

When we read 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, and particularly in the chapter (& a bit) we've read just now, it is **impossible** to do that, without noticing the “pastor’s heart” that Paul has... He says things like:

- “We were torn away from you... In person – not in heart”...
- “We tried really hard to get back to you... We had a great desire to see you again (face to face)”;
- “You are our glory and joy”;
- “I could not bear to not have news about you. That’s why I sent Timothy”;
- And he prayed: “May God direct our way to you”.

Alright, he is absent from his brothers & sisters in Christ (at Thessalonica), and he really, really wants to be with them again.

And here’s why:

## 1.

The first reason, is Fellowship (for Christian love to be expressed).

Now, for Paul & Silas (P&S), the Thessalonians had a very special place in their heart. It was a **spiritual** thing. Paul had a vision from God, of a man from Macedonia, begging him “**Come over to Macedonia and help us.**” And they did. The trouble is, they never got to see the results of their work.

They’d preach the gospel in one place, and a few people would become Christians, and then they’d get run out of town. And so they’d preach the gospel in the next place. A few

people would receive Jesus, and they'd get run out of town again.

There was no doubt in Paul's mind, that the Holy Spirit had led them to the region of Macedonia, and specifically to Thessalonica,, and he was keen to see what God was going to do there...

And on top of this, there is usually a very special connection/relationship between ourselves, and those who have been instrumental in our coming to faith, or instrumental in the development of our faith... True???

*For me, I think of a bloke by the name of Jim Singer. He used to run a SU Canoe camp down the Mary River. And I went along to those as a HighSchool camper, and later as a leader, and he played a big part in the development of my faith. And even now, I just love any opportunity I can have, to catch up with Jim and Janet.*

*There's another bloke by the name of Ron Watson. He was the minister in the church at Dalby we attended. And every January, he gives me a call, and I always look forward to that. Why? Because he played a significant part in my spiritual development, and I'm filled with joy, to talk with Ron again.*

What about you? Who are those, who had a significant impact on you? Spiritual father/mother if you like... ... Have you ever thought, that they might be a bit like Paul. They may be wondering how **you** are going in your walk with God... They may still be praying for you...

How about you give them a phone call... Or better still, invite them to come out to St George for a visit... Tell them what God's been doing in your life, and let them know that you've been keeping on in the faith...

Anyway: Back to the reading.

In Vv19&20, he describes these baby Christians as our:

- hope;
- joy;
- glory;
- crown of boasting...

Oops boasting... Christians aren't supposed to boast... But here they are: Boasting.... What's that about? Well, I **don't** think it's about "I'm a better evangelist than you are..." It comes across to me more as an overflow of joy for what God has done in Thessalonica.

*Think of a Mum and Dad, and their delight, when their little baby takes its first steps – when it learns to walk, and their little bub is no longer a baby – it's now a toddler...*

*Those of you who are parents, you can remember that moment of joy, can't you... And you boasted about it, too... You didn't say, "I'm such a fantastic parent. Look, I've taught my kid to walk"... It's not that sort of boasting. It was an immense joy for you, and you were so joyful, it overflowed, and you just had to tell all your friends... Little Johnny started walking last week... Wow... What a joy...*

So, there is always a special relationship between ourselves and those who played a big part in our “coming to Christ” or in our faith development... And this is definitely coming through here.

But there’s also something else at play – it’s bigger than that... It’s not just a love for “the special ones”. It’s a love for **all** Christians... It is a love for Christians within an individual church (And I see the love that you guys have for one another)... But it’s also a love that extends and encompasses the wider Christian church...

*Whenever Robyn and I go on holidays, a highlight for us, is to find a local church where we’re at, and meet a whole new group of people (who we’ve never met), and yet, we know we belong... It’s like we’ve known them for years, because we are brothers and sisters in Christ...*

*It’s now only 2 & a bit weeks until we go on holidays, and we’re really looking forward to fellowshiping with the Glasshouse Country Baptist. If you’re ever over at the coast, check them out. Lovely people.*

*Hello:*

- *Mark & Sue;*
- *Barnabas & Tania*

*If you’re listening in, we’ll see you in a few weeks.*

Christians belong with other Christians....

And I'd be bold enough to say that "Disciples of Jesus, are at their most joyful, when they are in the company of other Disciples of Jesus..." ... And when we're not, there's something missing...

