

# 1 Thessalonians 1:1

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[ 0 : 00 ] explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, This is the Messiah, Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you.

Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.

While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. When they could not find them there, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests.

They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus. The people in the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go.

Now 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 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.

[ 1 : 23 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. Well, it is a joy to be with you as spring truly gets underway, and the great glories of Easter are now a week behind us, and the wonderful months of Chicago spread out before us, and we hope they will go slowly from now through October.

Today marks, in some sense, the beginning of the spring in our city, and it certainly marks the advent of our spring sermon series.

And for the next 11 weeks, we will be finding our way into the text of 1 Thessalonians. And given the season of year, I'd just like you to envision these coming 11 weeks as an 11-week-long outdoor walk through the streets and the surrounding countryside of an ancient and long-admired city, Thessalonica.

I want to introduce this letter to us today by way of three simple words, by way of place and preachers and people.

And in doing so, hope that it will acclimate us to its own terrain and that really, in some sense, you would begin, as a consequence of today, to already feel the breezes, almost the salt breezes, as it were, resting upon you the context of this letter.

[ 3 : 22 ] Thessalonica holds a primacy of place. for at least two reasons. One, regarding it as a locale.

And secondly, in regard to this letter. I want to speak, first of all, about its primacy of place regarding its locale. It was first among all Macedonian cities.

Thessalonica served as the capital city of all Macedonia. In stature, then, it was elevated above cities like Berea or Amphipolis or Apollinaria as we, Apollinaria as we have already seen.

Even above the well-heeled city of Philippi, which received so much publicity in the church through the ages.

Thessalonica was a primacy of place among them all. It was stationed along the northernmost parts of the Aegean Sea.

[ 4 : 36 ] If you have a Bible that has maps in the back, this might be a good week to take a look and acclimate yourself to where it was stationed. It was settled nicely then into this kind of Mediterranean climate.

and it would have been an important port of call right on the water's edge. And so, as a consequence, it was strategically placed as a first-century center of influence.

One of the interesting things about Thessalonica in regard to it being a primacy of place was it stood somewhat at the midway point of the historic Ignatian Way or a road that stretched some 700 or so miles giving access in a sense for Rome and then a short ride across the waters and then 700 miles of Ignatian Way ending in the far distant area and vicinity of the Black Sea.

Think of it in American terms as a roadway that would have connected Chicago in distance at any rate all the way down to nearly Atlanta.

But rather than being landlocked in the middle of a country, the destinations of the Ignatian Way were on two different coasts. So it would be similar to in a sense taking a road from New York to L.A.

[ 6 : 16 ] and in the middle of it all strategically situated the great city of Chicago. This was the primacy of place for Thessalonica.

The road had been built in the second century B.C.E. It was nineteen and a half feet wide. It was made of great strong stone underneath and overlaid with hard sand.

It was the freeway of the first century world. And intentionally Thessalonica found its way near the midpoint.

Thessalonica was also called at various times in history Thessalonica. And it was founded in 314 B.C.E.

by King Cassandra of Macedon. And upon founding it he named it after his wife Thessaloniki who by the way was the half-sister of Alexander the Great.

[ 7 : 18 ] So you have this great storied city situated strategically in that first century world.

And I love the fact that Thessalonica was its name. For residents of Hyde Park the restaurant on the corner of 57th and Blackstone stands as our own local representation of this storied city.

Now this primacy of place then accounts in some measure for why Paul and Silvanus and Timothy would want to plant the gospel there.

I remember being highly influenced by a writer missiologist of the 20th century Roland Allen in his small book Paul's Missionary Methods East.

And he writes of the strategic places from which the gospel can run and how it was that Paul situated the gospel in the first century so that the gospel would run.

[ 8 : 35 ] Think of it running along that road to the east and the west. Roland Allen writes in his hands that is the apostle they became that is strategic cities sources of rivers mints from which the new coin of the gospel was spread in every direction.

