

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

What Every Church Should Be 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Part 1

Some of you might have wondered after completing our study last week, “What book of the Bible will we study next?”. We will be studying FIRST THESSALONIANS. Why would this particular epistle be of interest to us? Because it gives us an insight into a truly great church. It will give us an insight into hopefully what we are presently in the process of becoming.

Unfortunately many churches are like Noah’s ark if it wasn’t for the storm outside they couldn’t stand the stink on the inside.” Hopefully this is not true of us and it certainly was not true of the church at Thessalonica.

To help us appreciate really how special this particular church was at least three times in this letter, Paul gave thanks for the church and the way it responded to his ministry.

1 Thess. 1:2 “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers.”

1 Thess. 2:13 “And for this reason we also constantly thank god that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

1 Thess. 3:9 “For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account.

Hopefully we can be this kind of church. Hopefully we can become the type of church that would cause the apostles of Christ, if they were here, to rejoice and give thanks to the Lord for His mighty work in and through our lives.

You and I can still visit Thessalonica today, only the travel guide will call it Thessaloniki. (It used to be known as Salonika.) It is an important industrial and commercial city in modern Greece and is second only to Athens in population. It served as an important Allied base during World War 1. In World War 11 it was captured by the German army, and the Jewish population of about 60,000 persons was deported and exterminated.

We know Greece as one country. It used to be Macedonia and Achaia. Macedonia was in the North and Achaia in the south.

Thessalonica was one of three key cities in Macedonia. The other two were Philippi and Berea. In the southern part there were two key cities; Corinth and Athens. When Rome conquered Macedonia in 168 B.C., the city was made capital of that entire province.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The reason for this was quite simple. It occupied a strategic position, for it boasted a good natural harbor at the head of the Theriac Gulf, and it was situated on the Via Egnatia Highway which was the main route between Rome and the East. In Paul's day there was 200,000 people who lived there, most of them Greeks, but also many Romans and a strong Jewish minority. The town was filled with soldiers, tradesmen, businessmen, travelers, sailors. It was a booming place. It became famous for vice and sexual perversion. Prostitution was well organized. They would build houses without windows for protection. Divorce was frequent. Babies were abandoned. Murder was common.

It was into that environment that Paul came to establish a church in 49 A.D. How did he get there? Paul had been moving west. And he had come to the Aegean Sea. And he wanted to go south into Asia but was prevented in Acts 16. So he wanted to go north in Bithynia. But the Spirit said no. The only other direction left for him to go was west across the Aegean Sea.

On the edge of the Aegean Sea he had a vision. And in this vision he saw a man in Macedonia saying to them "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy arrived first in Philippi where they led Lydia and her household to Christ and there established a church. Shortly after that Paul and Silas were arrested on false charges, beaten, and put into jail. But God delivered them and they were able to lead the jailer and his household to faith in Christ.

After encouraging the new believers, Paul and his friends left Philippi (though Luke probably stayed behind temporarily) and headed for the important city of Thessalonica. They bypassed Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1), not because they had no burden for the people in those cities, but because Paul's policy was to minister in the large cities and then have the believers reach out into the smaller towns nearby. It is about 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. That would have been about a 5 day trip.

Acts 17:1-4 tells us what happened. He ministered in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, and the Lord worked in power. Many people believed in Jesus and were saved including a number of high-ranking women. However, the unbelieving Jews began to oppose the work, and Paul and his helpers had to leave the city. They went forty miles to Berea and there had a good ministry; but the Jews from Thessalonica followed them and caused trouble. It was then that Paul left for Athens, and from there to Corinth.

How long did Paul minister in Thessalonica? Does the statement "three Sabbath days" (Acts 17:2) mean three weeks only, or that he preached in the synagogue only three weeks but continued in another place? We know that Paul was there long enough to receive two "home mission offerings" from the church in Philippi (**Phi. 4:16**). Also, Paul worked at his tent making trade to support himself (**I Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:6-15**).

And besides if Paul were there on three weeks, he certainly taught the new Christians a great deal of basic Bible doctrine. As we study these two letters, we will discover that almost every major doctrine of the Christian faith is mentioned.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Considering all these things together it is most likely he was there more than three weeks and yet even though this is so everyone agree that the time that he spent there was relatively short. Even though Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was not a long one, it was solid enough to leave behind a thriving church. A church so thriving that it was a source of incredible joy for the Apostle Paul and for those who had ministered with Paul to the Thessalonians. What made this church so special? It was what every church should be.

The question that we will be asking over the next several weeks as we consider chapter 1 is, "WHAT CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS CHURCH MADE IT SO IDEAL AND SUCH A JOY TO PAUL'S HEART?"

