I THESSALONIANS
CHAPTER 1

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We're in I Thessalonians; this is a very good letter for all of us. You must turn to Acts Chapter 17 though to really pick up the beginning of the story.

Paul is on his Second Missionary Journey and you remember that he chose Silas to go rather than Barnabas and then as they go through Derbe they pick up Timothy. I don't know where Luke joins them; Luke probably started with them in the beginning but if you remember from the book of Acts we looked at the pronouns and Luke is the author of it and he was using "we", "we", "we" and then all of a sudden he'll use "they" and we'll find that he stays at a certain place.

But Luke is with them and so on the Second Missionary Journey we have Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke – there may be others. They make their way through Asia Minor and end up at Troas where Paul sees the vision and then they go to the City of Philippi named after Philip the Great, the father of Alexander the Great.

If you'll notice Paul's approach as he goes to major centers of activity; Philippi was one of them. It was really a retirement place for Roman soldiers; they were given land there and then the conversion there. They were thrown into jail, beaten and then they left.

As they go south and east they go along the Egnatian way. The prophecies of God are amazing in that how he prepares things. If you recall the image that

Daniel saw and the kings and the places it would happen – it talks about these various kings and the second to the last kingdom was Greek – Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great's claim to fame as far as religious people are concerned is that he instituted one language. They all spoke a natural language but they all could speak Greek and what does that do when you can all speak the same language? **It unites.* It facilitates communication; it facilitates teaching and we're struggling with that in our country. Everybody else in the emerging worlds want to speak English and yet we have to pass a law maybe to make people speak English here so it's ironic.

The second thing in the kingdom that followed the Greek was Rome. One of the things that Rome did is that Rome brought about peace. You can have peace many ways but the Roman peace was dominant because it was power. But one of the other remarkable things about Rome is that they built roads. They built roads everywhere because they were in constant movement and what do you believe happened to Paul? When the gospel got ready to happen he hit the freeways and if you'll just look at it, Philippi was a freeway town; Thessalonica was a freeway town, Corinth was a freeway town, Ephesus was a freeway town – they're all towns that were easy to get to, were centers of influence and the gospel could radiate there.

And so in Acts 17 we find that Paul comes to the City of Thessalonica after having left Philippi. Thessalonica is an interesting town because the name indicates that early in its history it was the seat of a lot of thermal springs. The town was named after the half-sister of Alexander the Great. Another thing about Thessalonica

is they chose in the Roman War; y'all remember Cleopatra and Caesar; there was an opposite in the Roman army – Anthony. Thessalonica chose the right side of the conquering in the Roman wars and for that they were granted freedom; they had a free status. They didn't house the Roman army; they didn't have to pay certain taxes so Thessalonica was a very important city.

When Paul came into Thessalonica from Philippi he found something that he often finds but he didn't find in the City of Philippi. In the City of Philippi he did not find a synagogue; they met at the river. When he came into Thessalonica there was a synagogue; now what did that tell you? There were a large amount of Jews.

If you look at Acts 17 and the reaction there you find something else that was prevalent both at Philippi and Thessalonica and you're going to find it in Corinth as well. He not only had a good reaction from the Jews but Acts tells us a large company of the Greeks and then Luke adds something else – prominent women! Even back then they were in charge of things. ☺ **Thank goodness!* ☺

Now, you remember that in the Temple they had the Court of the Gentiles; they could not go into the Inner Court and in the synagogue you had the same thing. You had a place for the Jewish people and then you had a place there for believers. What would make them unique; what would make the Greek people and the Roman people unique – those that came to the synagogue? What would that indicate about them? **God fearing!* And they only feared ***One God*** – because the society was multiple gods, multiple idols and yet here are some Greeks and Romans who have come to believe in only ***One God***.

Do you remember the household of Cornelius? Here is a Roman in the midst of a culture that believed in only One God and who, in all of that world, believed in only One God? The Jews; they're the only ones. And so I want you to understand the setting of the Thessalonians because it's going to have bearing on our study.

