I Thessalonians 2:1-12

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This morning we'll be looking at vs. 1-12 of I Thessalonians, Chapter two. I failed to mention last week but I want you to look at something. We'll get into it more in II Thessalonians but Paul must have spoken quite a bit about the second return of Christ. It is my opinion that Paul, as well as the other disciples of that period really anticipates him coming within their lifetime. I think that they lived with that hope and that anticipation that he would come back soon probably because of what they were enduring but I want you to look at something.

In the first letter that he wrote the last verse in what we have considered chapters even though he didn't write that way, has to do with the second coming. Look at Chapter 1:10: **and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

In Chapter 2; the last verse there: **For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not for you?**

And then Chapter 3: **May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**

And then in Chapter 4: **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 one another with these words.**

And then he talks about Jesus coming in the last few verses of Chapter 5 so it's not only on Paul's mind but it's on the minds of the Thessalonians that Paul has discussed this with.

There are so many things that we don't know; we think that we understand what Paul preached to these people as he came down the road and stopped at different places; we can surmise some of the things that he preached because of what they did like the Thessalonians in what we call the first chapter – he said they turned to God from idols so he discussed the power of Christ and the ineffectiveness of idols.

We know that they changed their lives but what did he preach and how did he preach it? In Acts he said he left the Thessalonians and went to Berea…all of you know that verse there that says the Bereans were more noble – why? They searched the scriptures. Now, if you're not careful you automatically insert "scriptures" there as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Acts, Romans and that's not true…what did they search? **The old scriptures.* And why were they searching the old scriptures; what was Paul saying that made them go back to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and all those? What was Paul saying to them from the scriptures that made them search? That Jesus was the Messiah and that he "fulfilled the scriptures". And so one of the things that we know that Paul preached was that Jesus was the Messiah and he pointed them to the scriptures – to Isaiah 53; Genesis 3, Joel 2, Daniel 2 – many scriptures

spoke of the coming of the Messiah. And so Paul spent a great deal of time in what we would call the Old Testament scriptures.

Now, I maintain that today we have an ignorance; we have a lack of understanding of the Old Testament scriptures because when, at Waterview, have we had lessons in an adult bible class on Old Testament scriptures? **I teach in the Wednesday night Faith Builders and we teach Old Testament. *Ladies Bible Class always has Old Testament themes; the last one was on Daniel.* Good, I'm happy about that. I just think we need to broaden it because to me the understanding of the New Testament has its foundation in the Old Testament. Some of the things that Paul states are difficult to understand if you don't have a knowledge of the Old Testament.

So we see that when Paul came to the Thessalonians, one of the things that he was preaching was how to search the scriptures, how to look at scriptures and how to draw conclusions from scriptures that Christ was the Messiah.

The other thing that he seemingly taught was the Resurrection! We often don't think of this concept being in the Old Testament but it is. It's there – not as pronounced as what Jesus taught in the New Testament and what Paul and the others taught – but its there. There was always that belief of eternity in the hearts of man. Job said it; David said it – we are very familiar with that passage when David's son by Bathsheba died and he said I cannot bring him back but I can go where he is – see? So even though it may not have been pronounced, it was there. So the Messiah concept, the death, burial and the resurrection concepts was certainly there.

In these scriptures that we're looking at today Paul here again is revealing some of his innermost thoughts, the way he feels and the way that he has been treated. Look at vs. 1. He talks about failure when he came to Thessalonica; what had just happened in Philippi? He had been beaten and in prison and probably had requested to leave. Jason probably had to put up a bond that assured that Paul and his party would leave town; that was the way they dealt with it…here is a person who is creating turmoil; you need to leave. And so Paul left and he came to the Thessalonians and he went immediately into the synagogue and began to teach and immediately there was a negative reaction about him after he had been there for, let's say, three Sabbath Days. And he said to the Thessalonians, I want you to be aware of something: **You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.** Not a failure!

