

So today we begin a 9-part series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the church of Thessalonica

There are Bibles in front of you and a sermon outline in the bulletin if you want to take notes.

Let me pray for God's help before we begin. Let's pray...

## Intro

A couple of questions to begin with...

[PowerPoint 1a-Q1]

How thankful are we to God for our church family?

(pause)

[PowerPoint 1b-Q2]

How encouraging are we to our church family?

(pause)

It's my prayer - that we can get answers to those 2 questions from our look at this letter to the Thessalonians

## Context

The Apostle Paul writes a letter to the new church in Thessalonica [which is part of Greece]

[PowerPoint 2-Map]

The context is that the Apostle Paul and his missionary companions Silas and Timothy - are on huge missionary journey - bringing the message of Jesus to Gentile (non-Jew) regions

### [Explain Map]

Paul, Silas and Timothy spent 3-4 weeks establishing a church in Thessalonica  
 Before their work could be completed - they had to leave in a hurry due to riots  
 against their teaching about Jesus

You can read about this in Acts chapter 17

### [PowerPoint 3-Context]

It was hardly an ideal start to a new church

But we have to remember - as Paul reminds the church in Corinth

One person sows the seed of Jesus - another waters the seed

But it's **God** is the one who brings the growth - He is in control

So, Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is a letter to encourage a new church - a  
 new body of believers - to keep going in the face of any opposition

### **Application for us:**

Whether we have new believers or new ministries or even existing ministries -  
 we could be encouraging them to keep going?

Perhaps we could be writing a letter or card or email encouraging folk in our  
 church family to keep going in the face of opposition or trials or sickness

(pause)

What is church anyway?

Let's see...

### [PowerPoint 4-Church]

## Greeting (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

Like any letter, Paul's letter begins with a greeting

### [PowerPoint 5-Greeting]

Greetings from the 3 missionaries who started the church - Paul, Silas and Timothy

Paul - is a very well-educated Jew - very knowledgeable in all aspects of the Jewish religion - but originally a persecutor of Christians - until he came face to face with Jesus. Now he's a passionate Christian whose sole purpose is to teach people to have faith in our Lord Jesus

Silas - is a Christian and prominent member of the Christian church in Jerusalem (Acts 15)

And Timothy - is a young Christian man that Paul met on his second missionary journey and Timothy became Paul's protégé - the person that the ageing Paul would pass the baton on to - and keep the mission of Jesus going. We know from Paul's letters to Timothy - that Timothy was taught about Jesus from an early age from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. Timothy's father was Greek

Paul, Silas and Timothy are seen as **co-authors** of this letter in verse 1

Their greeting highlights a couple of golden truths about being Christians...

First - the truth that - the greeting given is IN God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ - that is the Father and the Son, Jesus, are one (John 10:30)

Second - the truth that - the greeting passes on two gifts that we receive from the Father through the Son

GRACE - the undeserved gift and favour from the Father in sending His Son to die for the sin of the world - because the Father loved the world so much  
 And PEACE - not peace in the sense of no conflict or wars - but peace between God the Father and humankind - peace that had been broken due to sin and rebellion against God - but peace that has been restored by Jesus' death on the cross - a peace that surpasses all understanding

### Thankfulness (vv2-3)

[PowerPoint 6-Thankfulness]

The letter continues by expressing thankfulness in verse 2

Thankfulness for whom?

All of you - all the Christians in Thessalonica

How is this thankfulness expressed in verse 2?

By continually mentioning them in prayers

Prayer is a wonderful way: to thank God for our church family and to ask God to help our church family

In verse 3 - there are **3 things** that Paul, Silas and Timothy are thankful for

## [PowerPoint 7a-Thankfulness faith]

1. Thankful for - the work produced by their faith

We'd better define faith:

Hebrews 11:1 says: *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

So basically, believing in someone or something - without they're being proof or without seeing

Examples:

- a. When God told Abraham to go up a mountain and sacrifice his only son Isaac, and young Isaac asked where was the lamb for the offering for God (Gen 22:7)  
Abraham had complete faith that God would not let his son Isaac die but would provide a sacrificial lamb instead - and so Abraham said in Gen 22:8 - *God Himself will provide the lamb.* Abraham couldn't prove this - but he knew in his heart God would provide the lamb for the offering
- b. In the same way, the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (in Luke 8) - had faith that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus' clothes - she would be healed
- c. And in the same way the centurion who had a sick servant said to the Lord Jesus - in Matt 8:8 - *I'm not worthy to have you in my house - but say the word and my servant will be healed*

Ultimately for us faith is knowing and believing that Jesus died on a cruel cross for our sins against God to be forgiven - and knowing and believing that Jesus rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to defeat death and to provide a way for us to defeat death too - so we can have eternal life.

