

A Pauline Greeting

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[0 : 00] The letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, chapter 1, and I'd like to take as a text this evening the first few verses of this chapter.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians, and God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I am sure you are all aware, Paul's missionary strategy in spreading the good news involved primarily targeting centres of population, so that he tended to visit city areas, and there he planted churches, and from there the hope was that these church plants would in turn be involved in further outreach work.

In seeking to plant a church, he would establish contact with city residents, usually by attending a synagogue.

That was certainly the strategy that he pursued in Thessalonica. Acts 17 gives us this information.

[1 : 47] They came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews, and having established contact there, he began to teach and preach Christ.

And Paul went in, we are told in the book of Acts, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

And you might say that his teaching was a restatement of the good news. The Acts account tells us how the message of good news was blessed to a number of people during the brief period that he spent there.

Just a fortnight of teaching and preaching in the synagogue, and perhaps an indefinite period outside the synagogue.

And the result was, 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.

[3 : 17] That is Luke's way of emphasizing that there were many women who joined the group.

The good news message is the only message that results in the salvation of sinful men and women, and boys and girls.

And inevitably, this short period of blessing led to confrontation. When light shines in darkness and disturbs the kingdom of darkness, there is fight back.

So, there was opposition to the message that Paul had proclaimed. The kingdom of darkness does not like to be disturbed in this way.

And their accusations were twofold. First, that Paul and Silas had upset people in other areas, and now we're doing this the same in Thessalonica.

[4 : 30] Secondly, that they were teaching people to defy Caesar's decrees. The fact that that was untrue did not trouble them greatly, as long as they could get those in authority on their side.

And the upshot of this was that the messengers or the missionaries of good news had to flee the city. The first letter to the Thessalonians tells that their message was blessed because it came with power.

The people received the word eagerly. And I think it's important to emphasize that is how the message was blessed.

It came with power. Wasn't it? Paul was eloquent or Silas was eloquent? Nothing to do with the missionaries as such. They were merely the vehicles or the instruments that were used to propagate the message of good news.

But the message came with power. And the people received the word eagerly. And some of us have seen and remember times like that in this congregation, where there were periods of sustained blessing.

[5 : 53] The result in Thessalonica was that believers there modeled themselves on Paul and Silas. Remember, they had no New Testament to guide them.

And in turn, these believers themselves became models to others. You became, says Paul in writing to them, you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

In other words, they themselves became a missionary church. And surely that ought to be a given in all of our lives to share the good news with others.

We ought to have a strong missionary vision. The two letters to the Thessalonians provide a snapshot of the life and concerns of the earliest Christian churches.

These letters were written from Corinth, and they're among the earliest letters in the New Testament. Paul was at Corinth for around two years, so that means the letters were probably written within a short period of one another.

[7 : 18] When he left Corinth, Acts chapter 18, verse 18 tells us he had different traveling companions. So it was in this period that this second letter was also written.

After this, Paul stayed many days longer, took leave of the brothers, set sail for Syria, and with them Priscilla and Aquila. And these two letters highlight the doctrinal teaching of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the letters, it is clear that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is not to be viewed by the believer with fear and dread, for his coming is nothing less than our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There ought to be joyful expectation at the thought of his return. And I think I ought to mention under this heading of background that the letters also demonstrate the passionate, pastoral concern of Paul for this new infant church.

And that is why I believe that the two letters were sent so close to one another. He is deeply concerned, not so much about the level of persecution, which was serious and was highly active, but he is more concerned about the strands of false teaching that were being put about.

[9 : 01] False teaching always poses a greater threat to a church than does persecution.

False teaching, false teaching can destroy a church. Persecution very often helps a church to grow. Isn't it strange? Paradoxically, that's often what is true.

So that brings me to the words that I want to spend a little time on for the time that is left. The text that I have termed a Pauline greeting.

