

1 Thessalonians

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 17. We're going to be reading quite a bit of Scripture today, but it's going to be broken up a little bit into different sections.

So we can turn to Acts chapter 17, verse 1, and we'll read that in a moment. There are three things that are incredibly important to all of us, not just us Christians here, but incredibly important to just people in general, no matter who we are.

One of them is faith. Everybody believes in something. Everybody believes that certain things are true, and they trust those things. And often what we believe in, what we trust, turns out not to be true.

It fails, and we're severely shaken. Another thing is love. That is truly what makes families tick properly, what makes societies work, is if people can actually sacrifice their own needs and desires to help somebody else, to benefit somebody.

And if we do that for others, love is something that all people need, and some people experience, although most of us experience it in a very twisted way usually.

[1 : 29] Faith, love, and hope. Hope is something everybody needs, and people often experience glimpses of. Hope that something in the future will happen.

We strive towards something that we think is going to happen. Maybe it's something that's promised, and it motivates our daily life. We do things according to what we're striving toward. We hope in that. And again, unfortunately, so many things that people in this world hope for, hope toward, strive toward, fail.

Like the bicycle getting fixed, or some very serious things. Faith, love, and hope. Those are fundamental human needs and desires.

And Christians have been given, or the world has been given, these three things. And Christians enjoy knowing these three things in perfection. Trust in Jesus.

[2 : 32] Faith that he is the son of God who died for our sins and raised from the dead. Faith, it's in something that's true. A person who is true and will not let us down.

Love. Love. Jesus has poured his spirit into our hearts. Those of us who trust him. And this fire within us, by the Holy Spirit of God, helps us sacrifice our own desires, sometimes our own needs, to help somebody who needs help.

To love somebody else. Because we've received that type of love from God himself. Hope. The fact that Jesus is coming back. That that's sure.

That that will certainly happen. This gives us a rock solid anchor for the soul. Christians have been, our eyes have been opened by the gracious God to receive faith, love, and hope.

But we can all use some encouragement in that. We can all use these things strengthened in us. So we're going to focus this morning on a model. Some people that can model for us.

[3 : 40] Faith in Christ. Love for each other. And hope in Christ's return. Despite struggles that they had. Despite suffering.

Things getting in the way and challenging these very things. People who persevered. We're going to look at three particular men on a road in ancient Greece.

Walking along. Two of them stumbling probably because they had been beaten severely the day before. But three men. And we're going to think about the people that they're about to go and see. They're walking 95 miles, three day journey to a city. And they're going to bring the gospel of Jesus to these other people. So we're going to think about how those people then receive the gospel despite suffering.

These people are, the three men are Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Paul, you know, he used to persecute the church. He hated people who trusted Jesus.

[4 : 40] But Jesus confronted him. And brought him into his service. And now Paul is going around sharing the faith in Christ. The love of the spirit. And the hope of Christ's return.

Sharing it with everybody. And then we're going to focus on the Thessalonians. That's the city that they're going to. You see, these three men have just left Philippi.

It's an ancient city in Greece. If those of you probably received something in your intimations, you can take a look at the map. It helps me. Maybe it'll help you. There's a map on one side.

And you can see Philippi in the top center. That's where they've just left. They were preaching the gospel. They were talking about Jesus. Telling people how to be saved.

And they were, Paul and Silas were grabbed by men. Dragged through the crowds. Publicly beaten with sticks by the local authorities. Thrown in jail without trial.

[5 : 38] Shamefully treated. And then the next day asked to leave. So they're walking away from Philippi. 95 miles on a road to Thessalonica. Now we're going to pick up in Acts 17.1.

That's what has just happened up until this point. So let's look at Acts 17. I'm going to read some and then I'll pause at a few points. And try to fill in some details that would have been clear to the early readers.

But are not as clear to us. So let's start in Acts 17.1. When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. They came to Thessalonica.

Where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue. And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures.

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.

[6 : 43] 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.

We'll pause right here for a moment. These people in Thessalonica. What was Thessalonica like? It was the biggest city in this area. Some people estimate about 200,000 people in Thessalonica in that day.

Something like the size of Aberdeen proper right now. But this is 2,000 years ago. Big city. Major trade. Anybody taking goods across the whole country had to go through Thessalonica.

It was a very rich city. It was right on the waterfront, as you can see on the map. And on a clear day, if they looked across the water, they could see Mount Olympus rising up in the horizon.

The place where a lot of Greeks believed the major Greek gods lived on that mountain. Idolatry and paganism were very important in Thessalonica. Many people worshipped fertility gods and goddesses.

[7 : 50] They'd go to the fertility temple, or the pagan temples, and they'd have sex with the prostitutes there at the temple. Hoping to get the gods and goddesses to have sex.

