

## **Week 1 | “Paul and the Thessalonians”**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. It’s our aim as a ministry that our weekend teaching schedule is comprised of books of the Bible, as well as topical sermons. Series where we walk through entire books together, as well as looking at specific topics.
- B. But among the main reason why we preach through books of the Bible is this;
  - 1. **(1)** It’s how God wrote the Bible, in books, not disjointed thoughts. **(2)** It demonstrates good Bible study methods. **(3)** It guarantees balance for those that listen to the preaching. **(4)** It forces us to deal with difficult parts of the text, that we might otherwise avoid. **(5)** It prevents preachers from preaching their favorite texts/thoughts.

### **II. ORIGIN’S OF 1<sup>ST</sup> THESSALONIANS**

- A. The date of **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians** is uncertain, but most believe it be written around 50-51AD placing its date about 20 years after Jesus’ death. It might be among the earliest of Paul’s letters, other than Galatians. Paul most likely wrote these letters in close proximity (**1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians**) from Corinth (*4-8 months after his time in Thessalonica*), after Timothy returns from Thessalonica to see how the new converts were doing there.
  - 1. **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:1-2** “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and send Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith...”

### **III. PAUL’S JOURNEY TO THESSALONICA (ACTS 16-18)**

- A. During Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, he had a profound visitation from God in Troas;
  - 1. **Acts 16:6-10** “...So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man from Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them.”
- B. From Troas, they sailed to the island of Samothrace, finally landing on the shore of Europe in Philippi (**Acts 16:11-12**). After a short time in Philippi, having made disciples, baptized Lydia and her entire family, Paul and Silas casted demons out of a young fortune teller, causing them to be beaten, and thrown in prison (**Acts 16:13-24**).
- C. But at midnight, locked up in prison, Paul and Silas are praising God, singing hymns and suddenly a divine earthquake happens, opening the prison doors, leading the prison guard and his whole household to salvation and water baptism (**Acts 16:25-34**).
- D. After discovering that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were asked by the magistrates to leave the city. Paul and Silas still recovering with open wounds from their beating, leave Philippi, and head through Amphipolis and Apollonia and come to Thessalonica a journey of about 3 days and 100 miles (**Acts 16:35-17:1**).

#### IV. THE CITY OF THESSALONICA

- A. Thessalonica had an estimated population of around 100,000, and was referred to as the mother of Macedonia, and a “little Rome.” This city, like many others throughout the Roman Empire was pluralistic in its worship of pagan gods, but among the top were deified Roman Emperors, like Julius Caesar Augustus. In the center of town was erected a massive statue to Augustus, who’s right hand was raised in the air as great hero/god.
- B. This was not an easy city to do ministry in. Alongside deified Roman Emperors were priests of the imperial cult, and a large Caesareum built in the time of Augustus which had a sanctuary. And alongside these many Greek’s, were a group of antagonistic Jew’s who were playing the fence with Roman authorities to appease them enough to continue practicing Judaism.

#### V. PAUL’S TIME IN THESSALONICA

- A. Coming into Thessalonica Paul and Silas lodged at the house of a guy named Jason, most likely a well to do Jewish man (*he hosted Paul, the Church was in his house, and he paid the bond for Paul in place of his arrest*), who might have been in a similar trade as Paul. It seems logical that Jason helped Paul get connected to the Jewish community in town, providing him with an opportunity to speak in their synagogue, not once, but three weeks in a row.
  - 1. Acts 17:1-3 “...they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, this Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”
- B. Through Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica, many came to faith in Christ. There was a great multitude of god-fearing Greeks, leading (influential) women, and some Jews that professed Christ, and began following the way of Jesus;
  - 1. Acts 17:4-5 “And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks (god-fearing), and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jew’s who were not persuaded...”
- C. But not everyone was happy. Many of the Jews in Thessalonica saw the conversion of these God-fearing Greeks as a threat to their discipleship efforts, as Paul was taking them away.
- D. Paul and Silas were dangerous preachers to have around. If the Thessalonica people responded to his preaching and put faith in Christ, emperor worship might cease and the city could be in danger of harboring the enemies of Rome, thus cutting off their support entirely. This is why they said this of Paul;
  - 1. Acts 17:5-7 “But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them (Paul and Silas) out to the people. But when they did not find them (Paul and Silas), they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, these who have turned the world upside down (they are politically subversive) have come here too, Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another King—Jesus.”

