



Let's Get Ready to Rapture

First Thessalonians 1:1-3

"Making Sense of Sight"

Just about every Sunday for over 300 weeks we have presented a prophecy update that ended with the words, *"Ready or not, Jesus is coming."*

Turns out I'm in good company! Every chapter in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians ends with a reminder that the Lord is coming.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 ...wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

1 Thessalonians 3:13 ...establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prophecy is practical. In each chapter you will see how the coming of the Lord profoundly impacts your walk with the Lord:

- Chapter 1 - How the Coming of the Lord Affects Your Salvation
- Chapter 2 - How the Coming of the Lord Affects Your Service
- Chapter 3 - How the Coming of the Lord Affects Your Sanctification
- Chapter 4 - How the Coming of the Lord Affects Your Sorrow
- Chapter 5 - How the Coming of the Lord Affects Your Stability

1Th 1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul invited Barnabas to go with him on a second missions trip to strengthen the churches they had established on their first missions trip. Barnabas wanted to go, but he insisted they bring Jon-Mark, who had flaked-out on them the first time. Paul refused and instead set out with Silvanus, usually called by his Roman name, Silas.

(Here's a piece of Bible trivia - Luke always calls him Silas whereas Paul refers to him as Silvanus).

They travelled through Syria and Cilicia eventually coming to Derbe then Lystra. In Lystra they met Timothy. Paul wanted Timothy to join them but he needed first to be circumcised so that he, being half Jewish, would not be an offense when they preached in the local synagogues.

After going through Phrygia and Galatia the Holy Spirit began closing doors until Paul found himself in Troas. There he received the famous vision of the man from Macedonia saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Dr. Luke was on this trip, too; we're not sure when he joined them but in Acts 16 he uses the word "we." At the river in Philippi Lydia and her household hear the Gospel, receive the Lord, and are baptized.

In Philippi a demon-possessed slave girl follows Paul and Silas. After putting up with her for many days, Paul casts out the demon that gives her an ability to divine certain things.

Her owners are not happy - seeing they made a great deal of money from her divination. They get Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, and chained in the prison.

It's the prison where Paul and Silas are singing praises at midnight when God sends an earthquake, opening the prison doors. Fearing the prisoners are escaping, the jailor is about to take his own life when Paul stops him. He ends up leading the jailor and his family to the Lord.

Next day Paul and Silas are released to profuse apologies from the authorities once Paul reveals he is a Roman citizen. After

some days strengthening the believers in Philippi, Paul and Silas depart without Luke.

Passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they come to Thessalonica. It was the capital of Macedonia with a population of 200,000.

Acts 17 records that Paul ministered in the synagogue there for three consecutive Sabbath's, then he, Silas, and Timothy were forced by unbelieving Jews to leave Thessalonica for Berea.

Paul was eventually driven out of Berea by the same unbelieving Jews and he headed for Athens. Timothy and Silas remained behind in Berea. While in Athens, Paul sent word to Timothy to return to Thessalonica and strengthen the believers there.

Paul goes on to Corinth, where eventually he catches up with Silas and Timothy. Timothy delivers a good report to Paul about the spiritual health of the church at Thessalonica, and Paul writes this first letter to them.

Sure, they were on a trip specifically to do Christian work. But don't lose sight that they were just ordinary Christians who shared their testimony as they were going through life. The only thing extraordinary about any of them was God - the same God who saved you and can use you.

Paul addressed his readers as "the church of the Thessalonians." The word "church" means *a called out people*. It wasn't a Christian word; it was used of town assemblies when citizens were called together to conduct civil business. The Jews adopted it to describe religious assemblies. It came to mean *the assembled people of God*.

I don't need to belabor the understanding that the New Testament pattern was for folks to receive The Lord then join together with other believers as His called-out people. The New Testament knows nothing of a disconnected believer.

They may have been in Thessalonica but they were also "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." They were now citizens of Heaven, looking forward to the city whose builder and maker is God.

This language also, and perhaps mostly, reminds us of the love and unity between Father and Son, and it brings us into that unity as the called out people. We love God and also love one another.

