

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

Overview: Book Of 1 Thessalonians

8-13-14

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To strengthen the Thessalonian Christians in their faith and give them the assurance of Christ's return

AUTHOR: Paul

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: The church at Thessalonica

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 51 from Corinth; one of Paul's earliest letters

SETTING: The church at Thessalonica was very young, having been established only two or three years before this letter was written. The Thessalonian Christians needed to mature in their faith. In addition, there was a misunderstanding concerning Christ's second coming—some thought Christ would return immediately; thus, they were confused when their loved ones died because they expected Christ to return beforehand. Also, believers were being persecuted.

KEY VERSES: "For 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" (4:14).

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Timothy, Silas

KEY PLACES: Thessalonica

SPECIAL FEATURES: Paul received from Timothy a favorable report about the Thessalonians. However, Paul wrote this letter to correct their misconceptions about the resurrection and the second coming of Christ.

THE BLUEPRINT

1. Faithfulness to the Lord (1:1—3:13)

2. Watchfulness for the Lord (4:1—5:28) Paul and his companions were faithful to bring the gospel to the Thessalonians in the midst of persecution. The Thessalonians

had only recently become Christians, and yet they had remained faithful to the Lord, despite the fact that the apostles were not with them. Others have been faithful in bringing God's Word to us. We must remain faithful and live in the expectation that Christ will return at any time.

MEGATHEMES

Persecution

Explanation: Paul and the new Christians at Thessalonica experienced persecution because of their faith in Christ. We can expect trials and troubles as well. We need to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

Importance: The Holy Spirit helps us to remain strong in faith, able to show genuine love to others and maintain our moral character even when we are being persecuted, slandered, or oppressed.

Paul's Ministry

Explanation: Paul expressed his concern for this church even while he was being slandered. Paul's commitment to share the gospel in spite of difficult circumstances is a model we should follow.

Importance: Paul not only delivered his message, but gave of himself. In our ministries, we must become like Paul—faithful and bold, yet sensitive and self-sacrificing.

Hope

Explanation: One day all believers, both those who are alive and those who have died, will be united with Christ. To those Christians who die before Christ's return, there is hope—the hope of the resurrection of the body.

Importance: If we believe in Christ, we will live with him forever. All those who belong to Jesus Christ—from throughout history—will be present with him at his second coming. We can be confident that we will be with loved ones who have trusted in Christ.

Being Prepared

Explanation: No one knows the time of Christ's return. We are to live moral and holy lives, ever watchful for his coming. Believers must not neglect daily responsibilities, but always work and live to please the Lord.

Importance: The gospel is not only what we believe but also what we must live. The Holy Spirit leads us in faithfulness, so we can avoid lust and fraud. Live as though you expect Christ's return at any time. Don't be caught unprepared.

Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

SLOWLY they walk, one by one, scattering the leaves and trampling the grass under measured and heavy steps. The minister's words still echoing in their minds, they hear workmen moving toward the terrible place, preparing to cover the casket of their loved one. Death, the enemy, has torn the bonded relationships of family and friends, leaving only memories . . . and tears . . . and loneliness. But like a golden shaft of sun piercing the winter sky, a singular truth shatters the oppressive gloom: Death is not the end! Christ is the victor over death, and there is the hope of resurrection through him.

As with every member of the human family, first-century Christians came face to face with their mortality. Many of them met early deaths at the hands of those who hated Christ and all allied with him. Whether at the hands of zealous Jews (like Paul before his conversion), angry Greeks, or ruthless Roman authorities, persecution included stonings, beatings, crucifixions, torture, and death. To be a follower of Christ meant to give up everything.

Paul established the church in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (about A.D. 51). He wrote this letter a short time later to encourage the young believers there. He wanted to assure them of his love, to praise them for their faithfulness during persecution, and to remind them of their hope—the sure return of their Lord and Savior. Paul begins this letter with a note of affirmation, thanking God for the strong faith and good reputation of the Thessalonians (1:1-10). Then Paul reviews their relationship—how he and his companions brought the gospel to them (2:1-12), how they accepted the message (2:13-16), and how he longed to be with them again (2:17-20). Because of his concern, he had sent Timothy to encourage them in their faith (3:1-13).

Paul then presents the core of his message—exhortation and comfort. He challenges them to please God in their daily living by avoiding sexual immorality (4:1-8), loving each other (4:9-10), and living as good citizens in a sinful world (4:11-12).

Paul comforts the Thessalonians by reminding them of the hope of resurrection (4:13-18). Then he warns them to be prepared at all times, for Jesus Christ could return at any moment. When Christ returns, those Christians who are alive and those who have died will be raised to new life (5:1-11).

Paul then gives the Thessalonians a handful of reminders on how to prepare themselves for the Second Coming: Warn the idle (5:14), encourage the disheartened (5:14), help the weak (5:14), be patient with everyone (5:14), be kind to everyone (5:15), be joyful always (5:16), pray continually (5:17), give thanks (5:18), test everything that is taught (5:20-21), and avoid evil (5:22). Paul concludes his letter with two benedictions and a request for prayer.

As you read this letter, listen carefully to Paul's practical advice for Christian living. And when burdened by grief and overwhelmed by sorrow, take hope in the reality of Christ's return, resurrection, and eternal life!