Now, I want us to be aware and I struggle to say what do these scriptures have to do with me? Often we deem ourselves as failures because we have to endure persecution; we endure setbacks, we do not necessarily see the progress that we're making but Paul said, looking back and writing to the Thessalonians, he said my coming to you was not a failure. **Even though you understand we previously suffered insults in Philippi and as you know, but with the help of God we dared to tell you the gospel in spite of strong opposition.**

To me, in that verse, Paul is saying something to me that he realizes that we often don't realize that there are two powers in this world. Sometimes when we look at what we are involved in we see failure. It was interesting to me – Paul was beaten in Philippi, he was run out of town but it said that God was with him. Now, it's hard for

me to come to that conclusion sometimes. When I fail or when something bad happens to me or when I'm undergoing trouble and I say well, thank goodness or thank the Lord or the Lord is with me.

But Paul recognizes that there are two forces in the world at work and he begins to assign the power that enables him to survive and function to God; the other he assigns to the god of this world. The other he assigns that he has strong opposition and that opposition doesn't come from God but it is interesting that he states there that with the help of God we came to you. It's the way that we look at life in general; it's the way that we look at things and I have difficulty in looking at it that way…I really do. But Paul had that ability to look at it and say we are coming to you, we are not coming in failure; the suffering that we have is not in failure.

We don't know how many people were converted in Thessalonica but there must have been quite a few and in looking back he said I didn't come to you in failure even though you knew that I had problems in Philippi, even though you knew that I was run out of town I did not come to you in failure.

But notice something else: the message that he preached. He was not a failure. We heard Max Lucado at Preston Road many, many years ago when he first started developing the concept for the book "Six Hours One Friday" and one of the lessons and I think a couple of chapters in there says that you're not a failure and he develops this theme of we're not a failure because God is with us and he keeps going and he finally concludes with the fact that Jesus was not a failure. He did not fail on the cross; even

though it looked like it, even though as the hours ticked by on Friday everyone said that things were lost but he was not. This is the same thing with Paul.

And then Paul developed the idea of how was the gospel preached and I want us to note that. Look at what he said about the presentation of the message and I emphasize this because this is what we do. We have the opportunity to present the message and look at the message. He said: **For the appeal we make…** notice that; to me that is key…**For the appeal we make…** we are appealing to people; we are introducing people. **I just want to follow that thought about failure; we really do have to be careful in regard to success or failure because it really could in the short run or long run be something completely different especially when you read vs. 2… we dare to tell you the gospel in spite of strong opposition. And one point there might have been that people saw how sincere and how much they believed that what they were teaching that they were impacted by that. At that moment maybe people were running away and not believing because they were afraid but later on the impact and the way that they thought, I think that our duty in all of that is to do our duty as Christians and spread the gospel regardless of how we think…we continue on which is what I believe Paul and some of the others in the first century did. And God is in control of the results of that.* True… eternity is the only one that can do that. **We have what we perceived the last time we had success inlet's say some numbers or lack of success in lack of numbers and we just don't know where that's going at the moment; we may not handle the numbers correctly and that constitutes failure and on the other hand we may have two or three*

very sincere people and that can go a long way in accomplishing success. I think God is guiding that.

True, Ananias may not have had a very successful ministry but when he spent one evening with a man named Saul and brought him to conversion just look at the proof that Ananias has over one man and that is so true. And all of you have stories like that.

Who is the judge that worshipped with us for a good while? Judge Blankenship; he was not baptized until he was in his 80's. He lived with a godly woman for 60 or so years and finally was converted or really admitted or confessed his faith and yet many people would have looked at him in his early years and thought "he never will"; it's not there and yet he did and we have a number of stories like that. **Paul had an impact on people in the area where he preached so he was not a failure even by human standards.* *

The message that he presented, he said we speak as men approved of God; we're not trying to please men, we're not trying to flatter, we never put on a mask to cover up greed, we are not looking for praise of men…this is how the message was presented. He was not out there to win affection. It's sort of ridiculous but they interviewed one of the ministers for one of the mega-churches and they were talking to him about that he always drove a Rolls Royce and he had his private plane and he said that if Jesus were here today he would drive around in a Rolls Royce and probably have a fleet of planes. And you know, he doesn't even understand what the concept of ministry really is…he needs to read this book here (bible) but he probably has read it a

number of times. But Paul's message was couched in as he called it later on in the Corinthians that we have this message in vessels…jars of clay.

