

Holiness In The Light of Christ's Return

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Date: 30 July 2023

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[0 : 0 0] While you have your Bibles open, friends, at 1 Thessalonians, it's a very useful thing if you're going to try and expound the Scripture to know what the book you're dealing with is about.

In other words, context, context, context, context. Otherwise, the Bible can mean anything. You can mean the Bible mean anything, unless you take the context and be faithful to the context.

So to set the context for 1 Thessalonians, I would like to read just a few verses from two places to see what's in the mind of the apostle through whom God wrote the letter to instruct his relatively new Christians, the Thessalonian brothers and sisters.

The first one is chapter 3, 12 to 13, in the book of 1 Thessalonians. Just verse 11, 12, and 13 of chapter 3.

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

[1 : 2 3] May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

That's the context. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're expecting him soon.

Two thousand years ago. Let me read the second section. Chapter 4, 16 to 18. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

[2 : 5 5] If you're a Christian this morning, you'll be encouraged by that. We've just sang at the fall of all the nations. Don't tell me you're looking at the world today and saying to yourself, the world's a wonderful state.

Some nations are going through hell on earth, so to speak. Christians are being killed regularly in some nations. And we're going down the drain here.

Because when morals go, everything goes. Absolute morals come from the law of God.

And when you put aside the law of God to lawlessness, there's no anchor for anyone. That's why we don't trust each other anymore in this country.

Trust is gone. Very little trust left. You go on to look at your account on your phone.

[4 : 0 2] I wonder how many thousand people are looking at my account at the same time as me. We don't trust anybody because there is a lawlessness.

lawlessness. Lawlessness that comes from within.

You can't blame anyone else. Oh, the devil will take advantage. Like, he's a liar from the beginning. You can't believe a word he says.

And when the Lord comes, everything's going to be put in place. Him as well. These key texts for Thessalonians are to counsel believers who heard the gospel, who heard the gospel sincerely listening.

I want to ask you a question. If you value something, how do you treat it? over against something you don't value.

[5 : 31] If you value a person over against others, how do you treat them? You're judging yourself now.

I'm not judging you. You're thinking in yourself as I'm thinking in myself. If I value something, why do I value it?

Why do I value that person? But even values get changed when morals go.

Because when morals go, everything falls apart. Well, that's fine for you. You want to believe that? You believe that. That's true for you.

Forget it. I think it's a load of rubbish. The respect, the trust, the fragmentation, the disintegration. When Paul writes to these Thessalonian Christians, he has such a sense of thanksgiving.

[6 : 53] Thanksgiving to the Lord for their faith. For their faith. Because they valued the gospel when they heard it and took it into their heart.

Can you bring up that section, Stephen, where it says a cause of thanksgiving? Can you do that now? Now, we're going to concentrate on one verse.

1 Thessalonians 2, verse 13. That is our verse. Verse 13, And we also thank God continually.

He thanks God ceaselessly, continually, because they received the Word of God from the apostles, and he sees it still in their life.

As a Christian, a bunch of Christians seeking to witness, seeking to serve, he sees them as a fellowship, and he's delighted constantly at the way they have held on to the gospel and see themselves as servants of the Lord.

[8 : 15] That is a tremendous thing to know. And it's something that anyone here who has been born again by the Spirit of God should rejoice in. Rejoice in the fact that the faith of others, our brothers and sisters, here and wherever, that should be an occasion of joy to us.

It should be an occasion of joy to be thinking, Oh God, I thank you, I've got his fellowship, her fellowship, their fellowship, because it's very difficult, it's getting more difficult now, to be a faithful, open-minded, free-speaking, witnessing Christian.

And you need your brothers and sisters, you need for them to pray for you, the need for them to come and say, could you pray for me because I am the need.

They need to have somebody to come to. They want to come, they'll come to their brothers and sisters. Because there, they're seeing life from the same pair of eyes, the Holy Spirit guiding towards holiness.

And that's what the Lord wants to see when he returns. Do you know what it says at the end of the book of Hebrews? Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

[9 : 42] No one. Your brothers and sisters are very important to you. Mine are very important to me.

Any brother or sister here, I know I can share the things of the Lord with them. Paul is delighted constantly, continually, ceaselessly, when you receive the word of God, boy, did you take it to heart.

Now let me ask you a question. You're attending church. Here you are. It happens to be that I'm the preacher this morning. It could be our pastor, Cal.

It could be others. What are you doing with that word that's coming to you? What are you doing with it when it comes?

Do you value it? If you don't welcome, if I don't welcome the word of God as the word of God, but as the word of a man, you don't value it.

[10 : 57] And it will be of no benefit to you. It will be of no value to you unless you welcome the word of God as the Holy Spirit speaks, the man speaks, but God's message is what is happening.

You receive it. Do you value it? Because if you don't, it will be of no value to you. How does God know you value it? By the faith in which you receive it.

The word of God has been preached. Well, look at the Bible. 2,000 years, 3,000 years, 4,000 years, 5,000 years, 6,000 years.

