oh, Lord, we have decided to be an imitator. Please bless us.

Amen. We leave. Now we're imitators.

Not going to happen. It is not instantaneous. It's not an aorist tense all in one.

I am now a finger-picking genius on the guitar. I am now able to clear incredible heights with my pole on the pole vault. Right? It's a process.

So anytime we see this and Paul says you became imitators, he's looking at something that took place over time. Took place over time. Now, what should our expectation be? You're a believer.

I'm a believer. We've got the Bible here. Jesus is in heaven.

He's going to come back for us one of these days. We're all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And we are going to be measured against a standard.

Right? If you judge a thing, you measure it against a standard. I would like a desk that is 60

inches long. Just made one last week.

I wanted a desktop that was 60. It started out being 72 inches long. I didn't want a 72-inch desk.

I wanted a 60-inch desk. So if this desktop is going to become a 5-foot desktop instead of a 6-foot desktop, there's going to be a process involved. There's a saw.

There is glue. There's edging. It's a process.

Now, how do I know if this has been a successful process? How do I know if I now, how would you know? If you go over to my house right now and look at my desk, how would you know that I've accomplished my goal? What would you do? Are you just going to eyeball it? Say, well, that's about the size of it. Tape measure, measured against a standard. The tape measure has got a 60-inch mark on it.

If the desk memetize that 60-inch mark, if it is comparable, when I do a comparison, tape measure 60 inches at this mark, desk is 60 inches. It's comparable. Now, try reading that into this translation.

Verse 6, you became comparable to us. You became comparable to the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit. Did the Lord Jesus maintain His joy even when He was afflicted? Did He maintain His obedience and His dedication to the Father even under great resistance and opposition? He did.

Did Paul the Apostle maintain his enthusiasm and his dedication to his job even in the face of setbacks and challenges and opposition and persecution? Yes, he did. And he said, you became comparable to us in that regard. Now, let me ask you this.

If the tape measure and my desk are comparable, if the desk is a memetize of the tape measure, can I just swap one for the other? Because they are comparable, are they equal? I can save myself a lot of time, throw the desk away, and just set the tape measure in front of my desk chair, stack my monitor on it, and put my stuff in its drawers. No. When you talk about something being comparable, it is comparable in a specific respect, in a specific respect that you find in the context, right? So, to be an imitator of Christ, we've got to have more information.

An imitator how? In what regard? In what respect? This is what Paul is fleshing out here in Chapter 2. In what respect are we to be an imitator of the Apostle Paul? In what respect are we to be an imitator? In this case, the respect between the tape measure and the desk is length. The length is comparable. The length is a copy, right? But in many other respects, they are totally different.

I would not want to try to measure stuff with my desk, and I would not try to do any work on my tape measure. They are comparable in a specific way, in a specific area. So, having said that,

we've made two points now about memetize.

You should know two things more. You may have known these already, but you might not have thought about it. But now that we're talking about being an imitator, there's two things we know at this point.

What are they? First of all, it is a process. When it comes to a spiritual imitator of Christ, or of good things that are in Scripture, this isn't going to happen by an instantaneous decision. There is some sort of process involved.

Secondly, there is going to be a specific way in which we will be comparable or an imitator. We are not going to abandon our lives and our jobs and travel around as an itinerant apostle. We are not going to collect a band of 12 disciples and go about our region preaching and teaching, get ourselves arrested, tried, and crucified.

And I don't mean to be flippant about that, but it is important to note that we can be an imitator of Christ, but we've got to know what is the area, what is the specific nature of the comparison, right? And this keeps us from doing flaky things. Well, Paul the apostle had a snake bite him and he wasn't hurt, so if I'm going to be an imitator of Paul, I'm going to let a snake bite me, and I don't think it will hurt me either. There are people that make this, that's an extreme example, but there are faulty ways.

There are people who say, well, the apostles were largely evangelists, and if I'm going to be an imitator of them, I should largely be an evangelist. We have to respect the focus and the limits of the comparison. Length, not function, right? So these are two things with regard to memetai.

We're going to pause here and take our break, and when we come back, we're going to look at all of the New Testament uses of this word. There aren't that many, and by the time we finish, this is going to shine a very helpful light on what Paul is talking to the Thessalonians about and what God the Holy Spirit is talking to us about, because this is really central. Remember last time I talked about those three things.

There is the messenger, there is the message, and there are the recipients. Paul says, not only are we approved by God to be deliverers of the message, and not only is the message sound, and you know that it is sound because of its results in you and the way you received it, but Paul adds another dimension to that threefold relationship when he says, you have been and you should continue to be comparable to us, the messengers. You know what kind of men we were among you, and you should be this way.

Well, what way? And how can we become that? These are the two aspects of that exhortation that we have begun to define for ourselves, and in looking at Mimeti and the rest of the New Testament, largely in Paul, this is one of Paul's words. It's only used three times outside of Paul, and if you believe Hebrews is written by Paul, it's only used once outside of Paul. It's a Pauline

word.

He loves this thing, and he uses it. So, how can we be imitators of Christ? How can we be imitators of that which is good? This is what we are going to pursue and hopefully lay hold of in our second session right after the break.