

THROUGH THE BIBLE

1 THESSALONIANS 1-3

Baltimore football fans still grieve when they recall March 28, 1984. On that snowy night the unthinkable happened. One of the NFL's most storied teams, the Colts, snuck out of town in the middle of the night.

The Colts were the team of football greats... John Unitas, and Raymond Berry, and Lenny Moore... as well as their legendary coach, Don Shula.

Yet under the cover of darkness, Colts owner, Robert Irsay, hired the Mayflower moving company to clean out the team's offices, and drive their equipment to Indianapolis. An NFL powerhouse skipped town.

Irsay's clandestine operation to relocate his Colts was an attempt to avoid the negative firestorm that was coming from the Baltimore media. Irsay said, "People of the press were hounding my family for two years, and I wasn't about to take any more... hounding."

The *Colts* were *dogged* out of Baltimore.

In a sense this is why Paul and his pals left Thessalonica. Paul spent just 3 weeks in the city, and his time there had been extremely successful. Yet like the Colts, Paul left town to avoid a firestorm of hostility.

Acts 17 tells the story...

When Paul hit town he went straight to the Jewish synagogue. A few of the Jews believed in Jesus. But his biggest inroads were among Gentiles - Acts 17:4 specifies,

“leading women.” Apparently, [the Desperate Housewives of Thessalonica](#) came to faith in Jesus!

But this made the Jews jealous. They feared Paul’s influence. They complained to authorities, “[these who have turned the world upside down have come here, too.](#)” The Jews stirred up a mob and had Paul arrested.

Paul’s time in Thessalonica was over before it had really begun. Under the cover of darkness he and Silas snuck out of town and moved down the road to Berea.

In the days following - though Paul was *run out of town*, his heart kept *running back to the Thessalonians*.

He’d left behind a strong church. In a paltry three weeks a powerful Gospel had birthed a healthy church.

Yet because of the brevity of his visit there was much Paul didn’t get an opportunity to explain. He felt he’d left the believers under-equipped. So to shore up what was lacking, Paul sent Timothy and Silas back to Thessalonica. In the meantime, he departed Berea for Athens. ([Probably to celebrate a big Bulldog victory!](#))

Six months later Timothy and Silas rejoin Paul - now in Corinth. After their report, Paul writes the Thessalonians a letter. From Corinth, around the year 52 AD - Paul pens some correspondence to the church he *knew only briefly*, but *loved ever so deeply*.

Chapter 1 begins, “[Paul, Silvanus...](#)” which is the Roman spelling for “[Silas,](#)” “[and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...](#)” Thessaloniki, as its known today, is the second largest city on the island of Greece.

It has a population of a million people. Its one of a few biblical cities that has survived until modern times.

In the first century it was also an important Greek city. Thessaloniki has always had an excellent harbor.

It was originally named "*Therma*" for its hot springs.

Perhaps its best advantage was its location. It was on the great Egnatian Way - the Roman road that linked Rome with the treasures of the east. It was said, that Thessalonica "*lay in the lap of the Roman empire.*"

It's amazing, this city was steeped in paganism for 400 years - but after just three weeks exposure to the Gospel Paul wrote, "*to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Here's Paul's customary greeting, "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

A conversation was overheard on a public bus. A woman was reading a religious book, when the man next to her asked, "*What are you reading?*" "*It's a book a friend gave me. She said it changed her life.*" "*What's it about?*" It was obvious she had just started the book.

She flipped to the table of contents and read off a few chapter titles, "*Discipline, Love, Grace...*" The stranger stopped her, and asked, "*What's grace?*" The lady replied, "*I don't know. I haven't got to grace yet.*"

And this is the problem with many Christians.

They've yet to get a grasp on grace! It's the *unmerited favor of God - a love we don't deserve.*

Grace is the starting point in our relationship with God. Yet many Christians "haven't gotten to grace." You'll never experience peace until you receive grace.

The whole Christian life flows from God's grace.

Paul writes, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers..." Paul had just met the Thessalonians, but he was thankful for God's work in them, and he prayed zealously for them.

He also recalls what their early faith looked like...

"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..."

Thessalonica was a model church. They brought Paul great joy... In contrast there were churches that troubled him... The **Corinthians** were "*Christians Gone Wild.*" They were immoral and divisive ... Paul referred to the **Galatians** as "*My Dear Idiots.*" They were prone to legalism... The **Colossians** were gullible to false doctrine - like a big-mouth bass they bit the lies hook, line, and sinker... But the **Thessalonians** were a joy...