The sender, the content, and the recipients. First of all, the sender. The greeting is from an intrepid trio who engaged in missionary outreach at some cost.

Paul, Silvanus, or Silas, and Timothy. Although one would have to say that the content of the letter comes from Paul.

[10 : 10] The three whose names are given were all engaged in missionary outreach. And missionary outreach then was not for the faint-hearted.

Nor is it today, as one can expect to meet many, many challenges. Challenges which can only be overcome in the strength of the Lord.

And you only have to read of the missionary journeys recorded in the book of Acts to appreciate, for example, the challenges that Paul and Silas faced.

And to read Paul's own biographical note in his letter to the Corinthians, where he writes of how much he suffered in his missionary outreach.

He writes of imprisonments with countless beatings, often near death. Five times I received at the hand of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods.

[11 : 21] Once I was stunned. Three times I was shipwrecked. And night and a day I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys. In danger from rivers. Danger from robbers. Dangers from my own people.

Dangers from Gentile. Danger from the city. Danger in the wilderness. Danger at sea. Danger from false brothers. Toil and hardship through many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst.

Often without food. In cold and exposure. And apart from other things. There is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

And you know that last sentence. All the suffering that he endured tells us something of the tenacious spirit of this man Paul. And how he was prepared to lay his life down for the one who laid his life down for him.

But above all. The pastoral concern and love that he had for the church of Christ. And you may ask me. What is there then to get excited about a Pauline greeting?

[12 : 31] Is it not the same greeting with which he begins all his letters? And the short answer is no. It's not even the same greeting as the first letter to the Thessalonians.

Although some might argue that what is stated here in the second letter is implied in the first letter greeting. In the first letter it is Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians and God.

That's identical. But then notice the difference. In the first letter it is to the church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ gives to you and peace.

But in this letter it is. To the church of the Thessalonians and God the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I would suggest that this little word our makes a tremendous difference in this greeting. And you have the phrase repeated in verse 2.

[13 : 42] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I was going to say that most of us pay little or no attention to the opening greeting of a letter.

Apart from ensuring that it is addressed to us unless the greeting is in very extravagant or affectionate language. But then letters are something of our rarity today.

As people use electronic communication. However, it is not because it is rare in the sense of being an infrequent happening.

That I wish to look a little more closely at the Pauline greeting here. But because of its content and implications. In my view it is packed with doctrinal teaching.

So the sender, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. The content. First note the phrase God our Father.

- [14 : 47] The term Father may evoke many memories. For most people who are deprived of their Father through death.
- The memories are good memories. For some it may not be good memories. But whatever our memories of our earthly Father. This Father does all things well.
- There are no failings or shortcomings with him. But then you have to ask yourself. Who can legitimately use this phrase?
- God our Father. For example, many from childhood. Can repeat the Lord's Prayer. Which as every person knows begins.
- Our Father which art in heaven. But does everyone who repeats that prayer. Regard God as their Father. Well, I think not.
- [15 : 47] A distinction is made in the Bible. Between those who are the children of God. And can therefore regard him as their Father. And those who are not the children of God.
- The Bible speaks of those who are the children of God. As those who have faith in Jesus Christ. They believed and received Christ.
- Faith involves believing and receiving. Jesus Christ as he has revealed himself in his person and saving work. It's not enough to have vague notions about Jesus.
- People may say, I believe in Jesus. Meaning that they accept that he existed. Or even appreciate him in some sense. But that is not receiving and believing Jesus Christ.
- And it does not constitute saving faith. Faith requires us to receive Jesus as he has offered himself to us. In the scriptures.
- [16 : 50] We receive him as the person who he has revealed himself to be. And for what he claims to be. You remember how Jesus confronted his own disciples.
- About his identity. Who do people say that the son of man is? And you will remember some of the replies. Some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah.
- And others. Jeremiah. One of the prophets. And then Jesus forces the issue. By personalizing the question. But who do you say that I am?
- And you remember Peter. Being the spokesman. For the rest. As often happened. And he responded with words. That have become almost synonymous with a profession of faith.
- You are the Christ. The son of the living God. And you remember what Jesus says. Flesh and blood. Says Jesus. Has not revealed this to you.
- [17 : 51] But my father who is in heaven. Flesh and blood. Is simply a way of referring to ordinary humanity. Which is finite.
- Limited. And natural. The inability of mere human power. So when Jesus denies that flesh and blood.
- Has revealed this true identity to Peter. He is saying that mere human powers. Those by themselves. Cannot recognize. Cannot recognize. The true glory.
- Of Jesus Christ. Neither your humanity. Nor anyone else's. Has opened the eyes. Of our heart. To recognize the truth.
- And the beauty. Of Jesus Christ. And you remember. How that is developed. In the Bible. Those who received. And believed.
- [18 : 46] They were born. We entered. For example. Our earthly families. Because we were born into them. We didn't take the initiative. And it is obvious.
- That. The Lord. Uses that image. To show that he is the one. Who takes the initiative. In spiritual birth. He gives new life.