When he came into the city and preached he had success but immediately things turned bad when you get a crowd. There was a man mentioned there that befriended Paul and what was his name? **Jason.* Now, it's interesting about Jason because he had a house, he was known and when Paul got into trouble the officials of the town made Jason and other brethren put up money, a bail or bond, a pledge. And we don't know what that was for; we don't know if that said we're going to hold you responsible until he gets out of town or it may have been a bond posted so that he would make Paul leave…we don't really know. Paul mentions that in the 2nd chapter of I Thessalonians as well.

This Jason is mentioned one other time; look at Romans 16:21, there is an interesting statement there about Jason and about others. In Acts 20 there is also a list of people from Thessalonica.

Romans 16:21 – **Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.** And what does Paul say about them? My relatives! It's not beyond our expectation because Paul was a Jew; a prominent Jew and if he's like everybody else he has relatives so I'm sure that throughout the Roman world occasionally he came across relatives. Now, Jason

must have been a relative because he said he was a relative. What relation – we don't know but I thought that was interesting that he mentioned this.

We're taking the entire first chapter but we're going to hit the highlights because that's all you can do here. This is the first letter that Paul wrote. Paul wrote this letter when he was in Corinth; he had left Thessalonica, came to Corinth and you remember he was depressed because Timothy was late in coming and he worried about the churches – he was concerned. So this is the first epistle or first letter really that Paul wrote and Paul addressed it to the church of the Thessalonians.

I want you to notice here that nowhere in any of the letters that we have that there is a great deal of interest on the name of the church. It's just the church of the Thessalonians, the church of the Corinthians; it's really not a big deal, it's not a big thing. We sometimes emphasize things that really are not all that important; it's the church, we're all part of it.

Another thing I want us to think about is and this is something we deal with here – it is a letter to the church for instruction. We don't have a letter of the church to someone else and occasionally I get questions, as you get questions -- what does the church teach about so and so; what is the church's stand on so and so? That's really an unscriptural concept because the church does not have a teaching. If it does, it shouldn't. They church doesn't have a "stand"; it is the bible and God's word that directs us. The church may believe a whole lot of stuff that is right and some of it is wrong. The New Testament had the same thing. Look at the mother church in Jerusalem. There were some there that thought you had to be circumcised;

there were some there that thought you had to keep the Old Law and there were some that said "no, you don't" and they were brethren worshipping together but if you asked someone what does the church teach on circumcision, the circumcision brother would say you have to be circumcised. The non-circumcise brother would say no, you don't have to be circumcised. So you really can't depend on what the church teaches because it's according really to who you ask.

Notice that Paul addresses the teachings to the church. The church is to be taught; the church is to be informed, the church is to be directed. It's not the other way around. We're not directing anything; we're teaching, we're being taught, we're accepting, we're turning.

I want us to look at something here that just struck me – Paul is really enthused about these brethren and notice how he describes them: **We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith,..** notice something else: **…your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope…** They're sort of changed a little bit from I Corinthians 13 but they are the same concepts: faith, hope and love.

I want you to notice as we look at ourselves what we do and how we do it in our endurance is the same. The base underline of all of this; what all of this rested upon is in the next phrase: **…in our Lord Jesus Christ.** The faith is in our Lord Jesus Christ, the love flows out of our Lord Jesus Christ and our hope comes from our Lord Jesus Christ.

These three characteristics here is the only thing that can sustain a believer. We have our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have our love, our labor and notice the labor and the love is connected. Why didn't he connect this labor with faith; why didn't he say because of your faith you labor? I think we all know that.

Why do you do things; why do you do things for people? You care, you love…you love. Now, I know sometimes it transfers over on duty and things like this but basically if it is continual it is from the love. **The old thing that you hear people say "it's a labor of love" that he does this.* That's very good; it's a labor or love. Yes…yes? That's what it is. You guys that work on women's cars; I'm sure you get a lot of pay for that ☺ but it's a labor of love.