THEY WERE AN ELECT PEOPLE (I THESS. 1:1-4)

They were an elect church. When Paul looked at this church he did not see a church who made up of the saved and the unsaved. No when he looked at the church in it's entirety he saw a church of true believers.

Let us read **VV. 1-4** "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in god the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; Grace to you and peace. (2) We give thanks to god always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers (3) Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father (4) knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you. Verse 4 is the key verse in this section of scripture. The KJV translates verse 4 "**knowing, brethren is election of you.**" The scriptures are very clear those who make up Christ's church did not arrive there by accident but rather they were elected to be there. Or in other words they were chosen to be there.

2 Thess. 2:13 "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because god has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

John 15:16 says, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you..."

Eph. 1:4 says, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..."

We will never understand the total concept of election or in other word's God's choice of us for salvation this side of heaven. But this does not mean that the scriptures do not teach it. It is taught over and over and over again in the scriptures. We will therefore hopefully as an expression of love for and trust in the Lord not only be willing to embrace it as true for ourselves but even, when appropriate, be willing share it with others.

Does this mean that everyone that makes up Valley Bible Church or Bethel Baptist or Lancaster Baptist are the elect of God? Not necessarily. In fact it is very likely that within a particular fellowship. Even this fellowship that there are those who are genuine Christians or the elect and those who are not or who are the non-elect.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

And the answer is no. **Matthew 13** records for us a crisis day in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He knew that the growing opposition of the religious leaders would lead to His crucifixion. This fact he had to explain to His disciples. But their logical question would be, “What will happen to the kingdom about which we have been preaching?” Jesus answers this question in a series of seven parables which explained to his disciples the course of the Gospel in the world. If Israel had received Jesus as King, the blessings would have flowed out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But the nation rejected Him, and God had to institute a new program on earth. During this present age, “the kingdom of heaven” is a mixture of true and false, good and bad, as pictured in these parables. It is “Christendom,” professing allegiance to the King, and yet containing much that is contrary to the principles of the King.

Let us consider the parable of the “wheat and the tares” stated in **Matt. 13:24-30** and then explained in **Matt. 13:36-43**. The basic thrust of the story is that where Jesus is sowing true Christians which in the parable would be described as wheat Satan will come alongside of that believer plant a tare which looks like wheat but will in time not bear the fruit.

But though we would ordinarily anticipate in any given fellowship that there might be even a significant number of non-elect or those who are making professions but who truly have not been born again within the church of Thessalonica there were only the elect.

Let us again read the passage, **“Paul and Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”**. This is the richness of our salvation. We are **“in God”** and we are **“in Christ”**. We are engulfed in a life which is their life. This is the mystery of union with the living God in salvation.

Just a footnote while we are in this verse. Would you notice the single preposition **“in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Not “in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Combining God and father and the Lord Jesus Christ behind one preposition emphasis equality. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are equal in essence and deity.

Let us again continue to read, **“grace and peace to you”**. This is a common greeting. Grace is God’s favor to the sinner and peace is the result. What is he saying? He is saying I wish for you grace and peace. But you might say that they already have grace and peace. He wants them to live in the fullness of that which they have received that the continued outpouring of His grace might lead to a continuing wonderful glorious blissful peace.

And now we come to V. 2 and he makes this statement, **“We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers”**. Paul is filled with thanksgiving continuously for this wonderful fellowship of believers. Not just for a few. Not just for a majority. But he is thanking God for them all..... know let us skip to **verse 4. “knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.”**

Though in most churches there will be a mixture of the elect and the non-elect. The saved and the unsaved. When Paul looked at this fellowship he viewed them as a church composed of only the elect. When he looked over this congregation all he saw were true disciples of Christ.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Certainly we know from the teachings of Matthew 13 that this should not be expected. But certainly from what Paul is writing in this epistle it is possible. It is possible for us to be a church when someone of Paul's stature would look out over us he would see on the elect.

How do we go about this? I believe that the best defense against the tares. The best defense against Satan having a field day in our in this place is to have a strong church. If you have a lawn what is the best defense against keeping the weeds from taking over your lawn. It is to have a lawn that is healthy.

This is what we are striving for in this fellowship. We are not striving in this fellowship to grow larger and larger with more and more people. We have no desire for this. We only desire to continue to fill these buildings with disciples.

How can we know whether or not we are truly born again? How can we know if we are truly that we are one of the chosen? How can we know whether or not we are one of the elect? You might say that know one can truly know this. And in a technical sense this I am sure is true. But in a practical sense it may not be. Why would I say this? All we have to do is to consider the words of Paul himself. What did he say? Let us again read the words of Paul in **V. 4 “knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.”**

Paul felt he had a pretty good handle on this. In order to help us to keep this body has healthy as possible so that we might strive to be as pure as possible it is important for us to know how Paul came to personal conviction.

Next week what are the characteristics of the elect or chosen?