



Sermon Discussion Questions
April 21, 2024

Like a Thief in the Night

LOVE AND HOLINESS

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1. **Opening Discussion Questions** (in a group setting you will probably only want to do one of these questions)
 - a. Was there ever a time when you really wanted, perhaps even needed, to see a friend with whom you share fond memories but had not seen for a long time? To the extent that you feel comfortable, share about the experience. How long had it been since you last saw your friend? Had you been keeping in touch? Based on this experience do you subscribe to the old adage: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder"?
 - b. Who was the Sunday school teacher (of if you did not attend Sunday School as a child schoolteacher) that you would say had the greatest influence on you growing up? What did they do that you found most influential? As you grew older did you ever find yourself imitating that teacher's style or behavior? Can you identify anyone upon whom you feel you have had a similar influence?
2. **Sermon Outline/Key Points**
 - a. Paul Rejoiced in the Thessalonians' Spiritual Condition (1 Thessalonians 3:6-11)
 - i. Because they were quickly run out of Thessalonica, Paul was concerned about the new Christians left behind.
 - ii. Paul rejoiced in their spiritual growth.
 - b. Overflow with Love - Jesus is Coming (1 Thessalonians 3:12)
 - i. As you await Jesus, let the Holy Spirit cause you to overflow with love.
 - ii. Increase in love for other Christians.
 - iii. Abound in love for all.
 - c. Be Firm in Holiness - Jesus is Coming (1 Thessalonians 3:13)
 - i. We are declared holy by Christ.
 - ii. In response to God's grace, let the Holy Spirit actually make you holy as you wait for Jesus.
3. **Study/Discussion Points:**
 - a. **Sunday Afternoon** – As soon as possible after listening to the sermon set aside some time to ponder these questions prayerfully:
 - i. What one thing most stood out to you in this sermon?
 - ii. What new truth did you learn or of what truth were you reminded?
 - iii. After listening to the sermon, is there a Scripture passage you feel led to meditate on or commit to memory this week?
 - iv. What is one specific thing you feel God is leading you to do after hearing this message?
 - v. Did God convict you of a need to make any changes in your life and walk with Him?

b. Monday – Paul Rejoiced in the Thessalonians’ Spiritual Condition

- i. As we start this new series in the latter half of 1 Thessalonians it would be good to review the events surrounding Paul’s ministry there. Read Acts 17:1-13.
 1. If you have access to a Bible atlas or have maps in the back of your Bible locate Thessalonica on the route of Paul’s second missionary journey.
 2. Amphipolis was about thirty miles from Philippi, where Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned. Apollonia was another 30 miles away, making both logical places to spend the night. Why do you think there is no mention of any missionary work in these cities?
 3. Why did Paul preach in the synagogue first (see Acts 13:46-47)?
 4. How would you describe the results of Paul’s preaching? What results might have been unexpected?
- ii. There is likely a considerable time break between verse 4 and 5. How do these passages indicate that Paul spent much longer than three weeks in Thessalonica?
 1. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9
 2. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20
 3. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2
 4. Philippians 4:16

c. Tuesday – Paul Rejoiced in the Thessalonians Spiritual Condition (1 Thessalonians 3:6-11)

- i. Considering the results of Paul’s ministry recorded in Acts 17:5-10a do you think he had valid reasons to be concerned about the Thessalonians’ spiritual condition?
 1. How might the situation Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 have contributed to his concern?
 2. If you, as a new Christian, had been one of the “other believers” the mob dragged with Jason before the city officials how do you think it would have affected your faith?
- ii. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17 – 3:5.
 1. How would you describe Paul’s feelings about the church in Thessalonica based on what he wrote in 2:17-20? How would you feel if you received such a letter/email today?
 2. How does 3:1-5 change or amplify what you think Paul is feeling about the Thessalonians? What was Paul’s primary concern and fear?
 3. We’re used to instantaneous communications. Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica, over 300 miles away, and then moved on to Corinth where he stayed for a year and a half. How long do you imagine he might have had to wait for Timothy to return and eventually locate him?
- iii. Once Timothy had returned with good news how long did it seem Paul waited to write the Thessalonians? What do verses 4:18 and 5:11 suggest was one of the factors that motivated Paul’s urgency in responding?

d. Wednesday – Paul rejoiced in their spiritual growth.

- i. Read the focal passage, I Thessalonians 3:6-13 several times, from different translations if possible.