They were centers from which he could start new work with new power. And so as we just warm up to the book today by way of introduction and we think of it in regard to being a primary place for the gospel there will be much for us to learn in regard to how the gospel might spread even if God wills it that it would take root among us in this city.

It was first not only in regard to locale it was first in regard to the fact of being a letter first among Paul's letters. This is a great thing to understand before we enter the work itself.

It is the earliest of all we have in the New Testament from the pen of the apostle Paul. The earliest in other words it is dated and universally accepted as such to be written somewhere between 49 and 50 AD.

Very very near the resurrection itself. Let me show you the temporal marker in 1 Thessalonians hopefully you have the text open in chapter 3 there is a temporal marker that helps us and assists us in dating it.

[ 10 : 26 ] 3 1 and 2 therefore when we could bear it no longer we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone and we sent Timothy our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith.

An interesting point there Paul speaking of the time in history when he was at Athens alone and as a consequence sending Timothy back to Thessalonica the place from which he had come to get a report so that in chapter 3 verse 6 but now that Timothy has come to us from you and received that report Paul begins to write.

I'd like you to turn back to Acts 17 and you might keep both of these texts open at least today by some helpful way of introduction Acts 17 of course is the moment when Paul had undertaken what is commonly referred to today as his second missionary journey and it is the second missionary journey that brings him in chapter 17 1-9 to Thessalonica and from there to Berea and from Berea it reads in verse 15 those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible they departed so Paul finds his way into Athens in that great Athenian discourse which we looked at over three consecutive Sundays last summer but after Paul is in Athens where does he go next chapter 18 he finds his way to

Corinth and in verse 5 Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia so if we are trying to reconstruct the history of this travel Paul is in Thessalonica for a brief period of time he moves on from there to Berea very shortly into Athens and then into Corinth Timothy and Silas catch up to him on the back side of that journey and he sends Timothy back because he was compelled to leave Thessalonica under the cover of darkness long before he wished to depart and receiving a report from him he now picks up his pen and writes and therefore it has a primacy of place first among Paul's letters I want to say a couple of things about that first in regard to its timing and second in regard to the great tenets of the Christian faith that we find in this primitive material there is some question as to how long

Paul was in Thessalonica if you just took the Acts account where Luke records for us in verse two Paul went in as was his custom and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures and then he goes on in his account to state that a great stir was made and he's forced to depart and so you might think that he was in Thessalonica a short time as short as three weeks or even less than three weeks three Sabbaths perhaps fifteen days were it not for the only other place in the scriptures outside of Acts or Thessalonians where we have reference to his work there Philippians chapter four verse six and I think it's important for you to at least see this before we get underway into the letter because the fullness of what he accomplished while among the church there

[ 14 : 22 ] I think accounts for a bit longer time than merely three weeks Philippians four and verse sixteen Paul writes even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again now remember he had been into Philippi before coming to Thessalonica so there is some sense where once he arrives the church in Philippi hears of it they know he's in great need he has very little with him he was escorted out of Thessalonica under the cover of darkness and Berea not much longer they bring a gift to him and return home they evidently have enough time to bring another gift to him and return home furthermore in the letter itself when we'll see it unfolded Paul will commend to them his own model of Christian life as exemplary for them in their own life and that of course would need perhaps to be established longer than just having been in their presence fourteen to eighteen days so that said how long was he there somewhere between three weeks and probably not more than four months or so a brief time in

Thessalonica before he writes this first of Christian letters back one of the things that's interesting not only about the timing but I want to say something about the tenets of the Christian faith I love this letter as I've been reading it and preparing because while it is early the earliest all the foundational tenets of the Christian message that have carried the church throughout all the centuries are already in place nothing missing so that in Acts 17 you actually see he is in the synagogues arguing and reasoning trying to make a case for the death and resurrection of Jesus according to the scriptures and that this Jesus is that Christ and the accusation that came to him while in Thessalonica was that he had been purporting that there was one who had all authority all rule indeed over Caesar so the message that comes forth from the apostolic witness from the very beginning is that

