

# 1 Thessalonians Celebrate!

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Preacher: James Barnett

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Good evening. You're celebrating the wrong thing. That's what people have been saying for years about Australia Day.
- Some people argue it's a great day to celebrate mateship and have an Aussie barbecue, have some mates around. And others say that you're really celebrating the day the white man invaded someone else's country.
- One side says that, look, it's only been our national day for 24 years. It celebrates the wrong thing so it can be changed.
- Others say, well, look, 26th of January, that was the day that Arthur Phillip entered Sydney Cove and founded Australia, so we really should celebrate that day. You're celebrating the wrong thing, people say.
- What do we celebrate in the church? Is it possible that we're celebrating the wrong things? Let's have a think. What are the things we celebrate in church? We celebrate when people become Christians.
- [ 1 : 06 ]     We celebrate when people have babies, when people get engaged or married. We celebrate our missionaries when they come and visit. These are all things that we clap and celebrate for, aren't they?
- But is that it? Is that all we should be celebrating? Are we celebrating the right things? Today we're starting a new series on the book of 1 Thessalonians.
- It's a letter written by Paul and Silas and Timothy to the church in the area of Thessalonica. Today we're going to find out what he was celebrating, why he was celebrating, and the things that we should be celebrating too.
- So please pray with me and we'll have a look at this book. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, that we can be here on another Sunday.
- Lord, thank you for the privilege it is to gather together at a church and not be in fear of persecution. Father, we thank you for your word to us. Help us to understand it, but more than that, help our hearts be changed by your word tonight, Lord.
- [ 2 : 20 ]     Amen. Amen. So Deb read two passages for us. The first was from the book of Acts. The second, the book of Thessalonians.
- But in the book of Acts, we saw how this church got started. After Jesus was raised to life, the gospel news spread out, including to this guy called Paul, and he was saved.
- And in Acts 17, Paul has been journeying around. There should be a map that comes up at some point. There'll be a map that pops up. Paul has been journeying around, and he's been starting churches.
- And he comes to a church called, in the region of Thessalonica. You can see it up the top with the red box there. Modern day Thessalonica is in Greece. It's next door to Macedonia.
- And it's a harbour town. Has anybody been to Thessalonica? Debbie has. What's it like, Deb? Thank you. It's old.

- [ 3 : 20 ]     Okay. There's lots of boats because it's a harbour town. It's on the sea. And the average life of your average Thessalonian was influenced by the region they were in.
- And so they worshipped the gods of this area. So they worshipped the gods known as Dioscuri. They were the sons of Zeus. And they were said to be saviours of the dangers of the sea.
- And because it's a harbour town, it was a really important town for Rome and the rest of the area. Many people in the empire would go through this town to get through Macedonia, to get to Greece, to get to Turkey.
- So it's a really important and central hub. And that'll be relevant later. And so as Paul does when he goes around, he goes to Thessalonica and he finds a Jewish temple.
- He goes there and he preaches the word and he's there for at least three Saturdays. And by God's amazing grace, people are saved.
- [ 4 : 27 ]     It's really interesting. It says Jews turn and follow Jesus. Greeks turn and follow Jesus. And even a few prominent women turn and follow Jesus. Praise be to God.
- But not everyone is happy. Some of the Jews get jealous. They go and get some bad characters and get a mob together. And they start a riot in the city.
- And so to avoid the mob, Paul and Silas slip away in the middle of the night and they go to a town called Berea just next door. Now, Paul and Silas probably weren't in Thessalonica for very long.
- They were there for at least three weeks, but it may have extended to a couple of months. But can you imagine how Paul would have felt? He's gone to this town and he started this little church.
- People have become saved. They are learning about Jesus. And then your opponents get a mob together and chase you out of town. And he's had to flee.
- [ 5 : 31 ]     And he doesn't know how his church is going, how these baby Christians are coping. Now, this is, of course, a time when there's no real communication. There's no instant communication like we have.
- He can't just check in on FaceTime to see how they're going. There's no WeChat. He can't quickly ask how the church is going. He can't say, are you still loving and following Jesus?
- Are you standing firm in the faith? Was my time there starting the church a waste? Is everything okay? And so he sends them an ancient version of a text message.
- He sends them his young protege, an up-and-coming church planter, Timothy. So he sends Timothy, go check on this little church, see how they're going. I'm worried about them, see how they are.
- And so he sends Timothy. And now Timothy has come back and Paul sends this letter to the church in Thessalonica. And so that's the context of this letter that we get.
- [ 6 : 36 ]     And this helps us understand why Paul is writing this letter. So have a look with me at 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 1. Should be on the screen as we have a look at this.
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.
- We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paul spends time thanking God for this church, for these people. Paul says that they always thank God and continually mention them in their prayers.
- Now this is a wonderful thing to hear for this little church. The apostle who started the church, he is continually thanking God for them, always mentioning them in their prayers.

