

PAUL'S TIME IN THESSALONICA

Baltimore Colts football fans still grieve over the night of March 28, 1984. Under the cover of darkness, Colts' owner, Robert Irsay, hired a moving company to clean out the football team's offices and drive their equipment to Indianapolis. A sports franchise literally snuck out of town in the moonlight. Irsay relocated his team to Indiana in the middle of the night to avoid negative publicity. He said later, "The press was hounding my family for two years, and I wasn't about to take any more..." This was also why Paul left Thessalonica...

Paul's time in Thessalonica had been *brief*, but *blessed*. He had preached the Gospel in the city just three weeks, but with great success. Acts 17:4 tells us, "A great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas." Thessalonica was a place where the good news traveled fast.

Paul's ministry was so popular the local Jews became jealous. They began hounding

Paul and his pals. A mob came to where Paul was staying to arrest him. Paul was gone, but they took his host, Jason, and dragged him before the city council. The whole situation was a little too dicey and dangerous for the new church in Thessalonica - so like the Colts, Paul and Silas were smuggled out of town under the cover of darkness. The work was interrupted before it had really gotten started.

Because of the power of the Gospel, a healthy church had been born in Thessalonica. Paul knew, though, there were issues he had been unable to address. He felt he'd left the believers under-equipped. So, to shore up what was lacking, Paul sent Timothy and Silas back to Thessalonica - while he traveled on to Athens (to celebrate the big Bulldog victory). Six months later Timothy and Silas rejoined Paul in Corinth, and reported on the status of the Thessalonian church. It was 52 AD when Paul penned his first letter to the Thessalonians.

Devotion Box - Have You Gotten To Grace ?

Paul begins with his familiar greeting. It prefaces all of his letters, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Two ladies were talking on the bus when one asked the other, "*What are you reading?*" She replied, "It's a Christian book my friend gave me... said it changed her life." "*Really, what's it about?*" The woman, obviously, had just begun to read the book, opened to the table of contents and listed a few of the chapter titles, "Discipline, Love, Grace..."

The other woman interrupted, "*What's grace?*" The lady shook her head... "I don't know. I haven't gotten to grace yet."

It's tragic, but I know Christians who've been believers for a long time, but still *haven't gotten to grace*. They don't understand that God's love can't be earned or deserved - it's received by faith. If you still haven't gotten to grace, realize this is where Paul starts. You can't know God's peace until you embrace God's grace.

Devotion Box - Persecution

In verses 5-6 Paul recalls how the Spirit supplied the believers an incredible joy - even in the face of intense persecution.

We forget the first Christians chose Jesus even though it made them targets for persecution. In their day it cost to follow Jesus, yet multitudes of people were converted. It was in Thessalonica that the Jewish leaders accused Paul and Silas of turning the world upside down for Christ... the whole world!

Could it be that there's something attractive about a commitment that costs? *Are we more inclined to live for something, if we know it's worth dying for?*

Where the costs are steep, the commitment runs deep. This is why it's a grave mistake to water down the demands of the Gospel to make it more palatable to the masses. The plan back-fires. More people are turned off than turned on. We need to be upfront with folks - being a Christian will cost you... but it's worth the cost.

Devotion Box - Healthy Christians

In 1:3 mentions the "work of faith," "labor of love," "patience of hope." RC Lucas calls faith, hope, and love "*apostolic shorthand*" for genuine Christianity. Healthy Christians are characterized by faith, hope, and love.

Understand, serving the Lord is more than just performing tasks and working through a to-do list. Our works need to be coupled with faith. When you work for God anticipate God to work through you. He'll take your five loaves and two fish and work a miracle of multiplication. Trust God to infuse your efforts with His energy.

And be sure your labor for God is a labor of love. Ministry is more than doing a duty - it's putting legs to love. Serving God should be a tangible expression of our love for Him and others. It should be from the heart.

And we should also possess a patient hope. For years I watched my dad endure difficulties at work, turn down other job offers, save vacation... with the hope of a bountiful retirement. *A future hope can help you endure a present stress*. Heaven is the hope that enables us to live patiently in the here and now. We can endure difficulty, and turn down temptation because we're waiting for something better.

TURNING FROM TOYS

The Thessalonians' testimony is summed up in verses 9-10. Paul writes of their conversion, "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and 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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

A missionary in Latin America, was standing next to a chipped chalkboard teaching a seminary course. One of the students handed him a stick of chalk. The chalk looked odd when the students offered an explanation, "When we gave up our idols, we broke them up. Now we use them for chalk."

What a notion. Their idols had been transformed into tools that teach Jesus. The Thessalonians had also turned from idols to wait for the risen Lord Jesus.

Remember the early Christians came out of a polytheistic society, and the great danger was for them to think they could simply add Jesus to their long list of other gods. Paul makes it clear... to come to Jesus you must turn from your idols!

People today still have idols. Often we call them "toys." But if Jesus is not Lord *of all* He's not Lord *at all*. In short, an idol is anything you love more than Jesus.

