

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHRIST IS COMING

1 THESSALONIANS

A church with a testimony! If you are a preacher, or simply just have a passion for the lost and would love to see your church follow after your same passion, then this first letter to the Thessalonian people will feed your soul.

This church was started by Paul during his second missionary journey, and the way we know this is because Dr. Luke records the information for us in Acts 17. When you start looking into this account, it is absolutely fantastic reading, mainly because of the speed in which this church was formed. This is every missionary's dream work.

Paul no doubt used the famous Egnatia highway as he traveled through cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia before finally reaching the 200,000 populous city of Thessalonica, which had this massive highway running straight through the main street area.

From here we learn that the first thing that Paul did was make his way over to the synagogue of the Jews, and this is when it gets interesting. Acts 17:2-3 says, "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

It appears this church started in just three weeks! From a Jewish Synagogue, to a Bible preaching, New Testament church in just three weeks. Just the thought of that makes your head spin if you have any experience at all in building disciples or church planting.

And then, right on cue, here come some men trying to destroy all of the work done in establishing these Christians. This had to have been devastating for Paul and his missionary partner, Silas. It was actually so heated that they were forced to leave the area secretly by night. One of the charges laid against Paul and Silas was that these were some of the men that "turned the world upside down..." which of course, armed with the Gospel message, they were actually turning the world right-side up. We know that this world is so confused, and so backward, and so dark, that anything that represents truth is thought to be the enemy.

It must have been heartbreaking—the whole thing. The new converts would have to suddenly be without their spiritual father. Paul and Silas aching at the thought of leaving some new Christians defenseless in how to stand against this kind of

evil. Understand, these new Christians were immediately thrown into the fire of persecution. Oh, the questions that would have been swirling around. What have I gotten myself into? What did I just sign up to do? What if I have to be smuggled out at night? And then from Paul's side: There is so much I didn't get to tell them. I wonder how they're doing? I wonder if they have abandoned what I've taught them?

All of those thoughts would have been easy to think, you know?

In fact, it was so heart-wrenching for Paul that he sent Timothy back to them to see how they were doing. Paul even writes about this in **1 Thessalonians 3:1-2**, "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God..." Paul said, "I just couldn't take it anymore. I had to find out how you were doing."

And just what did Paul find out? Well that's part of what makes this letter so exciting.

How to Think About 1 Thessalonians

We'll look at this in greater detail in a moment, but the whole of this letter is consumed with the second coming of Jesus Christ. However, as the letter moves along you find great words of encouragement, words of instruction and warning, how to handle relational problems, and comfort for those who felt deep sorrow for those loved ones they had lost in this life.

This letter (as most of Paul's letters) can be broken up easily into two different sections:

A Different Way to Look (Chapters 1-3)— These chapters you'll notice are very personal in nature as Paul describes what he has heard about their progress, needing to defend himself from slander, and what Timothy was able to report about them.

A Look Inside the Church's Windows (Chapter 1): We get to peek inside this church a little bit as Paul gives them praise for the work they were doing. Paul had been worried that because he had to leave so quickly, and under such stressful circumstances, that these young Christians would have fainted under the pressure. But much to his surprise and delight, they were growing and engaging. In fact, these young Christians had a dynamic heart for outreach. 1 Thessalonians 1:8 "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything."

A Look Inside the Pastor's Heart (Chapter 2): Here, Paul does have to defend himself against some slander, but it's always nice to be able to point people to your character. Paul unfolds his heart in a way, and describes his actions in a way that should become the goal of every pastor and every spiritual leader.

A Look Inside the Church's Program (Chapter 3): The program of the church is to stand in love and in Christ before a changing and corrupt culture. Here we learn that God's churches are supposed to be the thermostat of the culture and change the temperature of the world around them and not simply the thermometer that measures the temperature of the world around them.

A Different Way to Live (Chapters 4-5)— Christian love and Christian understanding requires a different value system and a different way you approach life.

A Different Way to View Purity (Chapter 4:1-12): Just as in our day, changing the deeply entrenched culture of sexual preference was not easy. But it's a matter of God's will. It's interesting that we always look for the easy way instead of the better way. It's easy to give in to sexual desires. It's easy to want so much sexual gratification that you convince yourself that you actually need it. It's easy to use sex as an identity when all the while choice is involved the entire time. And because choice is involved, God says to choose purity.