Jesus rose from the dead and that his death was substitutionary in nature and that he was the fulfillment of all the promises of the Hebrew scriptures and that as a consequence God has given him a name that is above every name all authority in the letter itself we will see the basic tenets of the Christian faith that not only does he have all authority but there is already a call to repentance and faith chapter 1 verse 9 he speaks of how they turned from idols to the living and true God the subject of repentance already in place at the earliest Christian preaching what's fascinating in the letter and we'll see it is this eschatological angst that is cast upon the letter every chapter in 1st Thessalonians ends with a discussion on the coming wrath of God and the return of Christ so within just a few short months in their midst he spoke to them about the fullness of the gospel message even all the way down to a manner of life that Christians ought to be living who have come to faith in

Christ isn't that wonderful how firm a foundation is laid for your faith in his most excellent word that this primitive early letter to the church holds the centrality of Christ and the climax of Christ and the ascendant rule of Christ and the return of Christ and the need to repent in order to come into relationship with God through Christ and his second coming it's all there nothing needed to be added later we've been preaching this message from the very beginning Thessalonica place of primacy on two fronts as a location in first century world and as a letter for the Christian church let me say a word of introduction today in regard to the second heading preachers

I want to say a couple of things about the preachers who came proclaiming the gospel message take a look back at first Thessalonians chapter one the writers are introduced chapter one verse one a Paul Silvanus and Timothy the writers of the letter in a sense are three in number I think this is significant especially for a church like ours who considers itself desirous of throwing the gospel out from this place well how do you throw it out well through those who can proclaim the word and it is better to go in a team than on your own Paul did very little on his own he went with a team a competent team and they are named here Silvanus and Timothy the letter is from the three of them we don't normally think of that when we think of the

[ 20 : 17 ] Pauline corpus but look at the personal plural pronouns they are there a plenty chapter one verse two we give thanks it goes throughout you can see it just a sampling chapter two verse one for you yourselves brothers know what our that our coming to you was not in vain verse five for we never came with words of flattery verse nine for you remember brothers our labor and toil whose labor the three Paul Silvanus and Timothy chapter two verse seventeen but since we were torn away from you three one when we could no longer bear it and then you do get this kind of Pauline moment where he stands in the fullness of the composition of this letter in chapter three in verse six for this reason when I could bear it no longer

I sent to learn about your faith but Paul is not writing on his own and I want to say a couple of things about these preachers first they had to be learned in regard to handling God's word but there are other characteristics about them that we should know by way of introduction and I want to emphasize Silvanus because Timothy is so often emphasized as the apprentice of Paul and indeed he will come back into the letter later in a significant way and so we'll leave him to the side for a moment as a young man in training of course he came his way into this journey in Acts 16 by way of Paul's excursus into Lystra and Derbe but Silvanus had been with Paul earlier on and you learn that Silvanus was not only learned in regard to

God's word but he was a leading man among the brethren this this is one of the characteristics of what you ought to be looking for whenever you go anywhere in the world and are looking for a pastor or a man to plant a work they should be a rising up and out of the work recognized as a leading person among the brethren take a look back Acts 15 is the first time we are acquainted with Silvanus also known as Silas or if you want to shorten it even further sigh but in Acts 15 at that great council it seemed good to the apostles verse 22 and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas they sent Judas called Barsabbas and Silas here he is here's the phrase leading men among the brothers a wonderful phrase leading a leading man among the brothers he was a leader then in the