This is why I always cringe when people talk about how difficult it is for elders; it's a labor of love. I know at times it's stressful but these men that serve should be doing it because that's what they want to do. Thurman can quit anytime he wants to; he does it because he loves the body, he loves people, this is his gift. It's a labor of love and we need to recognize that.

If there is no labor its 1+1 = 2; if there is no labor, what do you conclude? **It's love.* What about endurance? If we do not endure; if we do not remain faithful, if we're not committed, where is our hope? It can't be anything except that.

I want us to note another thing about Paul – when he came into the Thessalonian church he had success. I want you to read the entire letter; you can do it in about 8 minutes so it doesn't take a lot of time. You need to read it a number of times but notice what he said. I entitled this phrase here "words are not enough" and

Paul says that. I don't remember the man but I remember a little bit of the phrase, he said "you need to go preach the gospel to the whole world ***and if necessary***, use words". Look at what Paul said:

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you *not simply with words*…but with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you … and to me that's the key.

If we're going to convert the world we have to show the world a way of living that is different from what they do and--- we need to demonstrate that the way we live has far more joy and reward and benefits than the way they live.

There are so many sins in this world that cannot be corrected by words; you just can't do it. There is no way you can correct many of the sins of this world by words. Now, we try that, we say Duane, just suck it up and change; just quit doing what you're doing. This old phrase that we had for a while "just say no to drugs" "just say no"… Let me tell you it's just impossible to say "no" to drugs once you have been captured…just impossible. You'll steal, you'll kill, you'll break in, you'll take from your mother, your father, your brother, your sister, you'll do anything to satisfy the craving…words are not enough.

Paul said we lived among you, we showed you and there's another word there that I want you to look at and that's "conviction". These books that are being written today about God and the fallacy of religion, you can't tell me that if Paul didn't see the Lord Jesus Christ that he would endure the beatings that he got in

Philippi and the beatings he got in Thessalonica and the beatings he got everywhere and he did all that because of a lie he was living? That is not even in the realm of comprehension; it won't happen. Here he did it in conviction.

Notice the impact of his living and this is another key. **We lived among you…** and then what happened to the Thessalonians; what did they do? They imitated; they copied, they duplicated, they said we want to be like you because you believe in One God, you have hope, you have love, you live a certain way, we don't want to do this…and notice something else that he said….**they *turned from idols* to worship the living God.**

In all of the letters I want you to notice; there is not one word about idols. Paul does not preach even on the agape hill in the book of Acts, Paul did not preach against idols. We have this thing turned around brothers and sisters; we do not have to preach against sin. We have to preach the Lord Jesus Christ and what the advantages and the benefits and love are and people will stop doing idols because they want ***this.***

If you had the opportunity to sit down at a table and you had a bowl of brussel sprouts and you had a bowl of Blue Bell vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup and a few nuts on it, which would you choose? ☺ That's a crude illustration to use but Paul, in my opinion, did not go and say you idol worshippers are just going to hell. He didn't have to, he talked about God, he talked about Jesus Christ, he talked about the changes and people said we look at the idols and we look at your God and you know what??? We don't want this anymore; we don't want this and

they turned…..which we call repentance. They turned! **In that connection I often make the mistake of thinking there's no need to talk to that individual because they have alcohol in their life or something else. Well, that's wrong thinking; the gospel, properly taught and understood will take care of that problem.* True…true…they turned!

We need to give everyone the opportunity and the impact is that the Thessalonian reputation went throughout Asia. They were dynamic; they imitated Paul and in imitating Paul they changed the world. **So you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere…** and that's because they had this faith, they had this love, they had this hope and they had this imitation of the life of a man who in the 2nd chapter is going to say I work day and night to show you what a Christian ought to be.

Thank you!

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This is a transcript of a class taught by James Ard at the Waterview Church of Christ.
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