Constantly. And then to Abraham's children through Israel, then through the Messiah, through the apostles, all the way through the centuries, the last 2,000 years, into the rest of the world.

And people have sat under the word of God and done nothing with it. But say, that was a nice service. Thanks for that message, Bill. And that's happening all over the world, wherever the gospel is preached.

[12 : 14] But, for those people who hear the word of God preached, and they combine it with faith, they're going to value that.

And it will be meaningful for them. Now, you could be sitting here this morning. Happens everywhere. Let's not pretend. Nominality, in name only, is a normal word.

Why are you here? Jesus Christ is coming again. That's the context of this counsel from the Apostle Paul.

The Lord is coming soon. Now, a thousand years is a day to the Lord. So, it's only two days since he went back to heaven. What are you doing with it?

Will you leave this place? Yeah, they're nice people in the Baptist Church of Bells Hill. That won't help you when you stand before Christ. We're glad to see you. But you need to receive the word of God and combine it with faith for it to have any value to you.

[13 : 26] Otherwise, you're just accepting it as a man speaking, not as God's word to you. And that's the point of the Bible being given to us.

The Lord Jesus Christ was prepared in heaven, then came to earth. The word of God was prepared in heaven, then was given to the earth. But the intention in both cases is for human beings to go to heaven when he comes.

Often I think we talk about going to heaven, but nobody goes to heaven. We're taken to heaven. We don't go to heaven.

Jesus said in John 14 in those well-known verses, then I will come back and take you to myself so that you can be where I am. We are taken to heaven.

We don't go on our own strength. We have no strength before God. These Thessalonian Christians had suffered almost from the day they were born again.

[14 : 40] The anti-Gentile Jew and the Jew who wasn't interested in anything but his own idols. But they left all these idols to go to the true God when they heard the gospel.

And Paul is delighted because, could you put that second point up, Stephen, please? because it was the word of God they received and not the word of man.

Now, Paul may have been a great personality. He may have stood up the front and everybody would have said, what a lovely personality. But Christianity is not a personality cult.

anyone standing up here is a servant. And if you're a Christian, so are you.

It's the word of God which is a revelation, an unveiling of God's purposes to us. I was 22 when I became a Christian.

[15 : 49] I'd never had a Bible in my life. My first Bible was given to me once I was saved to begin to get to know the God who had spoke to me and turned me towards him.

The word of God. Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven in John 17. Sanctify them by your word.

Your word is truth. And then he said, Father, for their sake I sanctify myself that they too may be sanctified.

Holiness. Holiness. is our criteria for heaven. Holiness. Lowliness. Faith in the Lord.

He's preparing them for the Lord's coming and putting them in the place where they are holy and lowly and obedient and serving and waiting and trusting.

[17 : 04] But the word of God is the constant through the Spirit where they grow in grace and knowledge and knowledge of the Lord and so become sanctified. We sin less though we're never sinless and we become more like the Savior and holiness develops.

The Lord is coming again. Never forget this. the Lord is going to come back. We're going to see him.

It's going to be astonishing. We've never seen anything like it. even those men at the Transfiguration Mount.

We'll never have seen anything like when he comes back. But remember this. It wasn't the direction of the Father when he spoke from the cloud to say to Peter, James, and John listen to Elijah listen to Moses no this is my beloved son.

Listen to him. And when he comes again you won't have any choice but to listen to him.

[18 : 37] But you do have the choice now in this part of your life while you are alive to hear the word of God and there you can see it in front of you.

Please don't be careless with it. If you value it from God then combine it with faith when it comes into your heart and mind. Because the combining it with faith is telling God his revelation to you.

You've accepted it as his word. Not the word of the preacher. Not the word of a man. But God speaking through him. and the preacher may not even know but you'll know as I did.

And that brings on repentance and faith and lowliness and a desire to trust Christ. Wonderful as our Savior and Lord.

They this cause of thanksgiving Paul was delighted with the response of these Thessalonian believers and the word they received. But the important distinction is the reason why it was so fruitful for them was it was not the word of a man.

[19 : 59] It was the word of God. Now you know and I know in the world there are religions pin a penny. and there are even large religions called quote unquote Christianity.

And it's very obvious that it's not just the scripture they're depending on their teaching for. It's the scripture plus tradition and convention and the words of philosophers and the words of theologians and the words of this one and that one all through the last thousand two thousand years.

But the true church of Jesus Christ is not built on anything but the word of God. And Christ became the word of God.

That we might see what God is like in his love and grace towards us. That important distinction is what it says in verse 13 you accepted it not as a human word but as it actually is the word of God which is indeed at work in you who believe.

If you're a believer this morning the word of God. That seed that was sown in your soil all those years ago you may have been a child.

[21 : 26] That seed that's sown is producing fruit 30 60 100. And I say to any of you here who are not the Lord's be careful of the cares of this world.

Be careful of the deceitfulness of wealth. Be careful of so many things that you can turn into what you're aiming to live for because if it's not the Lord himself and the word he gives you it doesn't lead to eternal life.