Jerusalem church this is a church that held all the weight of the apostolic inertia before Paul moves it so among all the apostles among the mother load of all churches until Antioch really supplants it Silas was a leading man in that kind of congregation he was a man among men known for his Christian character and in this sense he separates himself from Timothy he's much more Paul's equal than he is under and so he weds himself to Paul and they are in the harness together for the proclamation of the gospel and evidently not only was he a leading man among the brothers he was able to preach take a look later at verse 32 of Acts 15 and Judas and Silas who were themselves prophets encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words he was capable of a long sermon that strengthened and encouraged the troops he was a man of

God's word not only that we know through his journeys through the pen of Luke that he knew how to handle opposition it was while they were in Philippi that you have that momentous record of them healing a young woman who had been relegated to making money for others and after being set free they lost their livelihood and they grabbed Silas and they grabbed Paul and look what it is they do to them in Acts 16 they begin to attack them verse 22 to tear the garments off of them and gave orders to beat them with rods and when they had afflicted many blows!

[ 25 : 41 ] upon them we think of Paul's blows and the marks for the gospel Silas wore those scars too and then they threw him into jail and told the jailer to keep them safely and what was his demeanor in the midst of a suffering servant don't you love it verse 25 about midnight Paul and Silas were praying!

singing hymns to God these are the kind of people God uses to advance his kingdom in the hearts of men and women along in an Ignatian way or any other place where God might bring you elevated within the context of the local assembly capable of handling God's word able to withstand severe opposition being a person of prayer and song voice lifting up in the night the praises of God these are great great characteristics I think of what often holds my mind the influence of our church on young minds at a formative season of life that will do great good for the gospel over the next 30 40 50 years these are the kinds of people we need to grow from our own midst people like

Silas and Timothy so not only was he learned in regard to God's word not only was he leading man among the brethren with all of those characteristics involved but this also is critical they possessed these three a love and an affection for people they were people kinds of people that's one of the uniquenesses of this letter and we're going to see it unfold is the pastoral nature of it we normally think of Paul as distant and difficult and hard headed when you read first Thessalonians he opens up his you begin to see beyond the veil to the tender affection that these men had for the people of God let me put it this way anyone who would want to preach the gospel and plant the gospel into the hearts of people better be one who has the people already planted into his own heart this is a tender tender affectionate letter well so much by way of those two first headers

Thessalonica by way of place the writers by way of their preaching at the end of verse one Paul Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ grace to you and peace we must say something by way of introduction today before we launch into the letter next week about the people to whom this gospel was preached and the people in whom this gospel was planted interestingly the phrase is there they are called the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ let me take that first phrase the church of the Thessalonians some of you might have thought of the word church here the way we think of it today as well what they did on Sunday but the word really just signifies a gathering so that in the first century use of the term even in the Septuagint the translation in Greek of the Hebrew scriptures it didn't mean church the way we think of church it certainly didn't mean church in the way we think of it etymologically like the called out ones no it just meant a gathering of God's people so the church signifies

God's family that is not only attested in the Bible through the Septuagint but it's also attested in first century literature outside so that a church was merely a gathering within the context of any local community so what are these people well they are the gathering of the Thessalonians who are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ notice they're the gathering of the Thessalonians this is one of the distinctives of one of the subtle nuances of this letter is he speaks of them in this way not in regard to the city in which they live in other words it's not to the church in Thessalonica grace and peace to you from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ no to the church who is comprised of Thessalonians who are in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ now there's something subtle there that ought to be picked up on the church is defined as its citizenry not by its city

[ 31 : 22 ] I love that not that one is right or one is wrong Paul nearly in all of his other letters speaks to the church at Corinth or at Rome but here it's the church of the Thessalonians the emphasis is upon them as a people who are in God not upon the place in which they reside put it this way the church here is a socially described place it is a society a heavenly society what is the church church it is the gathering of the Chicagoans who are in relationship in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the work of Jesus it's social not structural let me put it this way our vision statement reads to see the city of Chicago transformed by the power of the gospel of Jesus