And the fruit of that would be better crops and fertility down on earth. This is the type of stuff that was going on in Thessalonica. A lot of good trade. A lot of very decadent things with their idolatry. Politically, it was a very interesting city. The Roman Empire was vast and was in charge of all these little cities. And usually would put Roman officials in a city to guide it and to lead it.

Thessalonica had been given a gift years before by the Caesar. It was called a free city. Because of some help that it gave to that Caesar in a battle.

It was a free city, so there was no Roman official governing it. They were allowed to govern themselves. They had city officials who would take care of the business of Thessalonica. And they loved being a free city.

[8 : 57] Caesar, their lord, was still in charge of them. He offered his people peace and safety. But they governed themselves and they wanted to keep it that way. That becomes important later.

Let's resume reading in Acts 17, verse 5. That's where we are. Many people have become converts to Christ. But the Jews were jealous.

So they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace. They formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas.

In order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the other brothers before the city officials. shouting, these men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.

And Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees. Saying that there's another king. Someone called Jesus. When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials

were thrown into turmoil.

[10:10] Let's pause there again. Why were they thrown into turmoil? Precisely because they're a free city. If they govern in a way that's appropriate for Caesar, their lord.

But imagine if some people start stirring up trouble. Saying there's this other king. Caesar is not the ultimate lord. There's another lord, Jesus. Well, and now a mob starts.

And trouble starts in the city. And they're having trouble keeping peace. They're going to want to crush this as quickly as they can. To keep their freedom. To keep that safety and peace that Caesar offers to them.

And Jason, one of their own, is housing these guys. That are starting this trouble. So let's continue on in verse 9. So the city officials made Jason and the others post bond.

And let them go. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. That's about 45 miles away. About another two day journey.

[11:15] On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. 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. Many of the Jews believed. As did also a number of prominent Greek women.

And many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea. They went there too. Remember, 45 miles away on foot.

Two days journey. They went there too. Agitating the crowds. And stirring them up. So the brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast. But Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea.

The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens. You can see on your map. That's a long way down. About 190 miles by foot. About 300 miles by ship.

[12:14] About a week's journey. They brought Paul to Athens. And then they left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join them as soon as possible. While Paul was waiting for them in Athens.

He was greatly distressed to see that that city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks. As well as in the marketplace.

Day by day. With those who happened to be there. Now let's actually skip down a little bit. Into chapter 18 verse 4.

What we're skipping is what Paul said to the Athenian philosophers. Talking about Jesus rising from the dead. And he's coming back to judge people. After he preaches in Athens.

He continues down further south to Corinth. You can see on the map. And this is where we pick up. He goes into Corinth. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue there.

[13:19] Trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia. Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching. Testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Christ. That's a very important moment. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to Corinth. Because it's right there at that point.

That Timothy and Silas tell Paul what's been going on. Up in Berea and Thessalonica. He doesn't know. He had to leave quickly. And he hasn't heard about what's happened.

With the Thessalonian Christians. He was with them for maybe a month. Maybe not even a month. Day in and day out. Meeting with them. Talking about Jesus. Opening up the scriptures.

Explaining why Jesus had to die to take their sins. But that he rose from the dead. Explaining that Jesus is coming back. They probably talked about how to live this out.

[14:19] Day by day. In their pagan context. How do we live faithfully to Christ? He worked with them for a month. God grew to love them deeply. And then was forced to leave quickly.

At night. And he hasn't heard. How they're doing. How are the Thessalonians? He left when there was a mob. Oppressing them. So things were bad.

And this is the point. Where Timothy and Silas finally come down and meet him. That they tell him what's going on. That's important for us. Because it's at that moment.

That Paul sits down. And writes a letter. To the Thessalonians. We have that letter. It's called 1 Thessalonians. We're going to read it in a little bit.

This is. He's finally learned what's happened to these believers. That he loved. But was ripped away from. And he writes them a letter. In light of what he hears. But before we read that.

[15:16] Think for a moment. About the situation. For the Thessalonian believers. Now. It's been about three months. Since Paul was with them.

If you put together. All the travel time. And the time that he was in each of the cities. Probably about three months have passed. Let's put ourselves in their shoes.

Try to think of. Like one of the Thessalonian Christians. We've just read what happens to them.

Let's try and think about. Some of the. The pressures. That they would have faced.

After Paul was ripped away from them. Some of what I'm going to say. I've pieced together from his own letter. And I'm going to present it to you now. And when we read 1 Thessalonians.

I think you'll see things leap off of the page a bit. So what would the Thessalonians have been experiencing? They've got a lot of Jewish friends. Some of them are Jewish.