We can't prove this all happened - but we choose to believe that the Bible is true and the Word of God

But notice that the missionaries are not just thankful for the Thessalonians faith - but their work produced by their faith.

You see - the Apostle James says faith without any works is dead faith

Faith has to result in a response and some action on our part

As the video showed - Faith is not just believing in our hearts - but also our hands helping in a practical way - and our feet going and telling people about Jesus, and making disciples and visiting and teaching SRE and Sunday School and so on - and so on

### [PowerPoint 7b-challenge]

Challenge: Because of our faith in Jesus - what is God telling our hands to do and where is God telling our feet to go? Pray about it. Ask God to show us...

(pause)

The second thing the missionaries are thankful for is the Thessalonians

### [PowerPoint 8a-Thankfulness for Love]

2. Labour prompted by love

So how do we define love?

Always a tricky thing

The dictionary will say: an intense feeling of deep affection

But the Bible's love is a bit different to that

The word used here in Greek is **agape**

And it describes God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind. It is God's ongoing, outgoing, self-sacrificing concern for lost and fallen people. God gives His love without condition, unreservedly to those who are underserving and inferior to Himself

Ultimately this love is shown on the cross of Jesus when Jesus says

**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34)

Is our labour of love for our church family and community like Jesus' labour of love - where we can say - even when we're hurt, even when we're gossiped about, even when we're misunderstood or falsely accused - we can say - father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing?

(pause)

You see having **agape** love for others - means we don't expect anything in return

That's hard isn't it?

But in the strength of Jesus - we can do all things (Phil 4:13)

The Apostle Peter puts it this way

**Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)**

What he means is - in the midst of an argument or a trial or being hurt - we can choose to love a person rather than looking to hate them or looking for revenge - we can choose to love - and love will conquer the hatred, the revenge, the anger, the frustration - because love covers a multitude of sins - just like Jesus' love on the cross covered the multitude of all our sins

### [PowerPoint 8b-Challenge]

Challenge: What labour of love is God telling us to do? Is there someone we need to forgive or reconcile with? Is there someone who needs our love? Pray about it. Ask God to show us...

The third thing, the missionaries are thankful for is the Thessalonians

### [PowerPoint 9a-Thankfulness for hope]

#### 3. Endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus

Again, we have a tricky definition to look at - when it comes to hope

We might say - I hope the weather is nice tomorrow or I hope I feel better soon

There's an element of uncertainty about that sort of hope

That's not what we're talking about here

Hope in this verse is best defined as

**The joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation**

In other words - we are absolutely certain we're going to Heaven - to be with God forever - because of our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection

It's not a maybe or a perhaps or if I'm good enough

It's rock solid 24 carat gold guarantee - because of Jesus - our place is booked in Heaven

And the missionaries in Thessalonica are saying that **certain** hope

Gives the Thessalonians and US - endurance and perseverance to keep going

And that's how King David saw things in our OT passage from Psalm 62

King David says he finds rest for his soul (in v1) by knowing that his salvation comes from God - and that God is his rock and fortress (v2) - so David is able to say - I will never be shaken. Can we join King David and say we will never be shaken?

King David is able to say that because he believes that ultimate power belongs to God (v11) - and that God's love - is an unfailing love (v12)

### [PowerPoint 9b-challenge]

**Challenge:** So, if we're having a bad time, lots of trials or sickness or grieving the loss of a loved one - whatever it is - remember our eternity is sorted out - ask God to help us to keep going. In Jesus we have someone who understands our suffering - and His grace is sufficient to keep us enduring (2 Cor 12:9)

3 applications to finish up then:

### Application

#### [PowerPoint 10a-App1]

1. Are we thankful to God for our church family - are we telling God that - are we telling each other that? It would be very encouraging and very loving to do so?

### [PowerPoint 10b-App2]

2. Are we continually mentioning our church family in our prayers? Are we continually thanking God for them? Are we continually asking God to help them? If not? Why not? Perhaps you could write a prayer - if you send it to me, I'll publish it in the bulletin - it can be anonymous too.

### [PowerPoint 10c-App3]

3. No matter what is going on in our lives and in our world now - we have the 3 pillars of Christianity always with us: our faith in Jesus, our certain hope of Heaven and the **agape love** of God. No one can take those 3 pillars away from us - as Jesus our Good Shepherd says about us - His sheep  
<sup>28</sup> I [JESUS] give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:28-29)

### Conclusion

Let me finish then - with these words from the Apostle Paul:

### [PowerPoint 11-1 Cor 13:13]

<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Cor 13:13)

The reason love is the greatest of these - is because without the unfailing **agape** love of Jesus - we would not have our faith or our hope

Thank you, Jesus,

Let's pray...