People mistakenly think Jesus can be one part of their life, while they remain in control of the other parts. Hey, Jesus wants to permeate every part of our lives. He refuses to be an add-on - or an accessory. He is Lord, and that means boss. Being a Christian is not just embracing Jesus as Savior, but also as Lord.

INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY

In chapter two Paul describes his ministry among them... He defends his integrity... There was no "deceit," "uncleanness," "guile," "flattery," or "covetousness."

When Mark Twain wrote his story, "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog*" he dedicated it to "*John Smith*" - a man of "manifold virtues." Twain admitted there was no particular person named "*John Smith*" - but he knew "*John*" and "*Smith*" were the two most popular names in the English language - and if only *the John Smiths* of the world bought the book it would be a bestseller. Twain used flattery and deception to sell his message... but not Paul. He was a straight-shooter.

Once there was a pastor whose sermons were good - but his life betrayed his message. Someone said, "When he was *in the pulpit*, his congregation wished he

would never leave it - and, when he was *out of the pulpit*, they wished he would never enter it again." Not so with Paul. His methods were true to his message.

In verse six Paul says that, as an apostle, he could've thrown his weight around and insisted on special treatment - instead he cared for the Thessalonians with a mother's tenderness. On his visit Paul poured out his life into the Thessalonians.

Paul didn't even demand or ask for a salary to support his efforts. Verse nine says he labored "night and day" to keep from being a burden to the Thessalonians. Paul was willing to *moonlight* in order to spread the *light*. Paul was a tentmaker by trade - and he was willing to construct a few tents to pay his own expenses.

Devotion Box - Pastoring & Parenting

In 2:10-11 Paul says there're lots of similarities between being a good parent and a good pastor. Both, if done right, are selfless jobs.

In verse 11 he says he's "exhorted and comforted and charged" the believers. Paul *gets in their face* when they're wrong... *stands by their side* when they're weak... and *stays one step ahead* when they get distracted... This is what a pastor does for his congregation, and what a parent does for his kids.

NEW TESTAMENT CROWNS

The New Testament lists five crowns available to the Christian...

1 Corinthians 9:24, "incorruptible crown." It goes to the person who disciplines their bodies to live for God. Revelation 2:10, "the crown of life." It's given to a person who endures persecution. James 1:12 also gives a *crown of life* to those who resist temptation. 2 Timothy 4:8, a "crown of righteousness" for all those who love the Lord's appearing. There's a crown for all rapture watchers! In 1 Peter 5:4, "the crown of glory" goes to the faithful pastor.

And here in 2:19 we find the "crown of rejoicing" goes to the person who leads others to Jesus.

The Thessalonians were Paul's crown - a heavenly reward. Imagine, standing before Jesus and heaven's throng, and someone points to you, and says, "Lord, I want to thank Bob. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be here." What a rush!

It's true, "The only thing better than going to heaven is taking someone with you." Lead another person to Jesus and you're laying up a crown of rejoicing.

GOD'S WILL

One of the most pressing concerns for every Christian is discerning God's will for their life. We're always praying, "God, what job should I take?," "What school should I attend?," "Which girl should I date?," "In what city should I live?"

And that's why I perk up whenever I find a verse that tells me God's will for my life. 4:3 is such a verse, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..."

An issue on which you can be certain about God's

will is your purity.

It's ironic, we care about the whats and wheres of life - while God cares about the who and whys. It's said, "God is more concerned about who you are than what you do, and He is more concerned about what you do, than where you do it." If you really want to walk in God's will be concerned with your "sanctification" - or your *set-apartness*, or purity before God. Is your devotion thorough and sincere?

Devotion Box - The Quiet Christian

4:11 tells us how to live... "that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you..."

In a day, of what I call "*militant Christianity*"... where Christians are constantly called on to join this protest - or that boycott - or picket every injustice - verse 11 offers what I think is a needed balance.

Paul says our goal as Christians is to lead lives that are peaceful, responsible, and nonconfrontational. He tells us to mind our own business. Work hard. Make an honest living. Be a winsome witness. Battles will come, and when they do we shouldn't back down, but we don't always have to go out looking for a battle.

Here's what bothers me, Christians today are more known for what we're against than for what we favor. We're known by our don'ts rather than our do's.

In many conservative circles, a "quiet Christian" is an oxymoron. It shouldn't be. I'm certain there are people we've turned off by our rhetoric we could've won by our love. Pushy Christians generally push people away. Learn to be gracious.

Devotion Box - Sexual Purity

And God's will is especially concerned about your *sexual* purity.

Verses 3-4 read, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor..."

Don't tell me you've prayed about it and God is okay with you having sex outside marriage - that it's God's will for you to live with your boyfriend. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says that God's will is your purity!

Verses 5-7 take it further, "not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness..." Understand, God created sex to be enjoyed by one man and one woman committed to each other in a lifelong, marital relationship. When sex is reduced to a weekend excursion - it degrades the participants. There's no honor in casual sex.

In fact, nothing damages the human psyche more than allowing oneself to be used to gratify someone else's sexual lusts. A person doesn't see it at the time, but afterwards the guilt and shame set in.