[16:12] You remember. They went to church. Well synagogue they called it. The gathering. The local synagogue. They were friends with the Jews there. But many of the Jews who didn't believe.

Had turned on them. And had led this mob against them. So their friends. The people they were at local church with. Are not friendly with them any longer.

In fact it appears that. Many of their Jewish friends. Were putting a lot of pressure on them.

Questioning Paul. And this gospel. This good news about Jesus.

For example. One of the things they seem to have been saying was. Paul completely misunderstood the Old Testament. All this stuff about Jesus being the Messiah.

A crucified king. That's not what the Old Testament teaches. You misunderstand your Bible. And that's why you followed Paul. Because he's in error with that. But also.

[17:09] You've abandoned the real faith. You left the synagogue. All because you've been hoodwinked. By Paul. He fooled you. He tricked you. Into believing this stuff.

He simply wanted to get something out of you. He was greedy. And so he told you what would please you. He told you what would tickle your ears. So that you'd follow him. And he'd get something out of you.

He was simply using you as a free ride. He was just flattering you. With what he said. So they're receiving all of these pressures. From their Jewish friends.

Who are quite opposed to them. That's a lot of personal pressure. And remember. They haven't seen Paul for three months. They don't know. What he's been up to. They don't know if he's thinking about them.

If he's praying for them. If he cares about them. But their Jewish friends. That's not the only pressure. That they are receiving. You remember. It was a pagan mob as well.

[18:08] That was against them. These are people. Some people they would have worked with. They would have seen the next day. They would have seen every day. At the office. Or wherever they're working. And these pagans think.

That you. Because you follow this new king. Jesus. Jesus. You're undercutting. Our city. And Caesar. Who is our true king.

You're very dangerous. To this city. The pressure. Coming from the pagans. Would be very strong as well. Maybe even. Some of the pagans. Who know your old way of life. They've been with you. At the temple. Visiting the prostitutes. They know. What you used to do. And now. Perhaps they're confused. Why you've changed. The pressure to return.

To the old way of life. Might have been quite severe. In some situations. But not. Not only. Are pressures. From their. Former Jewish friends. Pressure from the pagans.

[19:06] Of the city. But remember. The city officials. The government. Of the city. Has their eye. On you Christians. Because. They're worried. That you are.

That you're going to make. The whole city. Of Thessalonica. Lose its free status. Because Caesar's going to hear. That you're proclaiming. Another king. And he's going to come. And crush Thessalonica.

That's what Caesar would do. When people would rebel. Against him. He'd crush them. He'd take away. Their free status. So. The government. Is looking at you. They don't want you to believe. In this new king Jesus.

Your Jewish friends. Are putting pressure on you. Undercutting what Paul had said. Your pagan friends. They think you're trouble. And what's more. You don't know. What's happened to Paul. And Silas. And even more than that. There's more pressure. For these Thessalonians. And remember. Think from their perspective. It's been three months. Since Paul left.

[20:04] Some of their friends. And family members. Have died. Ones who believe in Jesus. Paul told us. That Jesus is coming back.

That King Jesus is returning. And when he returns. He's going to establish justice. And he's going to save. Those who follow him. Those who trust him. But my friends.

And family members. Have died. So when King Jesus. Comes back. What about them? They trusted in him. But they're dead. Was there any hope. For them? What if I die.

Before Jesus comes back. They're confused. And. Emotionally. Stressed. Those are the things. The Thessalonians. Were facing. As new Christians. What about Paul? Just a brief glimpse. From Paul's perspective. Shift all the way down the coast.

[21 : 00] 200 miles down. To Corinth. Paul's mission has gone on. He's shared about Jesus. With Berea. He's shared about Jesus.

In Athens. He's shared about Jesus. In Corinth. He sees people. Turning to Christ. But. But he cares about. Those Thessalonians. And he doesn't know. How things are going for them.

He's worried about them. He. Perhaps has heard rumors. Begin after three months. That. Things happening up there. But he doesn't really know. What's truly going on. In their church.

And he cares deeply. And it's at that point. That Paul. Or that Silas and Timothy. Finally make their way down. To Corinth. And they tell him. All that's been going on.

Up there in Macedonia. And that's where Paul sits down. And he writes a letter. To these Thessalonians. So let's read. First Thessalonians now. Page 1186.

[22 : 03] In your pew Bibles. I believe. Okay.

Well. It's a short letter. But it's packed with warmth. With warmth. For these young believers. And encouragement. For their faith. For their love.

And for their hope. So let's read what Paul says. To these young believers. From Corinth. Paul. Silas. And Timothy.

to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you.

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 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 the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 10] For we know, brothers loved by God, we know that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you, not simply with words, but also with power, and with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction.

