

1THESSALONIANS 1:1-3 "Paul Greet The Thessalonians"

The first time we hear of the city of Thessalonica is in the book of Acts during Paul's second missionary journey.

Paul had just previously been in Philippi and had been the guest of the Philippian authorities in one of their jails. He had been placed there for casting a demon out of a certain slave girl who had been practicing divination for her masters, bringing them much money.

Well, now that she no longer has the demon who empowered her for this work the masters of this woman became upset and accused Paul and Silas of stirring up the whole city and creating chaos. Paul and Silas were then beaten with rods and thrown into jail.

You might remember it was as a result of this incident that God used Paul to lead the Philippian jailer and his family to Christ. God caused an earthquake which opened all of the jail doors. The jailer rushed in thinking everyone had escaped. But Paul assured him everyone was still there.

And then that well-known question was asked of Paul after the jailer brought them out of the jail.

ACT 16:30-31 "... Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household."

Wouldn't it be great if more people asked that question today? And yet if we're willing to be used of God He may surprise you and bring you someone with a heart that wants to know the Lord. We just need a heart which is willing to give them the truth in love.

The other thing I find interesting about that incident is that God allowed a tragedy to befall Paul and Silas which He then used to speak to the hearts of this family. Imagine how much the Lord loved that Philippian jailer and his family that He would orchestrate this incident where Paul and Silas would be in the right place at the right time.

And yet how many of us would not have seen such a tragedy as an opportunity to be used of God? How many of us would have been so distraught that we may have missed such an opportunity or simply felt that God had left us, when in fact our Lord was right in the middle of that situation.

Paul knew first-hand how God works in the lives of those whom God loves as he writes to the church in Rome.

ROM 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who have been called according to his purpose."

Paul saw everything in his life in service to Christ as purposeful so as to bring glory to Christ, even situations which were less than comfortable.

But having been released from this Philippian jail they then shortly departed from there and we read this in the book of Acts.

ACT 17:1-4 "When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women."

Again, Paul takes advantage of the opportunity to give the gospel of Jesus Christ to these people in Thessalonica; a city located in today's Greece. The approximate time that Paul went to Thessalonica was A.D. 49. He evidently didn't stay there very long because the unbelieving Jews once more threatened Paul's life and he had to leave by night.

He ended up in the city of Berea and began preaching, as was his custom, in the local synagogue. He found that these Jews were very much interested in searching the Scriptures for the truth, which is why we read of this in Acts 17.

ACT 17:11-12 "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. 12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men."

And yet we know that even after Paul left Thessalonica he stayed in contact with them because he was concerned for their growth and their service for the Lord. And as we'll see, Timothy would play a role in their lives, not just as a servant who would carry

Paul's love to them in a letter, but also as one who would teach and help these people mature into strong Christians.

It was through Paul's faithfulness that some of the Jews in Thessalonica believed along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks. His relationship with them was such that he never forgot them and he had a special place in his heart for them.

And this is why, when he was in Corinth for a year and a half, he wrote two letters to them, encouraging them, and delivered these letters by the hand of Timothy. And so this morning we're going to travel with Timothy back to Thessalonica and share in the blessing they received from God through the pen of the apostle Paul, which took place around A.D. 50-51.

1TH 1:1 "Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you."

This is a common greeting for Paul and here he includes the names of those who were ministering with him and unto the Thessalonians. He mentions Timothy and in both the KJV and the NAS versions he calls the other one Silvanus. Silvanus is the Latinized version of Silas which means he was probably a Roman citizen like Paul. Notice here however, that Paul does not include his office given to him by Christ, that of apostle.

The reason he probably does not include it here is because his position and the authority given to him by God were never called into question by the Thessalonians. They recognized him as God's anointed and they respected and loved him for the servant he was and submitted to his apostleship.

On the other hand this was not the case with the Corinthian church nor the Galatian church which is one reason he begins both of those letters with the opening, "Paul, called as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ."