Here Paul mentions three outstanding qualities of this young church in Thessalonica... their "*work of faith,*" - their "*labor of love,*" - their "*patience of hope.*"

Real *faith works.* *It acts on what it believes...*

Love labors. *All our service to God should be motivated by love...* "The love of Christ constrains us."

And **hope perseveres**, *it's willing to wait...* It's our future hope that helps us endure the present stress.

Verse 4, “**knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.**” The OT reserved the term “**beloved of God**” for special saints. But in the NT the rank-n-file believer achieves the same special status. All who are in Christ are special to God. Paul calls us all “**beloved brethren.**”

And notice what makes this possible... “**your election by God.**” God chose - He selected the Thessalonians.

Think of what this meant to Paul. He'd spent only three weeks with these folks. *Not a long time by any one's standards. It takes more time to grow tomatoes.*

Paul was hoping to grow mature Christians. Yet his confidence was not in his own efforts. He knew God had a stake in the Thessalonians – *He chose them before the foundation of the world – had plans for them before they were born* - God would complete His work.

And this is what makes me so hopeful about you...

You may be new to our church. Perhaps you've only been coming three weeks. *That's not long to get a faith grounded and anchored*, but God is at work in you.

He chose you – you're His project. And we can be confident that God always finishes what He starts!

In verse 5 Paul recalls his time in Thessalonica, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit...” Miracles, boldness, the work of the Holy Spirit accompanied Paul’s preaching.

But notice what produced great confidence in the Gospel. Paul says the gospel came “in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” It was the *character of the messengers that brought credibility to the message*. And this is what’s needed in today’s church.

Sure we’d love to see more miracles. But far more important are more leaders and pastors with integrity.

There’s a troubling disconnect in today’s church.

We’ve separated *the message* from *the messenger*. We’ve got lots of *characters*, but not much *character*. We’ve got pastors with bling... *Integrity is not as sexy*.

Here’s a major problem... *Churchgoers today are more attracted to ability than righteousness*.

The *entertaining personality* - the *clever presenter* - the *celebrity spokesman* - draws a larger crowd than the *faithful servant*... Just because a person can put buns in the seats shouldn’t qualify them to lead.

Paul hadn’t been in Thessalonica very long, but for the time he was there he lived among the people. They witnessed his life firsthand... *how he treated people, and handled money, and carried himself around town*.

Always remember, the Gospel of God’s grace is truth, regardless of who presents it - but it’s easier to *believe*, when the messenger is *believable*!

Verse 6, “**And you became followers of us and of the Lord...**” A first glance this sounds a bit arrogant... Paul says, “***You became followers of US and of the Lord...***”

But think it through. When a new believer comes to Christ how much of the Bible does he know? *Probably not much.* A new believer’s immediate influences come from the Christians around him. Whether we like it or not, folks do follow “**US and the Lord.**” This is why we need to live godly. New Christians are watching us.

And “**having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.**”

The Church in Thessalonica was a wartime baby. It was birthed in the midst of hostility and persecution. When angry Jews stormed Jason’s house to arrest Paul, he wasn’t there, so they arrested the only Christians they could find. They charged Jason with “**aiding and abetting a criminal**” - made him post bail.

Like the babies in London in WW2, they were born in the midst of the bombings. Yet their “***much affliction***” couldn’t overshadow the “***joy of the Holy Spirit.***”

Once the chef for the Duke of Wellington resigned his post. When asked why he’d give up such a lucrative and prestigious position, he answered, “**When dinner is good the Duke never praises me, and when its bad he never blames me. It’s just not worthwhile.**”

Whether praised or blamed, the chef, at least, wanted to know that what he did matter... This is what the Thessalonians had found in Christ. Yes, their faith created a few enemies, but at least their lives counted!

They no longer felt worthless, insignificant. The joy of the Lord filled their hearts. They mattered to God!

The Thessalonians had even become examples to other churches - those in the regions of Macedonia and Achaia - *Macedonia was Philippi, Achaia was Corinth.*

Paul knew their testimony had reached Corinth. It was from there that he wrote them this letter.

Verse 8, “**For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth...**” literally, *blown like a trumpet blast...*

“**Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.**” News of their newfound faith had spread like wildfire. The YouTube video of the revival had gone viral. @Thessalonica was tracking number 1 on Twitter.

Paul even adds, and “**your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.**”

Everyone knew this church’s faith was legit.

In fact, Paul thinks back to their conversion, verse 9, “**For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...**”

The early Christians were saved from a polytheistic religious environment. The Romans, and Greeks before them, had a pantheon of various gods and goddesses. The great danger in the early church was for believers to think they could simply add Jesus to their already long list of gods. Paul makes it clear – to come to Christ you must “**turn to God from idols.**”

Jesus demands top shelf!