[ 7 : 44 ] It's not like he started the church, he's praying for them, he's moved on to Berea, he prays for them for a couple of weeks and has forgotten about them. No, no, no, he continually mentions them in our prayers.

This is a challenge to our prayers on so many levels. Paul, Silas and Timothy, they were diligent and consistent in their prayers.

And they pray in such an other person-centered way. I think when I pray, I always try to make sure I'm praying about God and his kingdom first before I bring my needs to him.

So I'll pray, you know, God, thank you for creating the world. Thank you for being awesome and amazing. Thank you for sending Jesus and loving me and those kinds of things. And then I'll move on to my requests.

You know, help me survive the rain or whatever my daily requests are. Work with Nick, you know, whatever little things they are. But these guys, they are continually and diligently praying for this church, the Thessalonians.

[ 8 : 52 ] They're praying in an other-centered way. They're praying that this church would stand firm in faith, hope, and love. Now, remember that Paul hasn't heard much about this church.

And he's finally heard from Timothy. And so he's celebrating. He's really thankful to God for what he is doing. He remembers what they had to go through.

This is an area where Paul and Silas, they were run out of town. And so life for these Christians was not easy. And yet God had changed their lives.

And they are standing firm with their eyes fixed on Jesus. Now, there have been far too many times that I've lost my children.

For the parents to hear, have you ever lost your children? I see people say, oh, Judy, she'll admit it. Have you found Rach yet? I think she's still here.

[ 9 : 52 ] She's here somewhere. It was a couple of years ago. Isaac probably would have been about three. He's six now. And we were at Ikea, that wonderful maze of a shop.

And we'd, you know, gotten distracted feeling fabric on a wall or something. And Isaac just disappeared. And so we're looking for him everywhere. And the minutes are ticking by.

And we're getting more and more worried. And horrendous thoughts start entering your mind. What's happened? Is he okay? Has he somehow gotten out the front and eaten those rancid meatballs that Ikea has?

Has someone taken him? Sorry, is everything okay? Jokes, jokes. Is Isaac okay?

And you get tense. You get worried. And then we just saw him crawl out from underneath something. And this wave of relief just washes over you.

[ 10 : 51 ] Oh, he's fine. Everything is okay. I don't need to be worried. Maybe I need to have a leash like I've always wanted. You know, maybe this is the feeling you have when, you know, if you're a parent of older kids, when the kids would get home with the car.

Relief. The car is okay. And I suppose the kids are okay too. But that's the kind of feeling Paul would have had hearing about this church. This baby church that he planted and was then kicked out of.

This church is okay. They're standing firm in faith, hope, and love. Now, if you didn't realize it, that's why we've got the shoes up here. We want to be encouraging everyone to be standing firm.

That's why there's shoes behind me. I'm not sure if, you know, standing under shoes is like mistletoe. If I accidentally stand under shoes with someone, I kick them. I'm not sure how that works. But we want to be standing firm, just like this Thessalonian church, in faith, in hope, and in love.