When those in a church create doubts about the gifts and calling of a man whom God has truly anointed and placed over His flock, especially if those doubts are unfounded, then it is not the man they come against; they come against God Himself and in essence they question God's integrity for choosing such a one to minister in His name.

In fact, this was a problem for Timothy who was seen as a young Pastor. There were those who questioned Timothy's anointing and calling by God to shepherd a flock. And so, Paul gave Timothy the words he needed to immediately stop any nonsense that would question his calling and ministry. Here's part of what Paul told Timothy.

1TI 4:9-12 "This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance

10 (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. 11 Command and teach these things. 12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

The letter was to Timothy but the message is also for the church and those pastors who have been called by God and who are faithfully laboring for the Lord, and delivering the message of hope and eternal life in Christ, as they equip the saints to become servants who take this message to the world.

Paul let those doubting people know that he was not looking to be an apostle when Christ met him on the road to Damascus. But when he was commissioned by the Lord he did not let anyone try to rob him of something God had given him, not man. And he made sure that such people did not try to poison the rest of the church by trying to undermine his ministry given to him by Christ.

Paul was a great shepherd and he would not let the wolves come in and raise havoc with Christ's sheep. And my request from you is that you would continually pray for me that I would always have that same love for the sheep, that I would not compromise that confidence that Christ has given me for His flock.

Paul loved the Thessalonians. Notice what he calls them. "To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:..."

These believing Thessalonians had not been together for very long, and in all probability they did not have a building where they were all able to meet. Remember that the unbelieving Jews had every intention of killing Paul for bringing this message of the Messiah Jesus into their city. You can bet that those same Jews did not make it easy for the residents of Thessalonica who embraced Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

And yet despite any great organization or any programs that we deem essential for a successful church, and despite the fact that they didn't even have pews and an organ for worship, Paul addresses them as the "church".

Why? Because that's how Christ viewed them. They were now part of the Kingdom and as men and women and children who believed on Jesus Christ and loved Him and worshipped Him together whenever possible, they were in fact, the church.

In fact, the word church has been grossly misunderstood by many in the church today. If it doesn't have a steeple and adequate parking, it's not a church. Never mind that they don't compromise the word of God. It's got to be a real production with all the amenities that make the experience pleasant.

Look, I'm not trying to be cynical, I'm just telling you the truth. I've had people tell me in the past that until we get a youth group to keep their children busy during the week they wouldn't come here.

Others have said that until we're in our own building they wouldn't come. What's the building have to do with truth? Praise God the Thessalonians didn't have a church background that was steeped in the things of men. They just had paganism and idol worship. And they forsook it all for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead.

The Thessalonians were a church, not because other Christians deemed them a church, but because Jesus Christ declared them so. In fact, the word church in the Greek is *ekklesia* which means a calling out.

They were called out by God, even as we are, to be His representatives, His ambassadors and His children who reflect the love of Christ and turn around and take that love into their communities and demonstrate it in ways which reach out and meet needs, especially the greatest need of being forgiven of the penalty of their sin by faith in Christ.

This was the kind of church Paul was addressing. Not a fancy group of people, but probably the kind of people who were a little rough around the edges but who loved Christ and who wanted to know Him better and love Him more through their obedience.

"Grace to you and peace." Paul meant that. He wanted them to experience the peace that passes understanding in Christ and he wanted them to drink deeply of the grace that was available to them in Christ.

Grace is something we don't deserve but which we receive from God despite ourselves. Paul had spent a great deal of time when he was in Thessalonica explaining to them the grace of Christ as Jesus offered up Himself for us; even when we were His enemies He died for us.

And Paul wanted the Thessalonians to constantly live in that grace and appreciate, with thankful hearts, what they had in Christ: forgiveness and an eternal inheritance, reserved in heaven for all who would believe.

What a great opening to a letter. And whether you realize it or not the Holy Spirit has addressed it to you and me this morning.

1TH 1:2 "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers."