And idolatry is still a problem in modern times. We can turn anything - *an item, or ideal, or identity, or ideology* - into an idol. Anything in life we label all important, or preeminent - is essentially an idol. We teach idolatry to our kids when nothing - not even the worship of God - takes precedent over a sports event.

The same is true for us, as for the Thessalonians...

Coming to Christ is free – but you can't come toting a bag of other loves, and competing loyalties. Salvation costs only what you have to drop from your hand to grasp Jesus. Our Lord Jesus refuses to be an add-on.

Either He's Lord of all, or He's not Lord at all!

I like the statement, "Jesus didn't come to take sides. He came to takeover!" It's true! We need to turn from our idols to serve the living and true God!

Verse 10, "And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus..."

When figure skater Nancy Kerrigan performed in the 1994 Olympics, her mother had to press her nose against a television screen to see her daughter skate.

Nancy's mom was nearly blind, and could barely make out the the elegant and beautiful lines of her daughter's magnificent skating. A news reporter asked her what she could see, "Well, I can see some shapes, some color, and some movement when she jumps."

That's when Nancy's mom finally burst into tears. Sobbing profusely, she said to the reporter, "But I can't see her face. I can't see my daughter's face."

This is how I feel about Jesus. I can see His hand at work – the silhouette of His presence and power. I can see the Lord’s movement, but I can’t see His face - not yet! This is why I’m waiting for God’s Son from heaven.

I really want to see Him face to face.

And we’re told Jesus is He “**who delivers us from the wrath to come.**” This is why I believe the rapture of the church precedes the Great Tribulation. The Bible says it plainly, Jesus will “*deliver us from the wrath to come.*”

Chapter 2, “**For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.**”

Paul’s trip through Macedonia had been a wild ride. In Philippi he was arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail.

He traveled 100 miles to Thessalonica, figuring the locals would be a little friendlier - and the Greeks were, but not the Jews. They were fiercely opposed to his assertion that Jesus is the Messiah. Jews, along with some local businessmen who were concerned about how Christianity was cutting into the local idol-making trade, stirred up a riot that forced Paul out of town.

United Idol Workers, Local 405, realized Christianity was going to put them out of business. Indeed, the Gospel was being spread, amid “**much conflict.**”

“**For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.**” It reminds me of the conversation between the motorist and the mechanic...

Motorist: “What will it cost to repair my car?”

Mechanic: “*What’s wrong with it?*”

Motorist: “I don’t know.”

Mechanic: “*\$189.95*” When a mechanic knows the price before the problem - *beware!*... Unlike an unethical mechanic there was nothing dishonest or deceitful about Paul’s approach to ministry. His message didn’t come from error, or corrupt motives.

Verse 4, “*But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*”

Bill Cosby says, “*I don’t know the secret of success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.*” Try to please *everybody* and you end up pleasing *nobody*.

It’s like radio stations. Imagine a station that played all genres of music... *A polka song by Jimmy Dorsey... followed by some Motley Crue heavy metal... next up a rap by Jay-Z... then a Cary Underwood country... then Coldplay... then Frank Sinatra... then Free Bird... then Beethoven’s fifth symphony...* Who would listen?

Cater to *everybody* and you please *nobody*. God entrusted Paul with the Gospel because his only desire was to please God - not cater to the opinions of men.

“*For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know...*” When Mark Twain wrote his famous story, “*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,*” he dedicated his work to “*John Smith.*” On the credits page Twain wrote, “*John Smith, who I have known in diverse and sundry places and whose many and manifold virtues did always command my esteem.*”

Actually, Twain didn’t have one John Smith in mind.

He knew “*John Smith*” is the most popular name in the English language, and if only the *John Smiths* bought his story, it would be a best seller. So he appealed to human ego, and wrote his dedication.

Flattery might sell a short story, but it has no place in communicating the Gospel. In fact, the Gospel isn't very flattering – it starts out with “*we've sinned.*”

There's nothing we can do to be good enough for God. Our only hope is His grace. Grace slaps our pride in the face. It builds us up, by first tearing us down.

Try to make the Gospel palatable and tasteful, and it dilutes its power. You'll cripple what it does. Sharing the Gospel calls for *straight shooting*, not *buttering up*.

Nor did Paul wear a “*cloak for covetousness - God is witness.*” Paul wasn't out for people's money. He wasn't out to *fleece the flock*, but *feed the flock*.

Some of today's evangelists have one hand *pressing the person's forehead* and another *picking their pocket*.

