

Route 66

1 Thessalonians: Faith, Love, and Hope

Part 52 – February 27, 2011



Thessalonica was a port city in modern day Greece; the Roman capital *of* and largest city *in* Macedonia.

It was situated about 100 miles west of Philippi where Paul and Silas had just been publically whipped, imprisoned, and escorted out of town.

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 gospel in spite of strong opposition. – 1 Thessalonians 2:2 NIV



Remember Lydia the textile lady and the Philippian jailer?

After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. When they had passed through Amphipolis [**am-FIP-uh-lihs**] and Apollonia [**ap-uh-LOH-nih-uh**], they came to Thessalonica ... – Acts 16:40-17:1a NIV



They passed through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia because Paul's evangelistic strategy was to focus on the big cities, like Thessalonica.

Modern-day Thessaloniki is the 2nd largest city in Greece, and sits on top of its ancient self; so, very little has been uncovered.

Although many turn from idols to serve the living God (1:9), in less than a month Paul finds himself in hot water once again.



... the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. – Acts 17:5 NIV

Notice how they rounded up the bad guys from the "marketplace"? In 1962, while relocating a Thessaloniki bus station, workers stumbled upon *that* marketplace! Most remains under buildings; only about 1/4 has been excavated.

And because of these Jewish troublemakers, Paul is forced to abruptly leave this three-week-old congregation. (Acts 17:10)

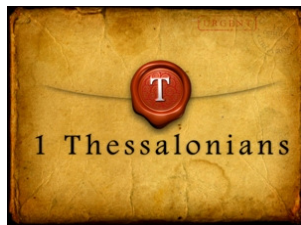
That night, Paul and Silas were sent 45 miles away, to Berea [**buh-REE-uh**].

When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. - *Acts 17:13 NIV*

So, Paul flees to Athens; and from there, sends Timothy back to strengthen the Thessalonians - if any believers remain. (3:3:2)

... when I could stand it no longer, I sent 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. - *1 Thessalonians 3:5-6 NIV*

A flourishing church established in *three* weeks! Incredible! Paul says: "Your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1:8)



Timothy also tells of persecution, ignorance of sexual sin, and a mistaken belief that believers who die *before* Jesus comes miss out on His Kingdom.

And Paul is moved to write what most scholars agree is his first epistle/letter (circa 51^{AD}).

And because of a mistaken belief, we get an incredible passage:

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. ... For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the 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 each other with these words. - *1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 NIV*

Scholars have long debated the precise meaning behind certain words and phrases in this passage. But the Thessalonians didn't; instead, they simply "encouraged each other with these words"!

They received is as Paul intended; not as means of fine-tuning an end-times formula, but as a declaration of the most glorious family reunion and homecoming celebration every conceived! In fact, in his very next breath, Paul says ...

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. - *1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 NIV*

Jesus' second coming promises to be every bit as sudden and surprising to this ol' world as his first coming was! It's not about speculation, it's about preparation.

Paul's first letter is one of comfort, instruction, and encouragement to fledgling believers, faithfully enduring bitter persecution.

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. - 1 Thessalonians 1:6 NIV

And Paul notes the "secret" to their spiritual success:

... [We remember] your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. - 1 Thessalonians 1:3 NIV

1. First, it's their: "work produced by faith"; not "faith produced by works" as the legalists advocated. And Paul identifies the source and supply of true faith:

... when you received the word of God ... 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. - 1 Thessalonians 2:13 NIV

If we're not planted in His Word, we simply will not grow.

2. Second, it's their: "labor prompted by love". Paul says:

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else ... for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. - 1 Thessalonians 3:12a; 4:9b NIV

We love because He first loved us! It's only as we embrace and receive and cherish God's love for us, that we become empowered and enabled to love others more fully, effectively, and deeply.

3. Third, it's their: "endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ". When Paul explains how the living and the dead will be caught up together to meet our Savior, he begins by saying:

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. - 1 Thessalonians 4:13 NIV

Funerals only come in two types: the kind where there's hope beyond the grave ... and the kind where there simply isn't. One is an odd mix of sorrow and expectation; and the other, a depressing hopelessness of *just* sorrow.

Hope isn't the same as wishing. It's a confidence in the promises of God as sealed by the death and resurrection of Christ.

As Paul closes, he says the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night *for those who live in the dark*. (5:1-4) But, for those who live in the light, he offers those three words.

We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ... But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on **faith** and **love** as a breastplate, and the **hope** of salvation as a helmet. - 1 Thessalonians 5:5b,8 NIV

Conviction from God's Word and confidence in God's love will protect my heart like a "breastplate" when I am tempted. And an expectation and anticipation of the life to come, through Christ, will protect my mind like a "helmet" when times get tough.



There were two old villages. One village got its water supply from a shallow but convenient, nearby mountain stream.

The problem was, during the dry seasons, when water was needed most, the supply would dwindle to a trickle and abruptly die out.



The second village drew *its* water from a deep artesian well, situated in the heart of the town.

That faithful fountain had an endless flow that reliably sprang up and satisfied, no matter how dry the season or how severe the drought.

Which water supply relates closest to *your* walk with God?

Only when I receive God's Word, and relish His love, and rely on His Son, can I begin to realize His will, as Paul sums it up here:

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV

The "always" and "continually" do not mean every moment of every day; they're simply other ways of saying, "in all circumstances"; not just when life is flowing in your favor.



When Paul and Silas sang praises in that prison, do you think they were drawing from an unsteady stream or an unfailing well? (*Acts 16:22-25*). I think they were tapping into Old Faithful! One of the last things Paul says in this letter is that ...

The one who calls you is faithful ... - 1 Thessalonians 5:24a NIV

Question is: Am I? Are you?

Let's guard our hearts and minds with faith, love, and hope.