

~ACTS~

Lesson 56- An Overview of the Epistles to the Thessalonians

Today we are going to take an overview of Paul's two epistles to the Thessalonians and in these epistles we see Paul's excitement and encouragement to the Church to be ready for the coming of our King.

Last week we followed Paul as he traveled from Athens Greece to the city of Corinth. And in Corinth he is met with much persecution again as he preached the Gospel, but the favor of God was with him and he was given a promise from Jesus to stay and speak His Word, **Acts 18:9-11**. And Luke tells us at the beginning of verse 18... **So Paul still remained a good while...**

So it was during this year and a half that Paul was in Corinth edifying and strengthening the Corinthian church. But during this time, Paul's focus wasn't just on the Corinthian church, it was on the Church. His "deep concern for the churches" was on the forefront of his mind. And it was here in Corinth that God gives Paul the time and the grace to begin writing the first of his epistles to the churches. Which ultimately would be compiled together in what we know today as the New Testament. It would be in Corinth that God's inspired Word of His New Covenant would begin to be written down for the edification and equipping of the saints, 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:15-16.

1 THESSALONIANS

The first epistles Paul writes is what we know as 1&2 Thessalonians. So today we are going to take an overview of these great epistles. It's going to be a little different than we normally go through a book because we're going to cover both Thessalonian epistles in this one lesson, just giving you a taste of the context and events surrounding the Apostle Paul as to why the Holy Spirit was prompting him at this point to write this letter. And we will find, as in all of his letters, these are two epistles to the Thessalonians are letters of encouragement, comfort and exhortation to continue strong in the faith... to endure and persevere, ὑπομένω, looking forward to our blessed hope of meeting our Lord face to face and living with Him forever. These two epistles are very small, 8 chapters all together, so it is my intention to read as much of this letter to you as we discover the heart of Paul and the Holy Spirit toward these believers. Notice the admonition of Paul at the end of his first epistle, **1 Thess 5:27**.

Paul is in Corinth and the Thessalonian believers had been heavy on his heart ever since he had to flee their city to escape persecution from the unbelieving Jews. And Paul mentions this distress in his letter, **1 Thess 2:17-20; 3:1-8**. Remember Paul spent three weeks with these people, but they instantly became family to him. Notice his heart toward them in **1 Thess 2:7-12**. This is the heart of these epistles... to walk the life of a Christian with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and His glorious return. This is the key to enduring persecution... our blessed hope of Jesus. So when Timothy returned with the good news that the Thessalonians were standing strong, this comforted the Apostle Paul, and Paul writes this letter to encourage and strengthen them in the faith, **1 Thess 1:1-3**. Notice that's the progression of our Salvation, Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification... work of faith- Justification; labor of love- Sanctification; and our patience of hope looking forward to His glorious return; Glorification. And we see Paul cycle through all three stages during this epistle because it is the walk of Sanctification that leads us into His eternal glory, Col 3:1-4; 2 Tim 2:10-12. Notice the walk of faith in the rest of chapter 1, **1 Thess 1:4-10**. And notice how Paul ends again with the three stages of Salvation... to turn to God from idols- Justification; to serve the living God and wait, ἀναμένω, to eagerly wait for and expect His Son from Heaven- Sanctification; Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. And as Paul is going to explain later in this letter, He delivers us from the wrath to come by catching us away to be with Him forever, 1 Thess 4:17. That's our Glorification in Him.

Paul continues into chapter 2 speaking of their first-time meeting them after coming from Philippi, 1 Thess 2:1-6. And he explains their heart and compassion toward them, then he continues to encourage

them through their persecutions, 1 Thess 2:13-16. Notice how Paul always brings the encouragement to the hope of Jesus and His glorious return. In fact, every chapter ends with this hope. Notice how he ends chapter 2, **1 Thess 2:19**. Now skip down to verse 9 of chapter **3:9-13**. And as we read, you will find that chapter 4 and 5 end the same way... our blessed hope. Paul continues exhorting these new believers to walk a holy and sanctified life. The call to be a Christian is to come as you are, but not to stay as you are. We are born again and our soul is being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ as we surrender our lives to Him and walk the life of Sanctification. The beginning of chapter 4 deals with this head on, **1 Thess 4:1-3**.

