

My Favorite Thing About 1st & 2nd THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

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After spending an uncomfortable period of time in Philippi, Paul and Silas went to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia.

Thessalonica's wealth was built on a booming import-export trade, made possible by its natural harbor and location on the trade route between the Adriatic and the Hellespont.

There must have been a thriving Jewish community in Thessalonica because there was a synagogue in the city. Paul spent 3 Sabbaths there preaching and his converts included both Jews & Gentiles.

Per usual, the Judaizers became jealous of Paul's success. They gathered a mob together, went to the house where Paul, Silas and Timothy were staying and hauled the homeowner – Jason – and others, before the Magistrates {Acts 17}:

"These men are causing trouble all over the world and have now come to our fair city. Jason has welcomed them into his home. They say there is another King (Jesus), besides Caesar and they defile imperial law".

No evidence could be produced to back up the accusations, so, the group was released. However, knowing the trouble would continue, Paul, Silas and Timothy were sent, by night, to Berea.

Paul's critics took full advantage of his sudden disappearance - launching a malicious smear campaign.... Sound familiar?

Paul sent Timothy to check on the believers and encourage them in the faith. Timothy brought Paul the following report:

Good news:

- The Thessalonian believer's faith and love remains steadfast even under persecution.

Bad news:

- The Judaizers are accusing you of insincerity, having ulterior motives and being a coward.
- The members are struggling with some issues:
 - Sexual immorality
 - Being productive members of society
 - Confusion regarding the 2nd Coming of Jesus
 - Tension within the fellowship

Which brings us to **My Favorite Thing About 1st & 2nd THESSALONIANS ---- The 2nd Coming of Jesus.**

Of the 8 chapters that comprise both letters, 7 of them contain references to Jesus' 2nd Coming.

There seems to have been 4 main issues troubling the believers in Thessalonica:

- The perceived disadvantage of those who had already died.
- Time setting while avoiding what it meant to live a Christian life.
- Persecution and Christian Perseverance.
- A false report that Jesus had already come.

Those who had already died {1 Thessalonians 4:13-18}

There was great anticipation among the early believers that Jesus would return any day. But as time went on and believers began to die and He did not come as expected, anxiety began to mount as to the fate of those who had died. Would they be left out of the kingdom? Would those who were still alive have some advantage over their dead loved ones?

Ancient Roman and Greek mourning practices were similar affairs:

- **Dr Laurel Taylor “SmartHistory”** – Roman funerals were often elaborate. Dramatic displays of mourning were performed by members of the deceased’s family. Such rituals included wailing, chest-beating, and sometimes self-mutilation. The deceased would be transported on an elaborate bier in a procession known as the *“pompa”*, which included mourners who were paid to wail and sing dirges.
- **HD Livingston “Classroom”** - Men typically did not show emotion and behaved in a formal and detached manner. The female relatives, in contrast, stood near the body, wailing and gesturing wildly, including pulling at their hair. The chief mourner was the mother or the wife of the deceased. She stood near the head and often held it in her hands in grief.

Certainly, the Gentiles, who had been converted to Christianity, would have brought these beliefs and practices with them into the community of believers, which, no doubt, would have had an influence, perhaps adding to the anxiety over the status of their deceased loved ones.

Here’s what Paul had to say in response..... Brethren, concerning those who are asleep:

- *Don’t grieve like those who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, therefore, we can have confidence about what will happen to those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. When Jesus returns, those who are still alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep. Jesus, Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and those who have died in Christ will rise first. Those who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet Jesus in the air - and then we shall always be with Jesus. Comfort one another with these words.*

Time Setting {1 Thessalonians 5:1-11}

Time setting can be an easy trap to fall into. Humans aren’t very good with the unknown. We don’t like mystery. Question marks make us uncomfortable. Part of the reason for this simply comes down to procrastination.

