

Episode: Paul's Letters Series No. 04

Narrator: Silas

Primary Scriptures: First Thessalonians

Story Summary: Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica

Location: Roman Empire; Macedonia, Thessalonica

Time: AD 30 Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
AD 48 Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
AD 50 Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
AD 51 Writing of *First* and *Second Thessalonians*

Suggested Memory Scriptures: 1 Thess. 1:4; 4:3-4, 7, 11-12, 15-17; 5:16-19

The church at Thessalonica was established on the Second Missionary Journey by Paul and Silas. It is possible Timothy was with them on that trip while they were at Thessalonica, which would explain why all three of them are named as senders of the letter known as *First Thessalonians*, although it is likely that Paul authored most of it.

This is the first of Paul's letters written to a church in Macedonia or Greece, and possibly the first one written to a church consisting mostly of non-Jews. Paul also personally knew most of the people in the church, and was familiar with their customs.

The first chapter is full of compliments and encouragement for the members of this young church, which has only existed for two or three years. The second chapter is a reminder of the way Paul lived faultlessly among them, and how he taught them the true gospel. By the end of the second chapter, you can imagine the Thessalonians thought they were truly "simpatico" with Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

In the third chapter, Paul starts revealing that they had previously sent Timothy back to the Thessalonians for two reasons: to encourage them and to find out how they were holding up against persecution and other temptations. He assures them that Timothy brought back a very good report from that trip. However, Paul also hints that there are still aspects of their faith lacking, and he drops a tidbit of information that Jesus will come back with his holy ones.

Chapter Four gives instructions on how to live holy lives. Some of these sound silly to modern ears because they seem so obvious, but many of the Thessalonians grew up with such things as drunkenness and sexual immorality considered normal, acceptable behavior. Paul was trying to change their standards.

Much of the rest of this letter discusses future events of the second coming of Jesus. This subject seems to have so captivated them that many had quit working in anticipation of the Lord returning quickly. Paul tries to inform them about the subject so they will behave as they should. Since he wrote to them again, we can conclude his results were spotty.

Discussion Questions:

1. The Christians in Thessalonica were previously like the rest of the Greeks/Macedonians and Romans in their propensity toward drunkenness and sexual excesses. How do you think they liked Paul's insistence on his new definition of good behavior (1 Tim. 4:3-5)? Do you think the men or women liked the new message better?
 2. What does 1 Thess. 3:1-2 indicate about Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians?
 3. In 1 Thess. 5:2, why did Paul remind them that the date of the coming of the Lord could not be predicted? What is the difference in believing the Lord will come back someday versus the Lord will come back very soon?
 4. How long had the Thessalonian church existed when Paul wrote this letter? Considering this, do you think they were doing well in their pursuit of Christian living?
2. Paul knew the Thessalonians personally, and deeply cared that they not succumb to the false teachers or to immorality. The Thessalonians knew Timothy well, so he was the best weapon Paul had. 3. It seems that some of the Thessalonians expected Christ to come soon, so they had quit working at their jobs, and may have quit being quite so controlled in their other behaviors. 4. Two or three years; yes.

Application Questions:

1. 1 Thess. 5:16-17 says to rejoice always and pray without ceasing. In the modern world, is it possible to do those things? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. 1 Thess. 5:22 says to abstain from every type of evil, and 1 Thess. 4:3 says to abstain from sexual immorality. Do you like abiding by sweeping statements like those, or would you prefer to have lists of evil types of behavior to avoid? Are sweeping statements or lists more restrictive?
3. 1 Thess. 4:13-18 says the Lord will come, and that it is an encouraging message that He will do so. Since He has not come back yet, do you believe He will or that this message is somehow no longer valid? What does it mean that Jesus will come?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. What does it mean to abstain from sexual immorality? Is that message still valid now that there are ways to avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases?
2. How does 1 Thess. 4:11-12 apply to you?
3. 1 Thess. 5:18 says it is the will of God that you give thanks in all circumstances. What would that look like in your life? Is that even possible for you to do?
4. 1 Thess. 4:22 says to abstain from every type of evil. Do you believe that there is evil in the world? How has society's definition of evil changed in the last 100 years? Do you think God's definition of evil changes with time?