When he comes the sheep and the goats are going to be separated. The Thessalonian Christians that important distinction is what set them apart in Paul's mind.

Well done he said. If you go to Acts 17 if you have time and some time that you'll see the history of the Bereans and the Thessalonians. And it says there that the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they took the word of God and they examined it.

And the Greek men and prominent women and the men and the women among the Jews that believed. They all began to say we want to hear more. We want to. And the Lord wonderfully worked amongst those that probably Paul as a human being he would never have expected it.

[23 : 09] He's delighted with these people. So he should be. He gave his life as a humble servant for the Lord.

Friends remember this important distinction. please don't leave here this morning and talk about me. I'm not interested in that.

When you leave here think about what the Lord's word says. That's why I read the key verses from Thessalonians telling you the purpose of the letter.

And if you're a believer take encouragement from the fact that you've got so many believers around you. There will be believers in many countries in this world today who are afraid to say they're a believer.

Or they're meeting in the dark. They can't put the light on in case someone comes in and finds them praying to Jesus. That's a fact of life for some people now.

[24 : 18] So in these dark troublesome lawless times and one has got to feel for the young my goodness that the Lord will reveal himself to them and they will be able to discern this is what I need and they will combine it with faith.

Because if they combine it with faith it will be of value to them. It's of no value to you if you don't combine God's word with faith.

Faith is the key grace from God that opens up your life to him. Not our gifts but the gift of faith to trust and obey.

For there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. And the Holy Spirit feeds us on his word and we become to love the word and read the word maybe personally.

There may be people today who can't attend church because they're too ill. But I know there will be many of them reading their Bible at home because that tells them the truth, gives them the light and the encouragement and the understanding and the way of dealing with their suffering and they think of the Savior and their comfort.

[26 : 02] So friends, the effective result is what really has to happen. The effective result.

result. I remember the first Bible studies I was in in Drum Chapel Baptist Church. Having my Bible, I could find the Gospels and I was a grown man in a qualified ship's plater.

But I couldn't have taken you anywhere from the Bible. And it was the most amazing thing when sitting in the room and one of the fellowship would come over and say, Bill, when I'll help you?

And we'd find Ezra. we'd find Ezekiel. And that makes a great point for me because you know what Ezekiel was told by the Lord? When Ezekiel took his word to the people, he was told by the Lord, you know what you sound like to them?

You sound like a guy who can play a musical instrument well, who can sing a nice song, but they actually are not listening.

[27 : 14] That was what he likened the hearers to. The prophet sounded like an entertainer. The word of God, they were listening.

So this morning, you know, in a worship time, please take thought for your own spiritual condition before God.

Is it coming to you as the word of a man, or is it the truth of the word of God? God. And remember the effective result it had on the Thessalonians.

Gideas and I never heard Carl's message from last week until the second part of this week, when we sat down and listened to it. And when I listened to it, I thought, Carl, the word the Lord has given me is just like a follow-on from where you were last week, I thought to myself, God bless you.

And that's really what I'm doing, I think, after he spoke about Elijah and the widow and all the rest of it, and it was the word of God they followed, the word of God they followed, the word of God.

[28 : 30] All I'm really on about this morning is the application of that word to our lives. If it's going to be effective, it must be combined with faith.

if this is just a religious act, forgetting the Holy Spirit gave us the word, it will be of no value to you.

I pray that this morning you will not be careless, but teachable, receptive.

and your response will not be shallow, or indifferent, or forgetful, or your heart going hard against what the Lord claims on you.

I pray that you will think sensitively, and realize the privilege it is to have the freedom to hear the word of God publicly, and value it for how precious it is, and how costly it was to the Lord Jesus Christ to actually live it out as the Messiah, prophet, priest, and king, and saviour of mankind.

[30 : 07] Please, we may never meet again, let's be honest, the next hour is not known to you, or me, but you will meet the Lord, whether you want to, or whether you don't.

When you're His, He says, wow, that's just overwhelming. Please. And my thanks to Stephen and to Alan for helping me through, for Robert through the worship.

Let me just, I want to just in closing, go to the book of Hebrews, and read you three separate verses.

You don't need to read, follow them all up. It might be better simply if you listen. But I'm going to begin at chapter 4, verse 2, in Hebrews.

for we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did.

[31 : 17] He's talking about the Old Testament Israelites. But the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.

this is a writer to the Hebrews guiding the persecuted Jews who become Christians through the difficult times.

12, 14 of Hebrews, make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy.

Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. God. And the next chapter, the last chapter, verse 20, now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant, brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. When the sheep see the shepherd, they know they're looking at the one who knows their needs and leads them and feeds them.

[32 : 52] Those of us who are his this morning recognize the great shepherd of the sheep. He knows our needs, he will lead us, and he will feed us. The question is, are you one of his flock?

If that's the word of God to you this morning, if it's not, combine what you've heard with faith in him, and forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection when Christ comes, will be yours.

I'm going to ask Robert, brother, would you just have a word of prayer at the moment before we sing our final hymn, Robert? father... Do it knowing how many what...