

**While I'm Waiting
(Week 5)
1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10
"Thank God"**

Introduction

How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you, as we pray very earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith? **1 Thessalonians 3:9-10**

What a joy it must have been for the Thessalonian Church, when they received their first correspondence from the Apostle Paul! After all, he had only been with them a very short while before he had been run out of town. After his departure, wicked men came in and tried to discredit him by casting doubt upon his motives for coming to Thessalonica in the first place. Paul was used to this kind of persecution and would have never left the city, had it not been for his concern for Jason, the Jewish convert who had so kindly allowed Paul and his companions to stay with him. You see, the city officials had forced Jason to put up collateral that would be seized, if Paul remained in Thessalonica. Not to mention the fact that Jason more than likely would have been arrested for harboring "criminals".

As a result, Paul and his companions departed much earlier than they had intended, all the while consumed with concern that the fledgling church that they had planted would not survive in the face of such tremendous opposition. But God... is faithful. It is **HE**, and He alone, that always finishes what He begins. I cannot help but wonder, if seeing God complete the work in Thessalonica without Paul's assistance was the catalyst that would strengthen the apostle's own faith and enable him to write these words years later in his letter to the church at Philippi.

I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 1:6**

Paul so desperately had wanted to remain in Thessalonica, but God, in His sovereign wisdom, had allowed the devil to thwart Paul's plans (**vs. 2:19**). I think that we Christians sometimes forget that the devil can do nothing to one of God's children, without God Himself allowing it to occur (**Job 1:6-12**). When God allows Satan to persecute us, there is always a higher purpose being fulfilled. In this particular instance, I believe God wanted Paul (and all of us) to understand that it is He who begins a work, and it is He Who finishes it. Not to mention the fact, that if Paul had been allowed to stay in Thessalonica, then we wouldn't have the books of *1 & 2 Thessalonians* in our *Bibles* today. God uses things that we do not understand for His Own purpose and glory. Thanks be to God, Who knows far more what His people need than they do! Can I get a witness?

When Paul could stand it no longer, he dispatched Timothy back to Thessalonica from the city of Athens, in order to bring back a report on the progress of the fledgling church. When Timothy returned, Paul had already moved on to Corinth. The news that Timothy brought back to him from Thessalonica filled the old missionary with Joy. The church had not only survived, but it was thriving! Paul could not contain his emotion at the news. Three times in the first section of his letter, he thanks God for his wondrous works in the Thessalonian church (**1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2:13, and 3:9**).

Today, as we gather here on the eve of Thanksgiving, I feel that it is appropriate for us to give that thanks to God as well. We are thankful for what He has done, and is doing, in His Church all across the world. For you see, The Church is under persecution in every corner of the world, but God will indeed finish the work that He has begun in this beautiful bride of Christ. So we must remember to give Him the honor and glory for all that He has done and all that He will do. We must remember to always come into His presence with thanksgiving in our hearts and give Him praise (**Psalm 95:2**). We give thanks this morning for *God's Plan, God's Promises, and God's Provision and Protection* that He has given to those who will simply put their faith in His Son. Paul gave thanks to God for these very things, that He had done in Thessalonica, and we are compelled to do likewise.

God's Plan (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5)

Most *Bible* scholars agree that *1 Thessalonians* was the first letter that Paul had ever written to one of his church plants. It was written around 57 AD, with his second epistle to them arriving a year or so later. It is important to remember that Paul had not intended to even travel to the province of Macedonia. His intent was to take the gospel to Asia, until The LORD stopped him and redirected him to the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica (**Acts 16**).

After being run out of Philippi, and then having similar circumstances in Thessalonica, Paul was worried that he had not been there long enough to make a lasting difference. But after Timothy returned to Paul with the news of how the church was exploding in Thessalonica, Paul knew that God had done a mighty work there. And he did what every believer should do. He gave all the glory to God.

Three times in the first three chapters of *1 Thessalonians*, Paul gives thanks to God for what He has done in that city. The first "thanksgiving" comes in the very beginning of the letter:

We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our LORD Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in The Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. **1 Thessalonians 1:2-5a**

You see, Paul knew when Timothy returned with the good news of the church, that it had to have been a work of God. Not only had Paul never intended to go to Thessalonica, but he wasn't allowed to stay there long enough to accomplish a great deal. It had been God's PLAN to save them, not Paul's. This was proof to the old apostle that what had happened in Thessalonica was all about God and had very little to do with him! Here is a lesson for us all. God doesn't need us to accomplish His plans. He merely allows us to be a part of it, if we are willing to serve.

If Paul had been allowed to stay in Thessalonica for very long, he might have started thinking that it was he himself that was making the difference. But what had happened there was living proof that it was all God. Do you understand this morning, that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it was because God chose to do a work in you? Listen to what Paul says about the church in Thessalonica:

For we know brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in The Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a**

Did you catch that? People are born again, because God has chosen them! He allows His Holy Spirit to convince us of the truth of His Word, so that we can be saved from the coming wrath. Now, I know this past year has been a struggle for many. I personally cannot remember a more "depressing" time in my own life, and I have lived through more than a few rough times. But one thing keeps me on the "positive side", when I see hard times. God has CHOSEN ME! I have been saved by grace, and nothing or no one can separate me from the love I have in Christ Jesus (**Romans 8:37-39**).