Christ if you were to put that in Thessalonian language it would read like this to see Chicagoans transformed by the power of the gospel in Jesus Christ it's just a subtle emphasis again in regard to people think of it this way if Bono is to appear at Soldier Field and to stand with all of the packed house I wouldn't be there but you would and he was before the concert got underway to yell hello Chicago nobody would say wow why is he speaking to the buildings and the structure no they would think that when he uses the word city he's thinking of the citizens and so it is with our vision statement to see the city of Chicago namely Chicagoans people be transformed Paul Silvanus and Timothy to the gathering of the people of

God among the Thessalonians who are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ what a great word even here to be in God the Father they take their life from God they are rooted in God as Father and look at this this primitive early elevation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the status of deity they are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ already 48 49 A.D.

Jesus himself elevated to the stature of being in relationship with God the Father I think that we are in for a wonderful treat as we look at this letter and I want to close just by taking a final kind of composite sketch of this people what were they comprised of this church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ chapter 1 verse 9 which we'll see next week he reports to them that they themselves know how they turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God evidently this kind of a line turning from idols to be into a relationship with God would not have been referenced readily toward Jews by nature for they would have been turning to Christ as the fulfillment of all the Old

Testament scriptures but to turn from idols would mean that the preponderance of the congregants in Thessalonica were Gentiles themselves pagans Chicagoans good old fashioned hard working people people who had never been raised in a religious context heard the message of Paul and the proclamation of the gospel and all those central tenets and believed even as adults many of them might have been artisans or even beyond that hard working people or people that worked with their hands like Paul who was a tent maker because later in the letter he will speak to those and encourage them to be at work with their hands in other words they were not only pagan Gentile Chicagoans there was also an element within the congregation that was just hard working laboring people get up punch the clock get it done get home steel booted!

[ 36 : 16 ] boys! Lest the weight drop on their toe and it be broken that's not all there was if you take a look back at chapter 17 of Acts when you see that early moment of conversion taking place there were three other facets of the congregants of the Thessalonians chapter 17 verse 4 and some of them were persuaded to join Paul and Silas as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women there were Jews in this congregation who had been converted to Christianity and there were God fearing Gentiles who were religiously inclined who now were Christians and not a few of the leading women Jason himself in chapter 17 of Acts has this attack come upon his house in all likelihood he housed the church in his house he had to be well to do there were moneyed people there were educated people there were prominent people there were moral people there were immoral people there were

Jews and Gentiles blue collar white collar all there how how as a consequence of the preaching of the gospel see we often think of all those terms race socioeconomic class we think of those terms as strategies for the gospel those people are the consequence of gospel preaching and they're all there together in one place what a sight that would have been think of Jason his life now changed yes who is it I've heard the gatherings here tonight oh come on in who are you well I just I just worked down the street oh great welcome come on in grab something to drink we'll get going in a little bit hello who's there oh hi one of the leading women

I've got my entourage and we have lots of money and we'd like to get things done in this Thessaloniki you know oh please come on in hello who are you well I've I've been searching for morality my whole life I didn't want to give myself over the base pleasures of the flesh I've been I've been really influenced by kind of Greek thought and I think there's got to be more to life than what I'm living and then I heard this preaching and well come on in come on in who's in fact if I can live off anybody in here it would be better than otherwise oh come on in we'll deal with you by the second letter I'm sure we will all there all there what would happen if we opened our living rooms to this breath of

Chicago under the proclamation of the gospel this is going to be a wonderful letter and it will speak to us on many many fronts this spring I hope we are in for a great 11 week walk along the streets and the surrounding countryside of this storied ancient and admired city and family and that it would encourage us with the work that God has given us to do in the world our heavenly father we thank you for this letter and its primary its place of primacy we thank you oh lord for these preachers who endured much to bring the gospel to those living in that city and we thank you for the people and we ask that we would be strengthened having spent time with them this spring in your word through

Christ amen I encourage you to stand and let us sing like Silas of old the glories of what we have in Christ and let and let rest and let rest