"Grace to you and peace" is a greeting uniquely Paul's.

- "Grace" is God's unmerited favor, by which we are saved; but it is more than that. It is the power of God to sustain us in our walk with The Lord.
- "Peace" is your inner tranquility knowing you've been saved. It is a word that summarizes the reconciliation God accomplished with the human race on the Cross.

1Th 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,

"God" was to be thanked. He led Paul and his companions step-by-step, sustaining them through persecution by grace, until they found themselves in Thessalonica sharing the Gospel. Then by God's grace human wills were freed to make decisions for Christ. Men and women were born-again, saved from perishing, set on the path toward Heaven.

Think of the miracle of saved, changed lives. You can't help but give thanks to God for His plan of salvation.

"Always" is a big word, considering it encompasses all the believers and believers are all over the map in their maturity. The Thessalonians themselves weren't all worthy of thanks. As we will see, some of them opposed Paul; some of them were living immoral lives; some were involved in false teaching.

No matter how many knuckleheads there were in Thessalonica, Paul and his companions could thank God for His saving work in all of them, knowing it was just the beginning of conforming each person into the image of Jesus.

The missionaries prayed together. They evidently thought that their prayers could make a difference. They weren't praying just to get themselves to accept the inevitable. They were praying to influence the work of God, believing that the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous can accomplish something.

1Th 1:3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

When Paul thought about the Thessalonians, which was often, he remembered three things about them as a congregation:

1. Their "work of faith" means the spiritual deeds they did inspired by their faith in Jesus Christ. This isn't random good deeds or acts of kindness; it is the specific work that God guides you into and fulfills in the power of His Holy Spirit.
2. Their "labor of love" means toilsome, laborious effort to go on loving with the love of God when things aren't going too smoothly. "Labor" is a particularly strenuous word. The thought here is that apart from the presence of God's unconditional love in their lives they would have given up by now.
3. "Patience of hope" is steadfast endurance inspired by true hope. The word for "patience" doesn't mean resignation. It, too, is a strong word that indicates an almost heroic endurance that faces trials with courage. Biblical "hope" is the certain knowledge that what God promised He will perform.

One author wrote, "faith rests on the past, love works in the present, and hope looks to the future."

Another said, "faith comes first as the source of all Christian virtues; love is the sustaining power which enables the believer to persevere in the face of opposition and suffering for the faith; and hope looks to the future, serving as the beacon star which guides the saint to his heavenly haven."

Here is another: "Faith looks back to a crucified Savior. Love looks up to a crowned Savior. Hope looks on to the coming Savior."

I like that one because it focuses our hearts squarely on "our Lord Jesus Christ."

"In the sight of our God and Father" is maybe the most precious phrase in this salutation. Faith, love, and hope are all energized by the understanding that God is a Father Who is constantly aware of the church corporately and of each member of the church individually.

My life is being played out before Him. In His sovereignty He guides, directs, limits, permits, allows.

I can't always get a handle on exactly why things happen as they do, but I can trust they are in His "sight" and that He loves me as a Father does His son.

There are certain moments in the Bible stories that bring out this point. Early in the story of the Jerusalem church, James is arrested and beheaded. A little later, Peter is arrested and is scheduled to be beheaded.

Instead an angel breaks him out of jail.

Why? Why permit James to be beheaded, then limit the power of the authorities by miraculously freeing Peter?

Some would suggest that there was more fervent prayer for Peter. There *was* a prayer meeting going on; but the text doesn't say that was the reason. It only establishes that the believers thought prayer could, in fact, influence the situation; and it did - even though when Peter showed up at the meeting they didn't at first believe he had been set free.

The truth is we cannot answer these questions of "Why?" Not this side of eternity.

But we need not despair if we know that all that we do is "in the sight of our God and Father."

Indeed, the Bible lets us know that "precious in the sight of The Lord is the death of His saints."

To live is Christ, but to die is gain. Live with that as your philosophy and you will flourish in the sight of The Lord.