Depression comes when we focus too much on self and not enough on God or those around us. We turn the spotlight inward instead of outward, and it causes a downward spiral into gloom and despair. Do you want to know how to feel confident and empowered this morning? Praise God. Bring into recollection all that He has done. God has a plan for you. He chose to do a work in you, although there was nothing that you had done to earn such grace. He chose you, before the world began. Do you not think that He will finish what He has begun in you? Take a firm grasp of your faith this morning and start to thank God for what He has done and what He will do. You might just find that your sorrow turns to joy when you praise The LORD. Do you spell God's Name with a big "G" or a small one? Do you believe that He is able to complete His plans for you? Then lift up your head, child of God. Your Father is still on the throne! Let us all stop and give thanks to our God for the work that He has done and is continuing to do in His Church! For it is He, and He alone, Who has given us our salvation.

**“For I know the plans I have I have for you” — this is the LORD’S declaration —
“plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”**
Jeremiah 29:11

God’s Promises (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

This is why we constantly thank God, because when you received The Word of God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, The Word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe.
1 Thessalonians 2:13

The second “thanksgiving” we see in Paul’s letter is for the power found in the Word of God. There are countless “talking heads” on our televisions these days telling us how we ought to live and what we ought to do. Sadly, most of them do not have a clue about what is real truth. Truth is found in The Word of God. He is the only One Who knows what has been and what will be. His promises are always kept. When we trust in His promises, He credits it to us as righteousness (**Genesis 15:6**). When everything around us falls apart, we can count upon the promises of God.

This is why we must follow the commands of Christ, no matter what the world thinks of us. They think that we are foolish to believe, but one day all will know the truth. I am awestruck by what Christ promised the church in Philadelphia, when they were suffering immense persecution:

Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying — I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.
Revelation 3:9

That is one of the most powerful promises that I have ever read in The Scriptures. One day, this world that has ridiculed us for our faith, this world that has tried to force its secular humanism down our throats and has mocked us for holding to God’s Word and its promises, will one day have to publicly acknowledge that we were loved by our Heavenly Father, and our LORD Jesus Christ. God’s promises are always kept. The Thessalonians were able to endure immense persecution, because of the hope they had in the return of The LORD Jesus.

Therefore, we don’t need to say anything, for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead — Jesus, Who rescues us from the coming wrath.
1 Thessalonians 1:8b-10

Are you living in the expectant hope of the return of Christ today? He has promised to come back and take us to Himself:

“If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, so that where I AM you may be also.”
John 14:3

We can endure anything that this world throws at us, so long as, we remember to trust in God’s promises. So thank God for His Word! He will do everything that He has promised He will do.

God's Provision/ Protection (1 Thessalonians 3:9-10)

How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you, as we pray very earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10

There is an unfortunate "chapter break" between **Chapter 2:17-20** and **Chapter 3**, for they are all together one complete thought process. Paul desperately longed to return to Thessalonica, but he had been unable to do so up to this point. He tells them at the end of Chapter Two that when they were all reunited with the coming of The LORD ("*parousia*" meaning literally *presence*), that they would be his "**joy and crown**" (**vs. 2:19**). Think about the beauty of this for a moment. When Christ returns for His church and we are all together in His presence, imagine the joy that you will feel as you look around and see those that you have personally led to The LORD. In Paul's own words, those souls will be our "*Stephanos*" meaning *victors crown*. How he longed to see the Thessalonians in the present, but if that were not to be, he knew that he would see them all again at the rapture! In the meantime, God would see to it that they finished the race!

Paul goes on in Chapter Three to tell them that he had been concerned that the persecution that they had faced would cause them to "withdraw from the race" as it were. His concerns were ill founded, for as he learned from Timothy's report, God always provides for and protects His children. The Heavenly Father had seen to it that the church would endure. Though Paul had desperately longed to returned to them, in his absence, God provided all that they needed to keep their faith and hope alive. That is what a Good Father does. He provides for his children. God didn't need Paul's help to keep the church of Thessalonica going.

When Paul heard of the flourishing church in the city where he had spent so little time, he praised God for them! Even though he had warned them that persecution would come (**3:1-5**), he worried that it would become too much for them. He sent Timothy back, in order to see if there was anything that could be done to strengthen them, only to find that a true church draws its strength from The LORD! Paul responded to Timothy's report by saying, "How can we thank God for you?" Which was another way of saying, "How can we ever thank God enough for what he has done for you?"

Paul was overjoyed and overwhelmed at the provision and protection that the Thessalonians had received from God. He had seen to it that the church would endure. And Paul could not help but praise The One True God from whom all blessings flow!

When I read this passage, I am reminded of how God has always seen to it that I have what I need. I was recently driving down the road and heard a song that said, "I see the evidence of your goodness all over my life." When I heard those words, I must admit I got a few tears on my eyes. It is so easy to get discouraged in these troubled times in which we live. But have you ever thought about how God has seen you through every one of those hard times?

I heard a story about a pastor, who asked his church to name their favorite verses. An older gentleman stood up and said, "My favorite verse is the one that says, 'And it came to pass.'" The pastor thought about this for a moment, and he asked the man what he meant. He replied, "It always reminds me that no matter what troubles come into my life, they don't come to stay. They come to pass. God will always get me through." Pretty much says it all doesn't it? Our Good, Good Father always provides and protects His children. In this life, we will have trouble, but it does not come to stay... it comes, to **pass!**

"I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." John 16:33

So, as we enter into this season of Thanksgiving, remember not just who you are, but Whose you are! Know for certain that these troubled days will come to pass. In joyous faith, thank God for His Plans, His Promises, His Provision and Protection. For indeed, if you are in Christ, then you are truly blessed!

And let all those who are filled with thanksgiving say... TRUTH!!!