And so Paul celebrates. He is so thankful to God that this church is standing firm. So, you know, you've got your little, you should have gotten something when you came in. What did you get?

[ 12 : 08 ] Did you get one of these blowers? Did you get bubbles? Let's test and see if they work. Everybody ready? Ready? One, two, three.

That's not bad. That's the most limp celebration I've ever heard. We'll use them again later.

Don't worry. We'll do better later. Stop. Sorry. Sorry, Judd. So Paul is really thankful. He is celebrating this church that they have stood firm in the face of opposition.

In the face of these people who have chased them out of town, that they are still faithful and loving God. And so Paul remembers what God has done in them.

And he thanks God. And he reminisces a bit about how they got started. It's like he pulls out the baby photo album. And verses four to six show us this baby photo album as he remembers the church.

[ 13 : 12 ] Have a look at verse four with me. Oh baby church.

You're so cute. I remember how God helped you take those first steps. You grew with power. We were there when you started walking as a church.

You imitated us and made baby sounds. And you learnt how to walk as a church, standing firm through severe suffering. It's not exactly like a normal baby photo album.

But it is arguably much more important. What other things he is reminiscing and remembering? Well, God chose them. God loved them first.

They didn't choose to follow Jesus. God has showed his unimaginable love for them in the death and resurrection of Jesus. God was the one that initiated the relationship with them, just like with each of us.

[ 14 : 37 ] We don't go seeking him first. He has sought us and chosen and loved us. And it might just take us time to catch up, to understand how much he loves us.

Paul also remembers the good news, that this good news came differently to other news. It wasn't like a pregnancy announcement or an engagement announcement. These bring much joy, yes, but they're not supernatural announcements.

The good news of Jesus being raised from the dead came with the power of the Holy Spirit. People in Thessalonica, they were spiritually dead, but now they have come to life in Jesus.

And it's also possible that, just like in the book of Acts, the good news of Jesus came with miracles. And so Paul remembers how the church imitated Paul and Silas.

This young church in Thessalonica saw what being a Christian was from Paul and Silas, and they copied them. Now, we should be encouraged to imitate one another as we follow Christ too.

[ 15 : 47 ] Now, this is both amazing and also a bit daunting. I think this is one of my favourite things about church here at St. Paul's. It's a real beautiful part of church here.

The way we have older brothers and younger brothers and older sisters and younger sisters. Our leaders should be saying, come and follow me as I follow Christ.

Copy me as I follow Christ. And that's really scary if you're a leader here, to actually say to someone, you should copy me as I copy Christ. But let's take someone as an example.

Let's take Juddy. Juddy, can I use you as an example, buddy? Yeah, two thumbs up. Yep, Dad, that's okay. Yep, just making...

Dad's not so sure, but we'll take that as permission. So Juddy, Juddy, who's your leader at Kids Church? Who's... It used to be me.

[ 16 : 43 ] I'll be there again. Can you think of anybody else? Say somebody that's name starts with K and ends in O. Ko, okay. Well, great. Thank you. So Juddy, he's led by Ko.

Where's Ko? Ko's over here. What a wonderful brother. And Ko, Ko has this amazing passion for the Bible and he loves Jesus. And it's a wonderful... Let's just... That's worth celebrating, isn't it?

Let's take out your blower. Let's celebrate. That's enough. That's enough. And so Juddy, you should be copying Ko as Ko follows Jesus.

But you know what? Ko also has another leader. Ko's in youth group. His leader is Rob Sharp. And so Ko is following Rob. Let's celebrate Rob. Come on. And that's wonderful.

Maybe Ko will have a beard like Rob one day. Maybe not. Who knows? But Rob's also in my community group. And poor guy, he's...

[ 17 : 46 ] That's about all the celebration there is in my community group. And so... It's fine, Deb. I think less spit in them works better.

So Juddy is following Ko who's following Jesus. And Ko is copying Rob who's copying Jesus. And Rob is copying me, copying Jesus.