Paul never stopped thinking of their love for him and his for them. And I'm sure when he was in Corinth making his tents throughout the day, as he sat there with Aquilla and Priscilla, they must have had some great times of fellowship, and as they took material and sewed it together I'm sure Paul would periodically stop and ask if they would like to pray with him about different people that were on his heart.

And I'm sure there were many. But, I'm certain that these Thessalonians were always a part of his prayer time, not just because he knew that they were undergoing persecution, but also for their growth in the Lord, and he actually thanks God for them as we see in verse 2.

But, look what Paul prays for in verse 3: "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is what excited Paul as he prayed for them. This was the report that Timothy brought to Paul when he finally joined Paul in Corinth.

Timothy was excited that these Thessalonians weren't just hanging out declaring how wonderful it was to be a Christian. He was excited that they were living out their faith in Christ by taking it to their friends and neighbors and strangers. They were real and they were excited about their faith and they wanted others to know that they could have eternal life as well.

Paul say's, 'when I come to my Father, my God and Savior Jesus Christ, and when I talk with Him I mention you guys and I thank and praise Him for your service to Him.'

Look what he mentions: "Your work produced by faith." What is that? The word work here in the Greek is literally translated toil. The word work is a good one because it denotes action with the idea of accomplishing real results in the power of the Spirit.

But notice the kind of works which are described. "Your work produced by faith." There are lots of works that people, even Christians, try to accomplish. But, what can happen is that some of those works are not done in faith.

What does that mean? To do anything in faith is to do it knowing that God is the one at work in you and that you're submitting to Him and acknowledging that it is His will, and that it is His strength accomplishing the work that honors and glorifies Him.

Lots of people are busy for the Lord, but they're busy doing it their way, in their strength, according to their will, and where they are the ones trying to get noticed by everyone else.

Those are not works done in faith, nor are they works which will last. Paul would later write to the Corinthians about this.

In 1CO 3:11-15 we read, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Paul say's that you can look pretty godly by apparently doing wonderful things for God, even things which include the appearance of gold, silver, or costly stones. There will be other

times when your works will be more evident when they include the smell of things you find down on the farm: wood, hay, and stubble, and things on the farm you don't want to step in.

These kinds of works carry other motives and they are not usually motivated to consider one another as more important than yourself. The works often times begin as something we think is a good idea and during the process of doing them prayer may be involved, but it's not to seek God's will, it's to have God put His approval on it even though we already began without Him.

By the way Godly works done in faith do not have to be thought out at great length. Often times they will be spontaneous and they may not be the kinds of works which shake the world. But, they will always be done humbly and to please God and not draw attention to ourselves. And in many cases we may not even realize we've done them because it was just a prompting by the Spirit to meet a need. You see it and you do it, because of Christ's love in you.

Jesus talks about some of these works in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 25:36-40 "I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

When we reach out with the desire to do it for Jesus, with the same attitude Jesus had, that of being a servant without expecting anything in return, then you'll know what it means to have done a work produced by faith in the name of Jesus Christ. It may be something as simple as meeting a physical need, or as wonderful as leading someone to Christ.

But, the work is always produced by the desire and the love that Christ has given you as His Spirit prompts you. This is what Paul mentions in the 3rd verse; "labor of love".

And it's done with an attitude of hope in Christ, and we want to express that to the world. And so Paul again intimates in this verse that these Thessalonians were steadfast for the Lord because of the

hope that they had in the Lord Jesus Christ with the understanding that they were in the presence of their God and Father.

When you live in that kind of faith and the reality of God's presence in every area of your life you will be less prone to want to do anything with wrong motives, or in a way that will bring attention to yourself, or doing it in your own strength.

And so when we look at this verse we should begin to see how we may align ourselves with the kind of attitude we should continually pray for ourselves, and then ask ourselves, are we submitting to the work of the Spirit in our lives, or are we too busy serving ourselves instead of serving others?

Hopefully we will be remembered before our God with works done in faith, with endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, and labors prompted by love.

Three key words here: faith, hope and love. Underline them in your bible and then remember what Paul told the Corinthians and you'll know what it is that pleases God in your service.

1CO 13:11-13 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."