A Different Way to View Motivation (Chapter 4:13-18): Paul says that we should be motivated by the second coming of Christ. In this truth we can be encouraged, we can have peace in sorrow, we can have light in

darkness. Thinking past what we experience in the present and wondering what kind of impact we had or wondering about the tragedy of loss can really bring a terrible dimension to life. But with Christ, with everlasting life, with hope of resurrection, with the promise of the ultimate irradiation of sin and suffering, well now, that brings a whole new reason for living.

A Different Way to View Priorities (Chapter 5:1-11): Because Jesus is coming, and because this brings us the greatest amount of comfort imaginable, we also know that there is work to do. We've got to live for what we know. The instruction here is, 'Don't go through life like you're asleep when God's work requires that you be awake.'

A Different Way to View Relationships (Chapter 5:12-28): Here we have a series of instructions that help us get along with one another, and protect our own testimony before each other. We also see from this that there appeared to be a little problem with church leadership. Not that the church leadership was bad, but that it wasn't being respected. Once again, we're looking at a bunch of new Christians here. We can easily see the problem rising, "Well, I don't understand why that person is telling me what to do. They've been a Christian as long as I've been a Christian." And Paul says that this is the absolute wrong attitude to have. A church is a community who leans on each other. We hold each other up. Go out into the godless society out there if that's the kind of atmosphere you want to live in. As for Christians, we view relationships far more different than that.

What to Look for in 1 Thessalonians

Second Coming of Christ Motivation— There is no greater motivation for the Christian than a healthy view and grateful expectation than our Savior coming back in victory for His people. Paul understands this. That is why this is the main teaching you should be on the lookout for, and the reason you will find this truth at the end of every chapter in this little letter. You will also want to pay attention to the fact that the constant expectation of Christ's return provides a powerful intensity that affects every area of a Christian's life.

Salvation: First we're saved, then we wait. And what a wonderful waiting period it becomes. You can just peer up into the sky and think, "One day, I'm going to be up there." Without an ounce of fear or reservation.

1 Thessalonians 1:10, "And to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

Witnessing: The second coming of Christ can work wonders for your witnessing life; It did for Paul and Timothy. They were excited that because of the gift of eternal life, they would all be in the presence of Christ at His coming. And so it is with everyone we witness to who accept Christ. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Faithfulness: The second coming of Christ can help you and motivate you to stay faithful.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 "To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Strengthening: If you're really looking for Christ, and you really have a literal hope in eternal life with Him and all of those in Him, as we get older, and those around us get older, and we start passing on from this life, we receive strength from the knowledge of seeing our loved ones again. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." **1 Thessalonians 4:18** "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Sanctifying: A Christian view of the second coming of Christ also has a very sanctifying effect to it. Your life suddenly has purpose. Your life suddenly has a joy attached to it because you know that Jesus is coming for you and you want to give Him the best you have in terms of an unblemished life. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What to Gain from 1 Thessalonians

Looking for Christ Brings Purpose to Life— Because it is so tempting to just deal with things that happen to us in this life as they come, we think of the second coming of Christ only when we have to. When a loved one dies, when we’re fed up with a particular sin that brings constant failure, when the preacher mentions it in a sermon, then we stop, consider, and reflect a little more on the fact that Jesus will come back. It’s not a new problem, and it’s not a congregation problem, it’s really just a human problem. But what Paul is mentioning here is that it doesn’t have to be this way. When you wake up in the morning, we can think, “Jesus might be coming back today. I love Him and He loves me; and I’m going to give Him my best.” Suddenly there’s purpose in the work that you do. Suddenly there is purpose in staying away from certain things, while everyone else looks at us like we’re crazy for not living like they do. Suddenly, everything is different; everything is exciting; everything has purpose.

CHRIST IS COMING - I THESSALONIANS

VISIT ONLINE AT LAKEWORTHBAPTIST.ORG/ABIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION



THIS RESOURCE IS OWNED BY LAKE WORTH BAPTIST CHURCH AND IS FREE FOR PERSONAL USE.
PLEASE DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE THE MATERIALS WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR.

WWW.LAKEWORTHBAPTIST.ORG