And I'm following Steve as Steve is following Jesus. It's a wonderful, beautiful thing. It's this beautiful chain from younger brother to older brother that we have in church.

It's an amazing gift. And now I could hopefully copy that through with anyone here, anyone here at church. And this is something that is worth celebrating.

Now, if you don't have an older brother or sister to walk with, come on, let me know. Talk to Debbie. I would love to find you someone to be walking with.

[ 18 : 45 ] And if you are following the Lord, there really should be someone that is copying you. A younger brother or a younger sister. The Thessalonians, well, they were imitating Paul and Silas.

And they imitated them particularly in the midst of suffering. We don't know exactly what their suffering was. But it's the suffering that caused Paul and Silas to run out of town at the very least.

And so they stood firm and the Thessalonians stood firm too. Now, Paul doesn't just reminisce about the good old days.

He isn't just reminiscing about, you know, back when I was there at church, we had great morning teas and great suppers. He's not just reminiscing about the style of music. He is reminiscing about the real important things.

He is remembering that God loves these people and has chosen them. He is remembering that this church imitated Paul and Silas and were obeying God even in the midst of suffering.

[ 19 : 52 ] The church has stood firm and that is something that is worth celebrating. One of the things that we do celebrate in church here is we celebrate when people become Christians. One of the ways we do that is when people get baptised.

We have the big tank and it's a great thing to celebrate. But there is something else worth celebrating. It's one thing to celebrate when someone becomes a Christian.

But in one sense, that's like celebrating when someone starts running a race. When you go to watch someone run a race, where do you go? Would we usually go to the start of the race?

Or do we want to see how they go at the end of the race? I want to see how people go crossing that line. So there's one thing that is worth doing, celebrating when someone becomes a Christian.

But there is another thing to celebrate. When someone stands firm for many years as a Christian. When someone stands firm all the way to the end.

[ 20 : 55 ] And this is why there is so much joy at Christian funerals. Because we can celebrate that not just they have started following Jesus.

But we can celebrate that they have made it all the way to the end. And they have reached the goal that all of us would love to be at. They have made it to Jesus. And so Paul is celebrating the things that are really worthwhile.

And not just things that are a part of personal preference at church. He remembered people. He remembered lives changed. People standing firm in the light of suffering.

So Paul and Silas, they were kicked out of Thessalonica. Moved to Berea. They would have been worried about this church.

Is it going to flourish or fail? Spread or cease? Stand firm or stand against one another? And he has heard from Timothy that they have stood firm.

[ 21 : 56 ] In faith, hope and love. But not only that. News of this church has spread out everywhere. Have a look with me at verse 7. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The Lord's message rang out from you. Not only in Macedonia and Achaia. Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it.

For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. And to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead.

Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath. Well, the church that had been imitating Paul and Silas. Well, people in the region have heard about that and they're imitating them.

This message has gone out into the region that they have stood firm in faith, hope and love. This is amazing. In a time of instant communication, we're kind of used to this.

[ 23 : 00 ] We're used to media going viral. But for the gospel to spread like this, it would have had to have spread like a real virus. Not like viral media, but a real virus.

From person to person. It spread out from Thessalonica. But instead of killing people like a virus, it brought people to life. The news had spread that they had stood firm in faith, hope and love.

They had heard that these people had stood firm. They turned away from idols. These things that we've been looking at over the past nine weeks in Judges. These statues made out of gold or rock or stone.

And their hope was in the son who is alive. What amazing news this would have been for that little mother hen Paul to hear about this church. I wonder what the news from here has gone out.

I wonder what message has rung out from here as a church. Has there been any message? Do people hear anything? So I thought I'd contact someone who lives far away to see what he's heard.

[ 24 : 13 ] I contacted our old brother, Sam Lowe. Sam was at church here. And they left to move to work in Queensland in January. And I thought, I wonder what they've heard about us.

What kind of news have they heard? So I sent him a text. Because, you know, it's much easier than sending a Timothy up to Queensland. And I said, you know, what have you heard? What is the news that has reached you even in this much easier age of communication?

