



1 Thessalonians: God of Hope

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 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.”

Background

First Thessalonians is the 52nd book of the Bible and the thirteenth book in the New Testament. Thessalonica was a prominent seaport city and the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia in what is now modern-day Greece. Paul started the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, spending only a short time there before having to leave under the cover of night due to an angry mob (Acts 17). Because of Paul's short time there, he grew concerned about the Thessalonians young faith in the face of opposition and sent Timothy back to serve and minister to them. Timothy soon returned to Paul with a good report that the Thessalonians were standing firm in their faith. In response, Paul wrote his letter of 1 Thessalonians as an encouragement to the new believers there, as well as to celebrate and reinforce Paul's relationship with them. Written from Corinth a few months after Paul had left Thessalonica around 51 AD, 1 Thessalonians is believed to be Paul's earliest letter and quite possibly the earliest written New Testament book.

The Short Story

Jesus Christ will return and gather His followers to Himself, rescuing them from the coming wrath.

What's the Big Idea?

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians begins with Paul commending the church on standing firm in their faith under difficult circumstances. He states that they “welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” becoming a model for believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1:6-7). Paul writes of his desire to see them again and encourages them to live out what they already know to be true, continuing to grow in godliness, living out the holy life that they were called to by God (4:1-7). Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to increase in love for each other, rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances (4:10; 5:16-18). The dominant theme of Paul's letter, however, is the return of Jesus Christ. It is very likely that Paul had emphasized the Lord's Second Coming while he was in Thessalonica. Thus, while enduring their persecutions bravely and standing firm in their faith, the Thessalonians had questions and concerns about what would happen to the believers who died before Christ's return (4:13). Paul explains to the Thessalonians that when Christ returns, both those who have died and those who are still living will be able to celebrate His Return. “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 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.” (4:16-17).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Paul closes every chapter in 1 Thessalonians with a reference to the return of Christ (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:16-18; 5:23). He was obviously looking forward to Christ's return and so should we. Jesus Christ is our hope and salvation, and He will rescue us from the coming wrath (1:10). While Paul talks much about the return of Jesus, he never says when this will occur. For the Thessalonians and for believers today, the hope of Christ's return should give us peace and comfort in the midst of suffering and uncertainty. It should also motivate us to live holy lives while we wait for Christ to come again. “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” (5:23-24).

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 “We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³ We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- What is your biggest obstacle to spending time in prayer? How can you free up time to pray more?
- If you could do any kind of “work” for the Lord, what would you do? What’s stopping you? How can you overcome it?
- Where do you need a greater Kingdom view?
- If Jesus were to come tomorrow, what would be your biggest regret? What would be your “crown”?

Practical Application

- Eschatology is a big word meaning “end times”. What do you believe about the end times?
- Who is that one person that you know that if only they would give their life to Christ would make a big impact on many others? Pray for them.
- What hope do you offer to someone who does not believe in Jesus?
- What has your experience been in sharing Jesus? How could you be more effective?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 1:8-10 “They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God “
- 4:13-18 “we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death ...”
- 5:2 “for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night “
- 5:17--20 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. “

Bonus Features—When will the Lord come?

“It is needless or useless to ask about the particular time of Christ's coming. Christ did not reveal this to the apostles. There are times and seasons for us to work in, and these are our duty and interest to know and observe; but as to the time when we must give up our account, we know it not, nor is it needful that we should. The coming of Christ will be a great surprise to men. Our Lord himself said so. As the hour of death is the same to each person that the judgment will be to mankind in general, so the same remarks answer for both.....Let us endeavor to awaken ourselves and each other, and guard against our spiritual enemies.” *Excerpted from Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary*

Personal Takeaways and Notes