

Walking Out the Word:
The Epistles to the Thessalonians

Important Background to Thessalonians:

- Thessalonica was originally called *Therma* for the many hot springs adjacent to it. It was renamed Thessalonica 313 after the half-sister of Alexander the Great and the wife of Cassander the Macedonian King. In Paul's day, 200,000 people lived in Thessalonica. Most of them were Greeks, but some were also Romans with a strong Jewish minority. Thessalonica was a prosperous port city on the eastern coast of Greece across the bay from Mt Olympus.
- Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. The Thessalonian church was founded by Paul and Silas during the second missionary journey when they traveled 90 miles southwest of Philippi on the Egnatian Way. (See Acts 16:9; 17:1-10)
- Paul ministered in power for three Sabbaths in Thessalonica and then left suddenly. Paul's ministry had caught the attention of both Roman officials and Jewish opponents. To call Jesus Lord, was to use a title that was reserved for Cesar. When the authorities could not find Paul, they took Jason their host and arrested him. Paul and his team left with civil and religious unrest. They went first to Berea and then to Athens. While in Athens, anxious to find out about the Thessalonians, Paul sent Timothy to them.
- I Thessalonians is written from Corinth. Timothy had returned to Paul and had brought him good news that the young church had remained dedicated to Christ. I Thessalonians 1-3 is full of thanksgiving and relief as Paul rehearses his ministry among them and the state of their faith. I Thessalonians 4-5 includes Paul's exhortation towards matters of sexual purity (4:1-8; 5:23), love (4:9-12), honor of leaders (5:12-13), patience and helpfulness (5:14-15).
- II Thessalonians is written a few months later around 50 AD to reinforce teaching and to explain some misunderstandings concerning the second coming of Christ. II Thessalonians clarifies that the return of the Lord will not occur until certain events take place:
 1. There will be a falling away and the Man of Sin will be revealed (2 Thess 2:3)
 2. This "son of perdition" (also the "Antichrist" in letters of John) will claim to be God.
 3. Although the spirit of this figure was known in Paul's day through the mystery of lawlessness, the second coming will NOT occur until the final end of the age.

Opening Discussion: In I Thessalonians Paul expresses joy in the progress of new converts, and instructs them to live holy lives as they patiently wait for the return of Christ. What brings you joy as you relate to other believers? Is it difficult for you to wait patiently?

I Thessalonians 1-3: Do you have some role models in the faith that you imitate(1:7-8)? How would Paul's example of overcoming persecution for his faith encourage the Thessalonians (2:6-9)? What difficulties were the Thessalonians facing (2:14-15)? What is Paul's "hope, joy, and crown" (2:19)? Paul and his companions prayed night and day for the Thessalonians (3:10). Do you pray like that?

I Thessalonians 4-5: What does it mean for us to live a life of purity (4:1-12)? What is Paul's concern in 4:13? According to 4:15-17, what things happen at the Second Coming of Christ? Are you prepared for the Second Coming of Christ (5:1-11)? Make a list of Paul's final instructions in 5:12-28. In this list, what areas do you personally need to work on the most?

II Thessalonians 1-3: What has been the greatest trial or persecution in your life in the last year? What does it mean for you to be glorified in Christ and Him glorified in you (1:1-12)? Who is the One who holds back the power of lawlessness (2:1-12)? How has II Thessalonians 2 helped you to understand the return of Christ? Describe the importance of mundane tasks in the life of a believer (3:1-13). Why does Paul encourage them that he is closing the letter in his own hand (3:16-18)?

Closing Prayer: In what area of your life do you need a fresh infusion of His peace and grace? Take time to pray over each other.