When we serve Jesus there should be no ulterior motive. Serving Jesus should never be a means to an ends... *to ease your guilt – or put a notch in your belt – or fulfill your quota – or coax an offering...*

Paul continues to discuss his ministry in verse 6, “*Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others...*” *Have you ever done something for God so you could brag about it later?* This should never be our motive. Paul's goal was to glorify God, not himself.

Paul could've thrown his weight around, and insisted on his privileges. It was a first century custom for a church to provide a true apostle free room and board, but Paul refused to exercise his ministerial rights...

He says, "When we might have made demands as apostles of Christ, we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." Like a nursing mother Paul cared only for what he could do for the Thessalonians, not what they could do for him.

Paul had the heart of a true pastor.

Verse 8, "So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God." Rather than asking the church for privileges and perks, Paul supported himself financially with a secular job. He was willing to *moonlight to spread the light!*

Paul's critics had accused him of being dictatorial, but he reminds the Thessalonians of his gentleness. This is what we need today - *strong but gentle leaders.*

Paul continues, "You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Paul pastored like a parent. Good dads and good pastors have a lot in common.

Paul says he *“exhorted, comforted, and charged...”*

“Exhort” means *to correct*. This involves spanking a kid’s bottom... *“Comfort”* means *to encourage*. This includes a pat on his child’s back... And he *“charges”* or *challenges*. Here’s where you’ll see a dad taking his child by the hand and leading him forward...

Here’s where a dad should be... *In his kid’s face when he’s wrong. By his kid’s side when he’s weak. And a step ahead when it’s time for him to move...* And this also describes what a pastor does for his church!

And here’s Paul’s goal for the Thessalonians, verse 13, *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”*

How could Paul visit a city for a mere three weeks, hold a few Bible Studies, get run out of town on a rail, yet still leave behind a growing, vibrant church?

There’s one explanation. As Paul put it, *“The word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”* The Word works! *The Bible believed* changes lives.

Paul commends the Thessalonians for welcoming his testimony, *“not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.”* It takes two ingredients to complete a touchdown pass. A pinpoint throw, but also a sure-handed catch. And so it is with our salvation...

Paul was a great quarterback. He could pass on the Gospel, but the Thessalonians were good receivers.

By faith they *“received the word of God...”* And the careful reception of the Gospel transformed their lives.

Verse 14, *“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus.”*

Times of persecution create a sense of isolation – *“I’m the only one who’s ever been through this ordeal.”*

Paul assures the Thessalonians that’s not the case.

He points to the churches in Judea, *For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets...”* Whenever you think you’ve got it tough... remember there’s someone somewhere who’s worse off. The Thessalonians had been persecuted for three weeks. The Christians in Jerusalem and Judea had been hassled for 20 years.

I remember years ago learning about a young man named Kyle Maynard. He played 11 year-old football for Collins Hill. Kyle was a nose-guard, but what made his participation so unique, is that Kyle has no arms or legs. He would crawl across the field on his nubs.

I remember reading a quote from one of his teammates, *“Everyone has reasons to quit that aren’t as good as his reasons to quit. And he doesn’t quit.”*

When you think you’ve got it rough... Your family *rejects you*, your co-workers *ridicule you*, your boss *rides you* – think of the believers in the world tonight who are behind bars – being tortured for their faith.

Paul says the Jews in Jerusalem not only crucified Jesus, they also “persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.”

It’s not Anti-Semitic to say it – it’s true – that much of what the Jews have suffered through the ages is a direct result of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah, and their hostility toward the early church, and God’s grace.

Certainly, when it comes to the cross we’re all culpable – the Jews, the Romans, even you and me. It was for my sin, and your sin, that drove the nails into Jesus’ body. I’m not alleviating anyone of responsibility.

But the Jews who rejected Jesus bear a particular degree of guilt. This gets implied in John 1:11, “(Jesus) came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

The awful cry of the Jewish hierarchy before Pilate still echoes down the halls of history, “Crucify Him, crucify Him...His blood be on us and on our children.”

The sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans - the European Inquisitions and expulsions of the Jews in the Middle Ages - the pogroms in Eastern Europe - the German Holocaust - even the future Great Tribulation is part of God’s answer to that infamous request.

Paul realized that “*wrath had come upon the Jews to the uttermost...*” God still loves Israel, but their stubbornness has come at a steep price. Here’s a warning... **all stubbornness comes at a steep price!**

Verse 17, “**But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.**”

Therefore we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us.”

Note, Paul’s awareness of the spiritual warfare going on around him. Here a *simple visit* became a *spiritual battle*. He said, “*Satan hindered us.*” The term “*hinder*” refers to “*a road so broken up it’s impassable.*”

Satan can maneuver circumstances, tinker with engines, puncture tires. In a million ways he can engineer little distractions to keep you from making a visit, or bowing to pray, or getting your family to church.