- E. Preaching another King, and a Kingdom would be in direct opposition to the culture of their city politically (*going against the head of their state, Caesar*), and religiously (*also against the head of their imperial cult*).
- F. These Jewish leaders heard Paul's sermon saying, "*this crucified criminal, who was rightly and justly crucified, was not only God, but the Christ?*" In their eyes, this "Christ" was deserving of death, as He claimed Himself to be God.
- G. One commentator rightly states that Paul's message was a break from traditional loyalty that was pledged to Caesar, which sounded something like this;
  - 1. "*I swear that I will support Caesar Augustus, his children and descendants throughout my life in word, deed and thought, that in whatsoever concerns them I will spare neither body nor soul nor life nor children, that whenever I see or hear of anything being said, planned or done against them I will report it and whomsoever they regard as enemies I will attack and pursue with arms and the sword by land or by sea.*"
- H. It makes sense why this uproar is so great against Paul, Silas, Jason and those others who are following The Way of Jesus. If Paul is calling them to turn from idols, to worship the One true God and recognize His Son Jesus, this message would destroy their synchronistic/pluralistic society that they've worked to build. Suddenly, they're thrust out of the city;
  - 1. **Acts 17:9-10; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:9** "So when they had taken security (some sort of financial bond, and Jason's word that Paul and Silas would leave) from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea...For they themselves declare...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living, and true God..."

## VI. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

- A. After leaving Thessalonica, Paul and the ministry team traveled to Berea, where they again started preaching Jesus and His kingdom in the local synagogue. But as they set up shop there, some of the antagonistic Jews from Thessalonica came there also and disrupted their meetings, forcing them to flee again, suddenly to Athens (**Acts 17:11-15**).
- B. But while Paul is in Athens, he becomes troubled about the welfare of the new disciples in Thessalonica, and decides to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how they are faring;
  - 1. **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:1-2, 5** "Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and send Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith...For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor (among you) might be in vain."
- C. After doing ministry in Athens (**Acts 17:16-34**) with what might have seemed like minimal fruit, Paul moves onto Corinth and once again sets up shop in the local synagogue and start's preaching Christ and reasoning from the scriptures (**Acts 18:1-4**).
- D. And it's here, in Athens when Timothy returns to him and gives him the mostly positive report about their ministerial labor and efforts in Thessalonica, that Paul writes both **1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians (Acts 18:5) (Acts 16:6-10, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth)**.

- E. **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians** is a progress-oriented letter of encouragement, not a problem-solving letter like **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians**. Paul's exhortation for the most part is that the followers of Jesus in Thessalonica need to continue doing what they've already taught them, holding fast to the good they've already grasped, while at the same time, avoiding evil.
- F. Also, among this letter is stout teaching about the return of Christ. In fact, in the total of 8 chapters in **1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians**, Christ's return is a premiere topic in 7 of the 8 chapters;
1. **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:9-10; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:19-20; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:11-13; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:1-11, 23-24; 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1:4-11; 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:1-12**
- G. Other topics that both Paul and we will tackle in the weeks and months to come;
1. Our identity in Christ (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:1**)
  2. Holding onto faith, hope and love (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:2-3**)
  3. The quality of God's power in Gospel proclamation as well as quality of character (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:5**).
  4. Suffering and joy through hardship's (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:6-8**)
  5. God's desire for righteous conduct among others (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:1-12**)
  6. The Gospel of grace, and Jewish election (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:13-16**)
  7. Compassion for those that God has called us to lead (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:17-20**)
  8. Confidence in God's nearness through pressure and tribulation (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:1-5**)
  9. The call to move go deeper in His love, and fulfill our ministries (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:6-9**)
  10. A exhortation into continued holiness (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:11-13**)
  11. Our call to go upstream, in a downstream world regarding sexual purity (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:1-8**)
  12. Living for Christ, among a non-believing world (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:9-12**)
  13. The resurrection of the dead, and the season of Christ's return (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-11**)
  14. How to be planted in a Gospel community (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:12-22**)
  15. Being a prepared people for the Lord's return and how His grace will perfect us (**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:23-28**)

## VII. APPLICATION

- A. Take time to read through **Acts 16-18:1-5** and all of **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians** over the next weeks to become familiar with some of Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, as well as his letter to the Thessalonians.
- B. Take the prayers that Paul prayers in **1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians** and pray them over your life, over your family, over your situation and the world that God's set you among.
- C. And lastly, work to put into practice the things that you learn from God's word, from prayer and from the weekend teaching. Close the gap between hearing God's word and DOING God's Word.