When Timothy came back from Thessalonica, he brought a good report. He spoke of their faith; he spoke of their love; and how they **longed** to see P&S, just as much as P&S longed to see them.

And when Paul prayed for them, he prayed <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you

Sometimes, it's easy for us to love our own little close-knit group of Christians... but for some, they find it "more difficult" to love those in the wider church... And sometimes we might become really insular and **don't** love other Christians, and **don't** fellowship with other Christians...

Sadly, sometimes we put more effort into justifying why we're set apart from another group of Christians, than we do into being one in Christ.... To my shame, I've done that at times. May God forgive me...

Now, for those who are **new** to BD, something you probably don't know, is when there's a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the month, we don't hold a service. We encourage our people to go and fellowship with the wider Christian church – go and visit another church, and share the love. So, start thinking about

who you're going to visit, because there's a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday next month (30<sup>th</sup> March).

But what a prayer hey: <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you

And that's my prayer for us as a church: <sup>12</sup> ... may the Lord make [us] increase and abound in love for one another and for all,...

Righto: So, that's the 1<sup>st</sup> reason he's desperately longing to get back together with the Thessalonians: For Christian fellowship / for an expression of Christian love.

## 2.

The second reason he wants to see them, is a bit tougher.

The church in Thessalonica, were suffering dreadful persecution (as were P&S). P&S had only been with them for 3 weeks before they were run out of town. And so here was this little fledgling church of brand new baby Christians, and they were suffering under severe persecution. And Paul was a little bit worried.

He was a little bit worried that:

- their faith had not had time to mature;
- they may have become disheartened;

- maybe they were not walking with The Lord anymore;
- the persecution had got the better of them, and they threw up their hands and said, “It’s not worth it”...

And the persecution they suffered, was a spiritual attack.

Paul said, <sup>18</sup> .... we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, again and again — but Satan hindered us.

BTW, if you don’t believe in Satan, then you don’t know who your enemy is. P&S had a mission to carry out, but Satan hindered them... And in this case, he did it through the Jews.

In Phillippi, the trouble came from the Gentiles/Pagans.

But once they hit Thessalonica, the opposition came from the local Synagogue. When people started turning to Jesus, the Jews became jealous, and they raised up a mob to run P&S out of town.

And so they went to Berea. And Acts 17 says:

<sup>10</sup> ... and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup> Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. <sup>12</sup> Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

Praise God. The Gospel has been received. They believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. But do you know what happened then?

When the Jews back in Thessalonica heard that the Word of God was being received in Berea, they went there themselves, and stirred up a crowd there, to run the missionaries out of town again...

And to escape the trouble they were put on a ship, and they left the region of Macedonia, and they travelled all the way to Athens...

How did Satan hinder them from getting back to Thessalonica? The Local Synagogue were violently set against them... They were not content with just running them out of Thessalonica. They dogged them until they fled Macedonia...

Now, this reminds me of something Jesus said, in the Book of Revelation. Twice, Jesus refers to a "Synagogue of Satan". Smyrna & Philadelphia. Why? Because these were places where God's own people, not only rejected Jesus, but actively persecuted Disciples of Jesus... They were not doing God's work. Their father, was not God, but Satan...

The persecution of Christians, is a spiritual attack, from Satan himself...

And it's not uncommon. In fact, it's normal. Paul told them upfront, (before they became Christians), "You're going to be persecuted if you do"... <sup>4</sup> For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

Here's a spiritual truth: An evangelist, is not a salesman. An evangelist, is a person who proclaims the Word of God, which is Good and True.

When's the last time you heard an evangelist make an appeal, "Come to Jesus, but be prepared for the suffering and affliction" ....? It doesn't happen much does it...

More often than not, these days, there's a false gospel being proclaimed:

- "Come to Jesus, and He will give you prosperity"  
Whereas Jesus says, "Leave everything to follow me".
  
- "Come to Jesus, and your life is going to be so much more pleasant:
  - You won't be sick;
  - you will become a person of influence;
  - your wife's going to love you so much more;
  - Your children are going to become perfect little angels...

Whereas Jesus says, "The way is narrow, and the road is hard that leads to life".