Beware! What you’re tempted to chalk up as coincidence or happenstance might be another skirmish in the spiritual battle raging around you.

Verse 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? For you are our glory and joy.*” When it comes to eternal rewards the NT lists five crowns available to the faithful Christian...

1 Corinthians 9:24 mentions an “*incorruptible crown.*”

Revelation 2:10 speaks of a “*crown of life.*”

2 Timothy 4:8 lists a “*crown of righteousness.*”

1 Peter 5:4 describes a “*crown of glory.*”

And here the “*crown of rejoicing*” is awarded to Christians who are faithful witnesses. Paul’s reward in heaven is the presence of the Thessalonians – the Bobs, Bills, Bettys, Barbaras. Folks he won to Christ!

Before the throne of God every face will be cocked toward Jesus. We’ll be pouring out to the Lord the glory due His name. But at some point, Paul will peek...

He'll look out of the corner of his eye, and see the Thessalonians - and his heart will take great joy!

He'll know his witness had something to do with them being there! The Thessalonians are "*his hope, his joy, his crown!*" - Who's your "*crown of rejoicing?*"

Perhaps you've seen a movie, "*Mr. Holland's Opus.*"

Glen Holland gives up his aspirations to compose music - his own symphony - in order to teach school. At the end of his career his students return to say thanks for the contribution he's made to their lives.

One of his former students tells him, "*Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. We are the music of your life.*" This is how Paul felt about the Thessalonians and the people he influenced for Jesus.

And this will be *your opus*... the folks you touch with the Gospel of God's grace, and influence for Jesus.

Chapter 3, "*Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith...*"

Paul couldn't stand not knowing about the welfare of the Thessalonians, so he sent Timothy on a visit.

It's interesting that whenever Paul heard of a church fighting false doctrine he responded with a **letter** - but when the problem was persecution he sent a **leader**, a *person*. And here he sends them his sidekick, Timothy.

Paul realizes that a person who's suffering needs more than info and data - they need flesh and blood help. It takes personal contact to make a disciple.

Preaching stirs a person's faith and sees them saved, but *pastoring* is needed to help a person grow.

Books, CDs, and podcasts take us only so far - the point comes when interaction is required - personal discipleship is needed. Faith becomes personal when there's a person helping us apply it to our lives.

Notice too, Paul was willing to forego Timothy's friendship for a time, so he could go to Thessalonica.

And there's a lesson here for us... Paul would spend forever with Timothy, he wasn't so selfish that he couldn't let go of a friend to help the Thessalonians.

We too, should resist the urge to huddle up, only with folks we like. Let's keep reaching out to new believers.

Timothy was sent to encourage the Thessalonians, **“that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this...”**

If you follow Jesus you will be persecuted. Don't let it surprise you when it happens, **“For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.”** Even Jesus warned us, **“in the world you will have tribulation.”**

I love the observation, "Jesus promised three things to His disciples... **First**, they would be *ridiculously happy*... **Second**, they would be *completely fearless*... And **third**, they would be in *constant trouble*..."

Paul left Thessalonica because he himself was the flashpoint, and his departure might cool tempers - *but it didn't extinguish the opposition*. He knew persecution would continue to be directed toward the believers...

This is why he sent Timothy to check on the church. Verse 5, "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith."

Paul knew his enemies in Thessalonica had lied about him, and tried to discredit him. He was glad the believers had not been swayed. What a relief to hear of their continued faith in Christ, and their love for him.

"For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord."

It's not enough to have faith. We need to stand fast, and continue in our faith, and hold tightly to Jesus.

"For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see

your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?” And what does a hurting person need most?

Paul says he was passionately “*praying*” for them.

He also longs to see them, and hang out. Paul’s top concern is to “*perfect what is lacking in their faith.*”

Chapter 3 closes as Paul prays a blessing over the Thessalonians, verse 11, “*Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you...*” Paul tells us to pray for an “*increase*” - but not of *pay*, or *promotion*... but *love to one another*. Don’t pray for a *bigger nest egg* – pray for a *bigger heart!*

And this is a common prayer of mine. I grew up around people who had *a closed mind and a small heart*. Over the years I’ve prayed for *an open mind and a big heart*. I want to be big-hearted - a big-grace guy!

Never forget, we have a big-hearted God!

Verse 13, “*so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*”

Each chapter in 1 Thessalonians ends with a verse about the return of Jesus... The NT speaks more about Jesus’ second coming than almost any other subject.

And that’s what Paul elaborates on in chapter 4...