Now the remainder of this epistle deals primarily with eschatological events... end time events. But its not a coincidence that he spends so much of this epistle dealing with the walk of Sanctification because Sanctification is what prepares us to be caught away into eternal glory with Jesus. So Paul continues in verse 13 comforting the believers in this hope, **1 Thess 4:13**. The issue of the rapture, and our glorified bodies, and how that works with those who have already died was evidently a major concern for this church. These new believers were concerned that their brethren who had died would miss the rapture, so they told this concern to Timothy and Timothy probably relayed this to Paul, **1 Thess 4:13-18**. Paul gives these believers the comfort in knowing that all faithful believers, whether dead or alive, will be caught up together with the Lord, ἀρπαγησόμεθα, the root word being ἀρπάζω, harpazo- to be snatch or caught away. And notice that Paul has the expectation of an imminent return of Jesus in his lifetime because he says, *“we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together.”* He is including himself with those who would still be alive when Jesus returned. This shows that in the three short weeks Paul was there, Paul had obviously taught them about end time events and the hope of Jesus’ return, **2 Thess 2:5**. Our blessed hope is what gives us the strength to walk in Sanctification. It is the Bride making herself ready for the groom who could come at any moment. Many Christians today don’t speak of end time events and Jesus’ return because they think that subject is for a more mature audience. But if Paul thought this was something new believers should know, we should be teaching this as well.

Now after discussing the rapture of the church, Paul continues with the next major event on God’s calendar after the rapture... the Day of the Lord. One major mistake that people make is assuming that the Day of the Lord is the rapture. And it’s not. The rapture precedes the Day of the Lord, and the Day of the Lord is what starts the 70th week of Daniel, the 7-year Tribulation week. And this is what Paul goes on to explain in chapter 5, **1 Thess 5:1-11**. These are comforting words. To know that we will not experience the wrath of God. The Day of the Lord is his vengeance on unbelievers, so He’s going to take us out of the way to be with Him. But this doesn’t mean Christians wont experience persecution. The Thessalonian church was born in persecution. But there is a big difference between man’s persecution on Christians versus God’s Righteous Wrath on unbelievers. Twice in this letter Paul comforts the church that God’s wrath is not intended for believers, 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9. But rather God’s wrath will be poured out in the Day of Wrath, in the Day of the Lord on all wickedness and those who reject Jesus Christ, John 3:36; Rom 2:5; 5:9; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; Rev 6:16-17; 11:18; 16:19; 19:15. Paul ends his first epistle with the admonition to continue to stand fast in the faith and he ends with the hope of our glorification in Him, **1 Thess 5:23-28**.

That ends Paul’s first epistle, but then several months later, word gets to Paul that a forged letter had come to the Thessalonian church supposedly written in his name stating that they were in the Day of the Lord. The Thessalonian believers were bothered by this because this would mean that they had missed the rapture. This wouldn’t have been concerning to them if Paul would have taught them about a post-trib rapture. But it is evident that Paul believed and taught in a catching away of the Church before the Day of the Lord starts, a pre-trib rapture. So Paul begins to explain to them the order in which the end will play out.

2 THESSALONIANS

Let's look at Paul's response to them in his 2nd letter, **2 Thess 1:1-12**.

Paul clearly states the reasons for the Day of the Lord, "*To take vengeance on those who do not know God and to punish them with everlasting destruction.*" But for those who believe, He will give us rest. This is the rapture, **2 Thess 1:6-10**.

Chapter 2 begins explaining the events that must take place for the Day of the Lord to come. Which gives these Thessalonian believers, and us, the assurance that we are not in the Day of the Lord, **2 Thess 2:1-8**. Then Paul goes right to the good part and explains the destruction of the anti-christ, **2 Thess 2:8-12**. And then again gives assurance of our blessed hope, **2 Thess 2:13-17**. Notice he says, "comfort your hearts..." The blessed hope is our comfort and joy and encouragement.

Then chapter 3 goes into the walk of Sanctification as we are looking for the appearing of our King, **2 Thess 3:3-5**. And notice at the very end, because of the forged letter, Paul tells us his signature phrase that he writes in all his letters, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen*" He writes this so the churches will know he wrote it...

The coming of our King is our blessed hope in which we long for and eagerly wait in expectation, making ourselves ready to be married to Him forever... so just as John says... "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"