Sex was meant to produce a renewed feeling of commitment and appreciation not the hollow emptiness of exploitation. It's no accident that the sexual revolution has spawned a generation of adults with shattered self-esteem.

YOUR RESURRECTION

In 4:13, Paul states, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope."

The New Testament uses the idiom of *sleep* to speak of deceased believers. In John 11:11, Jesus said of Lazarus, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." We learn later in the passage that Lazarus had been dead 4 days.

Understand, it's not the believer's spirit that sleeps. Nowhere does Scripture teach soul sleep, or suspended animation. 2 Corinthians 5:8 is clear that for the Christian to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When a believer dies his spirit goes straight into the presence of the Lord.

It's the body that's snoozing - not the spirit. Our spirit is with Jesus.

And it's the Christian's hope that one day these bodies will be resurrected. I believe every thing that has been touched and contaminated by sin will one day be redeemed and restored - including these corruptible and mortal bodies.

And Paul describes when this metamorphosis will take place... When Jesus returns to rapture His church the spirits of those who are in heaven will come with Him and be reunited with their resurrected bodies. Verse 16, "the dead in Christ will rise first..." Literal bodies will be resurrected and vacate graves. Cremated ashes will be gathered from wherever they were scattered and reassembled.

Bible Scan - 1 Thessalonians 1-5

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Middle School, **Flicks on the Bricks**—Friday, 9/20 at 5:00 PM. **Small Town Poets** in concert during our evening service 9/22. **Mother & Son Subs & Game Night**, Friday, 9/27 at 6:30 PM. **Baptism**, Sunday, 10/06 between services.

Next Bible Scan - September 29, 2002 - 2 Thessalonians 1-3

“He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

RAPTURE PLAY-BY-PLAY

Verse 16 provides the rapture play-by-play...

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” The dead in Christ will rise first because they’ve got six feet further to go.

Jesus will let out a shout! We’ll hear the voice of an archangel! The angels spoke at Messiah’s first coming. They’ll speak again when He returns.

Then we’ll hear a trumpet blast. In ancient times trumpets were used to send messages. The Jews began their New Year with the Feast of Trumpets. The priest would blow the ram’s horn, and signal the end of harvest. When the workers heard the trumpet they put up their tools, left the fields, and came to the temple to worship.

The Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah is a type of the rapture. When we hear the trumpet blast we’ll know the harvest of souls is over, our work on earth is finished, and we’ll enter into the heavenly temple to worship Jesus forever!

Verse 17 adds, “Then we who are alive and remain shall

be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” The expression “caught up” is the Greek word “*harpazo*.” And when translated into Latin it’s the word “*raptus*” – from which we get the word rapture.

The Greek word “*harpazo*” has five meanings “to snatch away speedily,” “to seize by force,” “to claim for oneself,” “to move to a new place,” “to rescue from danger.” All five meanings apply to the rapture. When Jesus returns He’ll snatch us up in the twinkling of an eye – claim us as His own – bring us home to heaven – and rescue us from the Great Tribulation that will rock the world with judgment.

What a day it’ll be when Jesus beams us up! You’ll hear a shout, a voice, a trumpet – then your body will dematerialize only to reassemble into a heavenly, flawless, body capable of living forever with Jesus.

Once we’re raptured we’ll never again leave His presence! What a hope... That’s why we’re told in verse 18, “Comfort one another with these words.”

A SINISTER SHALOM

Notice this phrase in 5:2, “the day of the Lord” - this is an important term when it comes to end-time prophecy.

Today is *the day of man*. Mankind is running the show on planet earth. But the day is coming when God will have His say on the fallen planet. “*The day of the Lord*” is the period of time when God will bring judgment on this wicked world, then restore it to its former glory. *The day of the Lord* begins with the rapture, and ends with a new heaven and new earth. In between, there’s the Great Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom.

But notice in verse three the day of the Lord is signaled with the promise of peace. A false peace – a *sinister shalom* – will lull the world into a false hope. Men will think a glory age has begun. Other passages indicate the Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel. Isaiah 28:18 refers to it as an “agreement with hell.” When it seems that peace has finally come to the Middle East, sudden destruction occurs. This is why Paul says “The day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night.” The rapture will surprise the world. It will occur at a time when its least expected. When judgment comes down, the church goes up.

Devotion Box - Needed Balance

Paul says in verse 19, “Do not quench the Spirit.” Through a lack of faith, we can fail to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. We can douse the fire He’s trying to kindle. We can hinder and limit the Spirit’s work.

Verses 20-21 strike a balance. Remember the Corinthian church emphasized spiritual experience over Scriptural exposition. On the other hand, it seems the Thessalonians focused on Scripture to the exclusion of the Spirit.

There needs to be a balance like we find in verses 20-21, “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.” Spiritual gifts are real, and for today. God speaks through words of prophecy. Just because a gift can be abused, don’t throw the baby out with the bath water. On the other hand, don’t be gullible. Test the gift. Is it really from God? Don’t quench the Holy Spirit, but don’t be gullible – some things need to be quenched.

There’s an adage, “A church with the Word but not the Spirit will dry up. A church with the Spirit, but not the Word will blow up. But a church with the Spirit working through the Word will grow up.”