At the turn of the 20th century, I lived in Alaska. For months all the experts could talk about was the impending Y2K disaster, but it wasn’t until late December 1999 that people began to prepare – and the panic was something to behold. I mean, why rush around in August if you can wait until December?

The same can be said for Jesus’ return. If you know when He’s coming, you can postpone getting ready. I mean, why repent in August if you can wait until December?

Here’s what Paul had to say in response..... I really shouldn’t have to write anything about this.

- *You know full well that the Lord will come like a thief in the night. People will walk around saying “**peace and safety**” and destruction will come like the sudden birth pangs of a woman in labor. Don’t live like people who live in the dark. Be sober, put on the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation. We have obtained salvation through Jesus, who died for us, so it doesn’t matter whether we are awake or asleep when He comes, we will all live with Him. In the meantime, encourage and build up one another.*

Remember the story of the 10 virgins....

From outward appearances the bridesmaids looked the same. The only difference was 5 were prepared for delay and 5 were not.

The five foolish bridesmaids had made a simple life choice – not to bring extra oil – as a result they missed out on the wedding celebration.

Jesus has promised to return and we can trust Him with that promise. Therefore, the Christian should never focus on the *“WHEN”*. The most important thing a Christian can do while they wait is to get ready and stay ready. Don’t wait until December.....

Persecution and Christian Perseverance {2 Thessalonians 1:4-8}

The believers in Thessalonica were experiencing extreme persecution for their faith in Jesus. Just as Jesus said they would:

- **Luke 6:22** - Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.
- **John 15:18-20** - "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love you, but because you are not of the world, the world hates you. Remember what I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.....

No doubt some were beginning to wonder if believing in Jesus and completely changing their lives was worth all the suffering it brought.

They would have been under extreme pressure to return to their old way of life.

Here's what Paul had to say in response.....

1st – Encouragement

- *We are so proud of your perseverance and faith in the midst of the persecutions and afflictions you are enduring.*
- *You are suffering for the kingdom of God. He is refining you and making you worthy of His kingdom ---- **HANG ON!** {see 2 Timothy 3:12}*

2nd – This is not the end of the story

- *When Jesus returns with His mighty angels in flaming fire, those who have done the persecuting will be re-paid in full for everything they have done. One day God **WILL** make all things right ---- **HANG ON!***

Report that Jesus had already come {2 Thessalonians 2}

Paul had given the church thorough instructions on the topic of the 2nd Coming - explicitly telling them of the public, earth-shaking nature of Jesus' return. But someone was circulating false reports that Paul was now saying the 2nd Coming had already taken place – some members were believing this fake news.

Here's what Paul had to say in response..... Remember what I have already taught you. Certain events must take place before Jesus comes back:

- *A specific religious apostasy must take place.*
- ***"The Man of Lawlessness"** must be revealed:*
 - *He is already working.*
 - *He opposes the law of God.*
 - *He opposes God Himself. He exalts himself above God and **"takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God"** {Is. 14 / Ez. 28}.*
 - *He is **"the son of destruction"**.*
 - *He has been restrained throughout history, but, just before Jesus returns, the restraint will be removed and 2 things will happen:*
 - *He will be fully revealed, **"according to the working of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with every deception of wickedness"**. {Matthew 24:23-24}*
 - *Jesus will destroy him **"by the breath of His mouth"**.*

2000 years on and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians has taken on ever increasing importance for Christians because we are just as tempted to:

- Lose heart and wonder if He's really coming back.
- Put off what really matters – a transformed life – in favor of things we **CAN** control.
- Trade discomfort, opposition and persecution, from both outside and inside the church, with comfort, ease and fitting in.
- Replace the clear words of Jesus with the fake news of the world.

Make no mistake, Jesus is coming – He promised!

- **Luke 21:25-28** - And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.
- **John 14:1-3** - "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also."

It might not be today or next year, but he **IS** coming and that's why Paul's focus on the 2nd Coming in **My Favorite Thing About 1st and 2nd THESSALONIANS**.