Where there is. No life. Just. Arid. Spiritual. Barrenness. And you will remember. How Jesus. Reinforced.

The necessity. Of the new birth. When having a nighttime. Conversation. With one of the then. Leading teachers. In Israel. Nicodemus. And you remember. The thrust. Of the teaching.

Of the Lord. Truly. Truly. I say to you. Unless one is born again. He cannot. See the kingdom of God. And again. You must. Be born again.

[19 : 44] That has not. And will not change. It is a divine. Requirement. The divine life begins. With God's. Working.

Not. With our doing. They are given. Not just. A new beginning. But a new nature. This requires.

The intervention. Of God. In power. They were born. And everyone. Here this evening. Who has. Who can testify.

Of the Lord. Intervening. In their lives. Can speak. Of this intervention. In their own lives. And how. They became. Acquainted. With the one.

Who intervened. In their life. You could say. That those. Who have faith. That they came through. For want of a better phrase.

[20 : 41] Through the birth. Canal. Of grace. That is how. You entered. Into the kingdom. Of God. And that produces.

A profound. And monumental. Change. In the life. Of any person. Of whom. That is true. Those who received. And believed. Have been given. A new.

Spiritual. DNA. A new. A new principle. And a new. Power within. But to all. Writes John. In his prologue. To all. Who did receive him.

Who believed. In his name. He gave the right. To become. Children of God. Who were born. Not of blood. Not of the will. Of the flesh. Nor of the will. Of man.

But of God. So. A distinction. Is made. Between those. Who are children. And those not. To be the children.

[21 : 36] Of God. Or to have God. As our father. Means that God. Has bestowed. His adoptive. And elective love. Upon those. Who can rightly.

Call. God. As their father. And you remember. How the apostle John. In his first letter. How he speaks. Of that love. See what kind of love.

Or behold. What manner of love. The father. Has given to us. That we should be called. The children of God. And so. We are. Those then.

Who have God. As their father. Are recipients. Of a love. That is outside. Of this world. And every recipient. Ought to be astonished.

At the measure. And the manner. Of that love. As it is made known. To them. And that brings me. To the second part. Of the content. That is.

[22 : 34] The name. Lord. Jesus Christ. And you know. When you read. These three words. When I read.

These three words. I feel like shouting out. Hallelujah. What a savior. You remember. How the hymn writer.

Expressed. The man of sorrows. For a name. For the son of God. Who came. Ruined sinners. To reclaim. Hallelujah. What a savior. Bearing shame.

And scoffing road. In my place. Condemned. His stood. Sealed my pardon. With his blood. Hallelujah. What a savior. You see.

The three names. Here are significant. We probably. Repeat them so often. That we forget. The significance. Of the names.

[23 : 28] Of the content. Lord. Jesus Christ. The name. Lord. Directs us. To the deity. Of the savior. We are reminded. That he is no less. A person. Than the second person.