- "Come to Jesus, and "Live your best life" – in other words, it's all about you...  
Whereas Jesus says, "Lay down your life, and follow me"...  
(It's all about Jesus)

And when the Gospel is proclaimed, “true evangelism”, **must** include the message, that it is tough being a Christian.

Jesus said,

- “The world will hate you because of Me” (Matthew 10:21)
- “Take up your cross to follow me” (Luke 14:27)
- “Count the cost” (Luke 14:28)
- “If any one of you, do not renounce all that you have, you cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33)

It’s tough being a Christian... And the message of the Gospel, should be “It is tough (being a Disciple of Jesus), **but the one who endures to the end, will be saved.**” (Matthew 10:22)

And I want you to understand this: It’s not “the one who is saved, will endure to the end”. Jesus didn’t say that. Jesus said: **the one who endures to the end, will be saved.**” (Matthew 10:22)

And this was Paul’s concern for the church in Thessalonica – he needed to know that:

- they **were** enduring in the faith
- they would hold fast, to the **end** (even in the midst of severe persecution)....

You see, when they first believed, he was filled with joy, because they received the Word for what it is (the Word of God); They believed; And they were saved... But because of the persecution, Paul’s been fretting: What if they can’t handle it; What if they can’t stand strong...: <sup>5</sup> **For this**

reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labour would be in vain.

I don't care what your theology is, the **Scriptures** are very clear, and **this** is what we hold on to "Those who endure to the end, will be saved". (not those who begin the race. Those who endure to the end)

And praise God, when Timothy returned with the news, he was so happy: They're holding on to the faith... Your labour wasn't in vain... They **are** still walking with Jesus...

He was so happy.

### 3.

The third reason Paul wanted to return to them, was because there is so much more for them to learn.

Imagine if you only had 3 weeks, to learn all there is to know about Christianity and being a Disciple of Jesus... I reckon I would probably get as far as "believe"; "be baptised"; and "be filled with the Holy Spirit"

"Conversion" to Christianity isn't enough. No matter how spectacular a person's conversion is, it is not enough. He sent Timothy to help establish them in their faith, and **exhort** them in their faith.

*Think of a wheat crop: You can get a grain of wheat to*

*germinate on a wet rag. But it won't grow into a crop. And when you plant a crop, the seedling gets up and growing,,  
But even then, it needs to have more rain, so it can get its secondary roots down into the soil, and establish itself as a plant that will grow and be fruitful...*

And for a Christian, conversion (that's where we make the decision and the commitment to follow Jesus) – well, that's just the first step. It's the beginning of a lifetime of:

- discipleship:
- being established; and
- growing; and
- maturing in Christ...

To establish, is to learn about Jesus, and to grow.

To exhort, is to encourage, and to urge one another on in the faith.

And this is why we meet together. It's why we:

- come to church;
- have Bible studies;
- have Sunday School  
& Kids Club  
& Youth mentoring

We get together, to:

- learn about the Faith;
- To encourage one another;
- To exhort one another.

As Paul said, he was praying that he could again be with them (face to face) to **supply what is lacking in [their] faith?**

There was more to be taught. He wanted to take them deeper. And in the rest of the letter, he starts to do that. And next week, we'll hear how he teaches them about living in holiness...

But there's two more themes in this letter: The Joy of a Pastor/evangelist; and prayer.

*When I was a farmer, the joy was two-fold.*

*a) Yes, there were tough times, but I loved doing stuff out on the farm... For me, it was the best workplace ever... It's more than a job – it's a way of life...*

*b) And the other source of joy, was to see the result of one's labour.*

- *The joy of the harvest;*
- *Shearing time; and*
- *even developing new country:*
  - *stick-picking;*
  - *burning out stumps;*
  - *ploughing up country for the first time;*
  - *levelling out melon-holes*
  
  - *taking a patch of Brigalow scrub, and making it into productive cultivation...*

*There's joy in that. There's satisfaction in that...*

What's the joy of being a pastor/evangelist???

## You are!!!

Paul would have been crushed, if they lost their faith. When he heard that they were still following Jesus, he said “<sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.”

P&S were doing it tough (and ministry can be very tough)... But in their affliction, they were comforted when they heard about the faith of the Thessalonians. It filled them with joy...

It wasn't joy as in “Oh, how wonderful we are as pastors...”... It wasn't joy in their own achievement... P&S **thanked God** for the faith of the Thessalonians. Do you know what that tells me? They had a faith made strong by **God**. It is a divine faithfulness...