You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord. In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

And you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it. For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God, we dared to tell you his good news in spite of strong opposition.

[24 : 39] For the appeal that we make does not spring from error or impure motives. We're not trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the good news.

We're not trying to please men, but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put a mask on to cover up greed.

God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you nor anyone else. As apostles, representatives of Christ, we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the good news of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardships. We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone, while preaching the good news of God to you.

[25 : 50] You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with you, each of you as a father, deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God continually, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered from your own countrymen the same things that those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord, Jesus, and the prophets, and also drove us out.

They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit.

The wrath of God has come upon them at last. But brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time, in person, not in thought, out of our intense longing, we made every effort to see you.

[27 : 24] For we wanted to come to you. Certainly I, Paul, did it again and again. But Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ, when he comes?

Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and our joy. So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker, in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials.

You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sensed to find out about your faith.

I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.

[28 : 39] He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you because of your faith.

For now, we really live since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we have in the presence of our God because of you?

Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else just as ours does for you. May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all of His holy ones.

Finally, brothers, we instruct you how to live, we instructed you how to live in order to please God. As in fact you are living, now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more for you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

[30 : 09] It is God's will for you that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.

The Lord will punish men for all such sins as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life.

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God who gives you his Holy Spirit. Now about brotherly love we don't need to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other and in fact you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

Yet we urge you brothers to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands just as we told you so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.

[31 : 52] According to the Lord's own word we tell you that we who are still alive who are left till the coming of the Lord will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep for the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command with a voice of the archangel with a trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words. Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night while people are saying peace and safety destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape but you brothers are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness so then let us not be like others who are asleep but let us be alert and self-controlled for those who sleep sleep at night and those who get drunk get drunk at night but since we belong to the day let us be self-controlled putting on faith and love as a breastplate and hope the hope of salvation as a helmet for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up just as in fact you are doing.

[33 : 55] And now we ask you brothers to respect those who work hard among you who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

live in peace with each other and we urge you brothers warn those who are idle encourage the timid help the weak be patient with everyone make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Be joyful always pray continually give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not put out the spirit's fire do not treat prophecies with contempt test everything hold on to the good avoid every kind of evil may God himself the God of peace sanctify you through and through may your whole spirit soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ the one who calls you is faithful he will do it.

Brothers pray for us greet all the brothers with a holy kiss I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

[35 : 39] The Thessalonians suffered quite a lot in a short amount of time and yet by the power of the spirit they held on to their faith and they grew in it they loved each other and they held on to their hope despite questions despite difficulties and Paul writes one of the warmest letters inspired by God to these young Christians to encourage them to press on with this on your handout which I'm simply going to commend to you to read in your own time there's a short outline of the letter to Thessalonians this first letter please read it and think about these parts of the letter in your life as I draw this to a close we're going to sing the rest of Psalm 24 but there's something very important in 1 Thessalonians that I want to draw your attention to as we then turn to Psalm 24 you heard when Paul was encouraging them that despite the fact that some of their beloved family members and friends had died trusting Christ that Jesus was going to return that he was going to come on the clouds from heaven and this call of the archangel and this trumpet of God was going to sound and the dead who believed in Christ were going to rise to life and all of the rest of us who are still alive together we're going to be gathered and hoisted up into the sky to meet

Jesus and be with him forever that was an image that the Thessalonians would have known very well because that's the type of thing that would have happened in a city where the king of the city had been gone for a while maybe in a military conquest or something and he was beginning to return he was returning from a distance with his army and the trumpets would sound that would let everybody in the city know that their king is coming back and all the people of the city the citizens would gather together and run out of the city to meet the king and usher him with celebration back to the city where he would establish his throne again and be with them in the city that's the image that Paul uses here to describe Jesus coming we're not going to remain in the sky Jesus is coming to the earth to establish his kingdom and judge the nations and save those who trust him and when he begins that descent here the trumpets will shout will sound where everybody is going to hear it

and those of us who trust him even if we've died will be raised to life by the power of God and those who are still living will be lifted out of the city to meet the king on the road and usher him in celebration back here and we will be here with king Jesus forever and that's our hope rock solid because Christ is risen from the dead and has promised to return now let's sing psalm 24 and let me read it to you psalm 24 in sing psalms on page 28 the last four stanzas verses 7 to 10 you ancient gates lift up your heads your doors be opened wide so may the king of glory come forever to abide but who is this exalted king what glorious king is he it is the lord of strength and might the lord of victory you ancient gates lift up your heads you doors be opened wide so may the king of glory come forever to abide but who is this exalted king who can this sovereign be the lord almighty yes he is the king of glory none but he please stand christians and sing this to the praise of our god