

A Gospel-Birther Church

Acts 17:1-9

1 & 2 Thessalonians

April 16, 2023

Series Introduction

- New series. Start in Acts 17. John taught in 2021, but more on the 2nd half

As we gather here today to delve into the Word of God, I want to begin by introducing our focus for today: the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. These letters, written by the Apostle Paul, were sent to the church in Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia, during his second missionary journey. The letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians address a number of issues that were of concern to the Thessalonian believers. In particular, they deal with the return of Christ and what that means for believers, as well as how to live as a Christian in a world that is often hostile to the Gospel. Throughout these letters, we see the heart of Paul for this young church and his desire to encourage them in their faith. His words speak to us today, as we too seek to navigate the challenges of living out our faith in a world that is often hostile to the Gospel. So as we dive into these letters, let us open our hearts to the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and may we be encouraged and strengthened in our own faith journey. (ChatBot GPT. Blame John Fox!)

A Church in Thessalonica

- Capital city of Macedonia
 - Named after Alexander's sister!
- Paul's second journey | AD 49 or 50
 - Right after the Roman expulsion of Jews?
- A church of Jew and Gentile
- Opposition from Jew and Gentile

Michael Holmes The people to whom he addressed the two letters we now call 1 and 2 Thessalonians were for the most part new converts to Christianity who had grown up in, and hence were thoroughly socialized in, a Greek cultural environment. One of Paul's major challenges was that of resocialization—helping these believers to learn, understand, and live by the very different social and ethical code of early Christianity. What made this task particularly challenging was that these people were also facing intense persecution from the surrounding culture. As a result of their commitment to Jesus, they were experiencing social ostracism and isolation as well as physical attacks from society around them.

1 & 2 Thessalonians Themes

1. Gratitude for God's work
2. Encouragement to persevere
3. Patience for Christ's return

Sermon Introduction

- Humans are always found in groups:
 - Families, clans, villages, cities | Teams, brigades, armies, nations | Clubs, associations, companies, governments | **Personal examples this week**
- Many different answers as to why:
 - Most of nature tends to cluster together in groups
 - All sorts of benefits from cooperation
 - Antisocial personality disorder = sociopath
- The Bible says that we are image bearers of a relational God

Relational God

1 John 4 ⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

- Love requires an “other” | God is 3 persons in 1, relationship and love in God’s very own self
- Out of that overflow of love, God created humanity | **NOT because of NEED**
 - Human community, God’s earthly family, “sons of God”
- Human sin brought fracturing to every relationship, group, organization
- God sent his Son (2nd person) to take on flesh as Jesus from Nazareth
 - **GOSPEL WORK** of life, death resurrection
 - But also a major of work of regrouping and uniting the human family

The Jesus Gathering

Matthew 16 ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

- Kingdom (God’s universal rule) will play out in the earthly institution of the CHURCH
- Church = ekklesia, *lit.* the assembly, the gathering
- What was fractured is now coming together because of the work of Jesus
- This is the message that Paul from Tarsus really believed, why he traveled the world!!

Paul’s Second Journey

Acts 17 ¹ After they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica,

- Major city, important on a travel route

where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was

necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead: “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.”

- This is the central message of the Gospel: 1) Identity as Messiah, 2) death/resurrection, 3) the whole bible tells this story

⁴ Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews became jealous,

- Note: the church is both Jew and Gentile
- “The Jews” is a term that means “the leaders” | No room for anti-semitism

and they brought together some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. Attacking Jason’s house,

- Not much info, but apparently a member of the synagogue and hosting Paul & Silas they searched for them to bring them out to the public assembly. ⁶ When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them. They are all acting contrary to Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king— Jesus.”

- See this kingdom work taking place in and through a gathering (church)?

⁸ The crowd and city officials who heard these things were upset. ⁹ After taking a security bond from Jason and the others, they released them.

- This is the founding story of this church
- They are going to face a lot of opposition, but Paul in the letters is going to encourage them to keep going because of the good news of Jesus
- This from Thessalonica is the central point that I want to make today

(big idea) A church is only truly a church because of the gospel of Jesus

Insufficient Alone

1. Civic club: community service, friendship, enjoyment/games
2. Event: you could go to a baseball game, a concert, or a *killer* church service
3. Classroom: a Ted Talk, a documentary, a podcast, a college class, or a church class
4. Activists: homeless outreach, racial justice, water in Africa
5. Hospital: AA and addiction recovery, counseling, group therapy
6. Family: ultra-close friend group, travel together, “do life” together

Nothing inherently wrong with any of these things. In fact, many can be found in Jesus’ teaching

- Problem #1: You can find versions of all of these apart from Jesus
 - “I have lots of family (or my basketball team, so I don’t need the family church”
 - “I’m not an addict, so I don’t need AA / hospital church”
 - We are saying that the church is different, it was supernaturally founded and its work will last beyond any other human institution in the Kingdom of God

- Problem #2: The weight of “do this” is on you apart from Jesus
 - The nature of “good news” is that it is received

Yancey Arrington Imagine a king departing his castle to battle an invading army. If the king loses, he sends his military advisers back to the castle with the bad news. They also inform the citizens of new strategies and techniques: “The enemy is approaching. We suggest you put marksmen here, chariots there, and so on.” All of this is done in an attempt to equip the people to defeat the enemy themselves. They feel incredible pressure, knowing that victory (or defeat) rests on their shoulders. But if the king defeats the enemy, he sends his messengers back with the good news. They return to the castle square shouting: “The king has defeated the enemy! Enjoy the peace and blessings of the victory our lord has achieved for you!” With this joyous declaration, the people would not only experience freedom in their daily lives, but their love and gratitude would also be directed toward their king.

A Gospel-Centered Church...

1. ...emphasizes what Christ has done more than what we must do.
 - a. The Thessalonians *believed* what Paul was telling them
 - b. There are commands in the letters, but always grounded in and fueled by what God has done for us in Jesus!!
2. ...is embedded in the entire storyline of the Bible.
 - a. At this point, they didn’t have the New Testament! They got all of the “Jesus is the promised Messiah / death / resurrection” from the Old Testament
3. ...is both resolute and gracious.
 - a. In the letters, instructions to “hold firm” but also “live quiet lives”
 - b. In Acts, they didn’t give up their faith, but they also paid the required fines

Dear Sound City, commit to be a gospel-centered church

- Yes to family, yes to activism, yes to classroom, yes to great events
- But none of it matters if we make those the center and foundation

Read aloud together: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.