Of the trinity. God. The son. He is Lord. He is the one. Who is. And was. And will be. In the form of God. And you remember.

What the apostle Paul. Writes about this person. In writing. To the church. At Philippi. Every knee. Should bow. In heaven. And on earth. And under the earth. And every tongue. Confess.

That Jesus Christ. Is Lord. To the glory. Of God. The father. Every knee bow. Every tongue. Confess. Not some. Not a few.

But every tongue. When shall every tongue. Confess. When he sits. On the judgment seat. And every person. Shall appear.

[24 : 22] Before him. Those who acknowledge him. As Lord. In this life. Bow already. Before him. In the day of grace.

Is that not what you do? You already. Confess. That he is your Lord. But on that day. The most virulent enemies.

The mockers of all. Who dismissed his claims. Will. Confess. That he is. That Jesus Christ. Is Lord. To the glory of God.

The father. And then you have the name. Jesus. What about that precious name? How sweet. The theme of Jesus.

The name of Jesus sounds. In a believer's ear. Soothes his sorrows. Heals his wounds. Drives away his fears. Makes the wounded spirit whole.

[25 : 17] Calms the troubled. It is manna. To the hungry soul. And to the weary rest. Is that how you view. The name Jesus.

Is it that precious to you? Perhaps. There was a time in your life. And the name Jesus.

Was used in a derogatory fashion. Perhaps it was used. As taken in vain. And today.

Are you not so. But the way you treated the name. Of the one. Who is your Lord and Savior. You remember.

The account in Matthew's gospel. An angel of the Lord. Appeared to Joseph. And a dream said. Joseph son of David. Do not fear to take. Mary as your wife. For that which is conceived in her.

[26 : 15] Is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son. And you shall call his name. Jesus. For he will save. His people. From their sins.

And the name here. Picks up on the meaning. Of the Old Testament name. You know the name Jesus. Is actually. The Greek version of. Joshua's name.

Which means either. God helps. Or God saves. And we know that Jesus. Exercises the office of. Prophet, priest and king.

And I believe the fact that we are told. The meaning of the name Jesus. Directs us particularly. To his exercise. In the office of priest. Ask yourself.

How does he save. People from their sins. And the answer the Bible gives us. That he bore. Our sins to the tree. That there.

[27 : 13] He sacrificed himself. That's where he brings. Every person. Whom he saves. He brings you to the tree. He brings you there. By. By his word and spirit.

To the tree. Of shame. To behold him. As your priest. Offering himself. Up as a sacrifice. To satisfy.

Divine justice. And reconcile to God. And there. He says to you. And to me. Behold. The lamb of God. Who takes away. The sin of the world.

Oh. Is this not the way. That we enter. Into our blessed. And our glorious eternity. Come into the tree.

Of shame. Meeting. With the help of God. Jesus saves. His people. From their sins. Oh. Do I hear anyone say.

[28 : 08] With a hymn writer. Jesus. My shepherd. Husband. Friend. My prophet. Priest. And king. My lord. My life. My way. My end.

Accept. The praise. I bring. Lord. Jesus. Christ. And Christ. Is not a surname. It's the Greek version.

Of the Hebrew word. For. Messiah. Jesus. Is the anointed. One of God. The one who was promised.

By God. Through the prophets. In the Old Testament. And it's as if Paul is saying. In this greeting. Look now. Behold your saviors.

Behold your God. He is your father. Behold the saviors. He is the Lord. He is the creator. And redeemer. He bears the name. By which.

[29 : 04] The only name. By which. Man. Can be saved. He is the Christ. The anointed one of God. So.

That's something of the content. Of this greeting. The sender. The recipients. And the time is going. Did you notice what he wrote? To the believers in Thessalonica.

No. That's not what he wrote. Take careful note what he said. What he wrote. To the church of the Thessalonians. In God. Our father.