Then he talks about his presenting it and how he lived. Now, when I look at this I find that as a people of God we have become like the nations round about us. That was one of the sins of Israel; they wanted a king to be like the nations round about them. I want you to really read these passages and investigate your own feelings and why is it that we have come to the point where the ministers or the leadership or the evangelist described here is not, as a rule, reflected even in our own fellowship. It is not even reflected in our own lives. Look at what he said here about himself and he is a minister; an evangelist. **As an apostle…** (this is the first time he uses this word other than the beginning)…**we could have been a burden to you…** (Sometimes there are rights that you have that are not wise to exercise.) **But we were gentle among you like a mother caring for her children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel but our lives as well…**

There was a transparency about Paul and Silas and Barnabas and the others that people knew them; they knew how they felt, they knew what they believed and they knew how they lived – there was a transparency. In many of our own pulpits today the minister gets up and he preaches the sermon and you can't find him after that; he is not involved. I know one man who was very forceful in the fact that "I don't make hospital visits", I don't visit in homes; I'm here just to proclaim the message. Somebody else needs to do the visiting, somebody else needs to do the interfacing with people; I'm not going to do that and yet he calls himself an evangelist. No! Not even in

a stretch of the imagination is he an evangelist and why is that; is it my opinion? No, it's not my opinion. Here is an example of the Apostle Paul and he also said to Timothy the same thing.

Notice: **We shared with you our lives as well because you have become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked day and night in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel to you.** We have bought in and I don't mean to be preaching to the choir but we have bought into the idea; it was early that we support our ministers in order that they could devote full time to the preaching and the sharing of the gospel and that has long since been a misnomer. The only thing that the scriptures taught was mutual edification; now, those of us that sit in the pew, we don't want that. We don't want to listen to Al or we don't want to listen to Richard; we want a professional. We want someone who has 40 years experience that is not over 35 years old ☺ and is a graduate of one of our Christian colleges, married with at least two children whose wife is as dedicated as you are to the gospel – that's who we want. And if we don't have that then we'll move our membership and we'll go to another congregation.

And so we say why is it that it's not like this? It's not like this because of you and me – basically. We don't want this right here. I think that we need to rethink the gospel, how it is presented and how we accept it.

I want you to notice some of the other words he said here. He said he was not deceptive. You can be a good person and still be deceptive. There is a great deal of emphasis on words and how they are used and their meanings and this is a part of the

deceptiveness. Occasionally I deal with people and they say well, we don't want to do this because the group that we're to be over-seeing or the people that we're to be leading and this is not necessarily church –they just would not understand this action and therefore we're going to take this action but we're not going to tell anybody about it because they really wouldn't understand it. That, to me, is deceptive.

If you are a leader of a group then you need to reflect the desires of the group and if it violates a conscience or a conviction then there needs to be a stand taken and the discussion made on what the difference is. The First Century church had a lot of what I would call knock-down, drag-out meetings that lasted for hours and they were not afraid to share those things with everybody. All I'm saying to you is – look at these scriptures in the light of how you feel and how you act and how others act. I don't know that you can bring about a change but I definitely think that eventually there has to be some modification of the way we do things and the way that we live in order to have an impact. The key is people knowing how you live…how you live!

Now if you're like most of us, me included, you don't know very many people around you – they don't know you. We don't even know church members. I'm constantly amazed that I'd say to Al, how about so and so; do you know him? Al says no, why should I know him? Well, he sits on the other side or he sits with the other church over there and ya'll have been worshipping together for the past 15 years and you don't even know his name. **I saw him last night.* Yeah, you were with a group last night but you probably met some people that you didn't even know. **Several; they were all younger.* ☺ Why is that?

Recently there was an article; it's not Ann Landers but this woman was writing in and she said my husband and children are going to have to stay home this year; we cannot go to visit our folks because they live a long distance and she said I have dropped a number of hints to my friends about that we're going to be here but none of them have taken up the hint to ask us over and she said what should I do and I loved it. She said why don't you invite somebody into your house? Duh? ☺ So the transparency that we need, the sensitivity that we need has to come from us; we cannot wait on Laura to do it. So look at this scripture because it's very important; reread it and rethink it.

Thank you.

9 December 2007

This is a transcript of a class taught by James Ard at the Waterview Church of Christ.
**Indicates comments by class members.*
A blank indicates words/phrases that could not be understood.