1. What is the general tone of these verses? How does it compare with the tone of 2:17-3:5 that was read yesterday?
 2. What is the significance of starting this passage with “But”?
 3. This is the only place in the New Testament where Paul uses this specific Greek word, *euangelizomai*, translated “good news” for anything other than the gospel’s Good News. What does that suggest about how he felt about the message Timothy delivered?
 4. What does the mutual desire to see each other described in 3:6b suggest about how we should live in an America increasingly characterized by independence and isolation?
- ii. Verse 8 tells us that the Thessalonians were “standing firm in the Lord” even though after Paul, Silas and Timothy left they apparently had no experienced “pastor” and lived in the face of significant opposition/persecution.
1. Although your answer will be hypothetical, what do you think accounts for their continuing in the faith? According to Acts 17:2 what resource did they have?
 2. What resource not mentioned in the Acts 17 account did they, and all Christians, have?
 3. Assuming that the Old Testament Scriptures available in the synagogue were a major factor in their ability to remain faithful in trying circumstances, what does it suggest about the importance and emphasis we should place on the Old Testament today?
- e. **Thursday** – *Paul rejoiced in their spiritual growth.*
- i. Start by reading 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 again.
 1. What is Paul’s primary response to the good news Timothy has delivered (see verses 9 and 10)?
 2. What does the frequency and intensity of Paul’s prayers suggest about the importance he is giving the Thessalonians? What does the fact that Paul is doing this while in the midst of a difficult ministry in Corinth suggest about what our prayer life should look like?
 3. Despite the fact that they had Scriptures to study what does Paul’s statement at the end of verse 10 suggest about their spiritual growth?
 4. While we have the full Bible what does Paul’s statement suggest about the importance of preaching and teaching in our lives?
 - ii. Even as Paul rejoiced in the good news of their continued faith, he recognized that all Christians need to continue that growth – we will never reach perfection until Christ returns. Read these passages and discuss what growth we should be striving to accomplish in our lives:
 1. Ephesians 4:11-13
 2. Ephesians 4:3 and Romans 15:5-6
 3. Romans 14:9
 4. 1 Corinthians 2:6-7 and Colossians 1:28-29
 5. Ephesians 3:17b-19
- f. **Friday** – *Overflow with Love - Jesus is Coming.*

- i. Focus today on 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.
 - 1. After telling the Thessalonians in verse 10 that he is praying Paul proceeds to do just that in verses 11-13. What three specific things does Paul ask of God?
 - 2. What does it mean to you that Paul prays that God would “direct our way”? What would that suggest about how Paul chooses what to do and where to go (see Acts 16:6-10)?
 - 3. While we have no actual record of Paul returning to Thessalonica Acts 20:1-2 suggests a possible opportunity. Even if he never made it back what does Acts 20:3-5 suggest about his on-going relationship with the church there?
- ii. Paul’s second request was not that God strengthen their faith but that they would “increase and abound in love”. Why do you think he prayed about their love?
 - 1. The increase Paul prays for includes “for all” (“for everyone else” in the NIV). Who would this include and why would Paul want them to love that way (see John 13:35)?
 - 2. How might Paul’s use of himself as an example have helped the Thessalonians’ love to “increase and overflow”? How can you help love to increase within your family, church or Thrive group?
 - 3. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3. What was God’s answer to this prayer?
- g. **Saturday – Be Firm in Holiness - Jesus is Coming.**
 - i. Read Paul’s prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 again.
 - 1. What is Paul’s third request of God?
 - 2. What does it mean to you to “be blameless”? Consider these passages:
 - a. 1 Corinthians 1:7-9
 - b. Ephesians 1:3-5
 - c. Philippians 1:9-11
 - d. Philippians 2:14-16
 - ii. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 1:28-31. Discuss how it is that we can in fact become “blameless and holy”.
 - iii. With what promise of future hope does Paul end his prayer?

4. **Application:**

- a. The Bible describes love as being practical and involving action – not just emotional good feelings. Spend time this week reading James and making notes of practical suggestions for putting love into action.
- b. Think of two or more other Christians who need encouragement this week. What might you do to help them? When can you do this?

5. **Prayer Points:**

- a. Adoration – Psalms 8:1 and 29:1-2
- b. Confession – Proverbs 28:13 and 1 John 1:8-10
- c. Thanksgiving – Psalms 95:1-2 and 100:4-5
- d. Supplications – Matthew 21:22 and John 16:19