And that's what brought them joy. “God is at work in you. Praise God.”

And let me tell you, I am filled with joy at the moment, because I can see the way God is doing a work in **this** church. I am seeing:

- an increase in love;
- an increase in joy;
- an increase in faith;
- an increase in service; and
- caring for one another...

That's the sort of thing that P&S would boast about... Not to say, “Oh how wonderful we are”, but to say, “Oh how wonderful God is. Oh how faithful He is. Thank you Lord.”

And their joy leads them to prayer.

The letter we're currently reading (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians), is one of the oldest books of the New Testament. And as such, this prayer, is one of the earliest written prayers, that is prayed **to** the Lord Jesus. Prior to this, Prayer was always to God (as in God the Father). But this prayer is acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus, and is addressed to **our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus.**

We pray to God the Father;  
We pray to our Lord Jesus; and  
We pray through the Spirit...

And I want you to notice something about the way that P&S pray.

There is a humility about them:

- They do not presume to always know God's will; and
- They do not presume to tell God what to do; or
- To demand that God will do what they claim...

Nor do they:

- try to claim that their own words have power.
- speak their prayer into being; or
- use their language as some kind of evidence of how great my faith is, and therefore God will do whatever I say...

There is something very wrong, when a person puts themselves in the place of God, when they pray.

- I command this to happen; and
- This is going to happen; and
- God will do this...

How did P&S pray? They humbly made a request of God, without assuming that it was God's will for it to happen.

And so they said:

- <sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you
- <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love...
- <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father

Now, in the original Greek, there is no word "may". That's all taken care of in the voice and the mood of the Verb. And so e.g. the verb "direct" is in what's called the "optative mood"... It's expressing a wish/desire. It is not making a demand or an assumption that it's going to happen....

To get the sense of it in English, we have to add the word "may"...

And so when we pray, we humbly bring our prayers/requests/petitions... It's saying, "Lord, I desire this. May You please do this for me???" But not my will, but Your will be done...

So, that's how they pray. What do they humbly ask for?

1.

Firstly, that they could get back together with the Thessalonians again.

If it was Satan who was stopping them from getting back to Thessalonica, well it's God who can clear the way. But they don't take the liberty to assume that God will clear the way...

And we don't know if P&S ever **did** get back to Thessalonica. God may have had something else planned.

## 2.

Secondly, they prayed that the love within that church would grow.

<sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another

And let me tell you, when a church is a bunch of Christians who really love one another, that is a place where God truly is at work. The Spirit of God is the source of love. He fills us with love.

## 3.

And their prayer for love didn't stop there.

may the Lord make you increase and abound in love....  
for all

Does that remind you of the sorts of things that Jesus said about loving our neighbour?

As Disciples of Jesus, we are followers of our Lord Jesus... We follow Him in His ways. Those whom Jesus loves, we love... It is a divine love. It is the Lord who enables us to love those who you thought you could never love...

#### 4. And:

The fourth thing they prayed, was: <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

The current life we live (in Christ), is preparing us for eternity. When Jesus returns, those who have died already, will be raised, and we will all be gathered together (all of the saints together). And we will be presented as being holy and blameless...

And here in this prayer, we realise that being holy and blameless, has a lot to do with the way we love.

The prayer was: that the Lord would make our love abound (our love within the Christian fellowship, and our love for all people) – that our love would abound... Why? So that He may establish our hearts, blameless in holiness....

Do you remember how Jesus summarise all of the Law and the Prophets? Love God with every part of your being, and love your neighbour as yourself.

The prayer, is that the **Lord** will fill us up with His love.  
A love for:

- God;
- our Brothers & Sisters in Christ;

- other people...

And this love, is an expression of the Blamelessness and holiness of the Spirit of God within.

When God in us:

- purifies us; and
- makes us holy; and
- fills us up with His love for others,,,

This is the divine work of God. It is the means by which we will be presented as holy, on the day of Jesus' return...

Next week, we talk about how we live, while we wait for Jesus to return: a life, that is pleasing to God.

Questions???

Let's pray:

<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, ... make [us] increase and abound in love for one another and for all,.....<sup>13</sup> so that he may establish [our] hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Acts 16:9