And the Lord Jesus Christ. The church of the Thessalonians. In. These were the recipients. Those who comprised the church of the Thessalonians.

But it is their current location. Or their current address. That really excites me. In God. And the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 02] Does that not tell us something. Of the security. That they enjoyed. How? Well you remember. That what Jesus himself taught.

On one occasion. As he referred. To his believers. As sheep. And you remember what he said. My sheep. He says. Hear my voice. And I know them.

And they follow me. I give them eternal life. They will never perish. And no one will snatch them. Out of my hand. My father. Who has given them to me.

Is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them. Out of the father's hand. And in other words. He is teaching there. That believers are in the twofold grasp. Of the father and the son.

No one can snatch them from there. What an assurance. To a fledgling. Persecuted church.

[30 : 55] Where false teaching. Seeks to undermine. And destroy. You are in God. And in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes.

Perhaps. They felt overwhelmed. Perhaps. They felt. Endangered. And greatly threatened. And Paul is saying to them. In this greeting. But you are safe.

You are in God. And in the Lord Jesus Christ. And maybe this evening. You feel threatened. And overwhelmed. By the hostility. Of the world. Threatened and overwhelmed.

By the power of indwelling sin. In your own heart. Threatened and overwhelmed. By the powers of darkness. This assurance. Is for you too.

You are in God. And in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know. The fact that they are in Christ. You remember how Paul writes to the Corinthians.

[31 : 54] If any man. If anyone is in Christ. He is a new creation. The old has passed. Writing to the Romans. There is therefore no condemnation.

For those who are in Christ Jesus. And if I say that the expression in Christ. Sums up as briefly and profoundly as possible. The inexhaustible significance of man's redemption.

Does it not as it were. Summarize. What is true. Of every person.

Who has experience of the power. Of God's redemptive grace. In their lives. I have already alluded to the. To the security aspect.

But in Christ speaks of acceptance in him. It says before us. That such a person is justified. And the process of progressive sanctification. Has begun.

[32 : 52] In God. And the Lord Jesus Christ speaks. Of being an heir of an inheritance. Imperishable. Undeified. And unfading. Kept in heaven for you. Who by God's power have been guarded through faith.

For a salvation ready to be reaped. In the last time. How can the recipients. Of this greeting.

Live the life. Into which they have evidently been born. Is it not from the source of strengthening. It comes. From God.

Our father. And the Lord Jesus Christ. And may we know and enjoy. The full panoply. Of his supplies. As we reflect.

Upon these truths. This evening. The sender. The sender. Paul. Silvanus. And Timothy. The content. Directing us.

[33 : 51] To the relationship that is enjoyed. With God. The father. Our father. An intimate. Relationship there.

The provision. That this father. That this father has made. For those. For whom. He is father. The Lord Jesus Christ.

The savior. Who is yours. And all that is involved. In the names that are presented to us. To be a recipient.

Now. Of this message. To be. In God. And to be in Christ. Jesus. Is to know eternal security.

And to have a hope. That shall never be ashamed. But gloriously realized. When you come. To meet. With God.

[34 : 51] In Christ. At the end of life's journey. Let us pray. O eternal God. We thank thee.

That poor. Frail creatures. Such as we. Can address. The holy God. As our father. In the knowledge.

That we are coming to one. Who has brought us. Into a fellowship. Yea. Even more. Into the family. Of grace.

Through thine own. Wonderful. And amazing. Grace. In being. Expressed.

In the lives. Of unworthy sinners. Lord. May we know more. Of the blessings. That are true. To be now member.

[35 : 48] Of that blessed family. And the glory. Shall be thine. In Jesus name. We ask it. Amen. Let us conclude.

By singing to God's praise. From. Yes. In Jesus name. Go. Mr. somos. At the heart. Of thedas. Of the wisdom. At the whole. Amen. Ready for Jimmy.■■■■ode. Let us see. In Jesus name. h Foote.