And he pointed out two things. I hear that God continues to bring gospel fruit and new believers into the family there. I hear great things about ESL and the work Adrian and his team are doing to connect with and serve those in the community who don't speak English.

I've heard that the youth ministry is flourishing. And I'm excited for the current year 12s to make their mark after they graduate. And I hear the staff team continues to lead the charge of knowing, treasuring and representing Jesus through every change and challenge that comes.

I'm encouraged by you all. And I miss doing the journey with you. And I also wanted to hear from Sam what was happening in his church so we could be praying for him.

[ 25 : 28 ] And he said that they're in a season where they're still preparing for their church plant. And preparation is important, but impatience is his weakness.

So he asked us to pray for wisdom, to trust God's timing to make most of this preparation season. It's remarkable that news has spread out from us to them.

I wonder what people who aren't as connected with us, I wonder what they hear. There are so many great things that God is doing in the church here.

I think it's amazing that we can stop and celebrate them. Let's not be a church who gets caught up arguing with one another, fighting or bickering with one another.

Let's remember to celebrate how this church has stood firm in faith, hope and love. I want to be known as the party church. Celebrating when people become Christians, have a party.

[ 26 : 33 ] Celebrate not only that, but when the Holy Spirit changes our hearts to trust in Jesus more. When the support of our church helps us to overcome sin.

Let's cheer when someone who has an addiction overcomes that addiction by God's grace. Let's celebrate when someone hits their silver anniversary of following Jesus.

Now I've got no idea. Does anybody know what the silver anniversary is? 25? 25? Who's been a Christian here for the longest? Isla and Juddy, you both put your hands up?

I love your keenness. Okay. What we're going to do is we are going to celebrate a little bit. We are going to celebrate. We're going to get these ready. Get these ready. You can blow bubbles if you like. Sorry, buddy.

It's going to be a bit noisy. There's headphones there if you want to cover your ears. Let's practice rejoicing because I don't think we're particularly good at it.

[ 27 : 34 ] So let's, who's been a Christian for more than 10 years here? More than 10 years. Let's celebrate these people. I think it's the fire alarm.

Let's, let's go a bit further. 20 years. Okay. I see a couple of hands. Beautiful hands. Let's celebrate. Let's celebrate. Okay. All right.

All right. All right. Who thinks they've been a Christian here the longest? You are the oldest.

Praise God. You have stood firm for much longer than I have. Give me a number. Come on. More than 30 years.

Let's assume. What a wonderful thing that it is that these people have stood firm longer than many of our lives. They have been following Jesus for many, many years. That is worth celebrating.

[ 28 : 41 ] Let's do it again. Let's come on. Wait. Wait, whoa, whoa. I'm going to count to three and I want it to be the loudest one. One long honk. Ready? One, two, three. One, two, three.

All right. All right. All right. Last one, Judd. I hope. I hope. Let's get better at rejoicing.

Sorry, Clem. We do love you, little ones. Sorry. I feel very bad now.

That's okay. There's mums there. Let's church. Let's get better at celebrating when people show sacrificial, costly love to one another.

Like Jesus has showed to us. Let's sing and dance and praise God when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we wait for his return.

[ 29 : 43 ] Because church, when we do this, the good news of Jesus working in our lives will not just go out to Chatswood or just up to Queensland.

It will go out across the world and people's lives will be changed. Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the joy that we can have following you.

Father, thank you that there are people here who have been following you for many years. Father, help us to all stand firm in faith, in hope, and in love, following you for many, many years to come.

We ask that we would celebrate the things that are worth celebrating, Lord. Help us to be a party church that loves to celebrate what you are doing in our lives and help us to rejoice with one another because of your love for us.

Amen. We're going to continue to celebrate now by sharing the Lord's Supper together. But first, it is important for us to acknowledge where we have come from, that we are saved sinners depending on his grace.

[ 31 : 00 ] So let's say this confession on the screen together.