

Slide 1

Salvation
Exemplary hope of young
Christians

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Today we start a new series on the letters to the church in Thessalonica.

All in all, it will take us about 3 months to go through these 2 letters.

Before we go to the actual letter I want to give you some background of Thessalonica.

So, let's have a quick look at a map showing us where Thessalonica is located.

Location of Thessalonica



As we can see Thessalonica is located in between Berea and Philippi, two other cities where Paul has been. The distant to both cities is approx. 100 miles or 160 km.

In the past we had already a series on the letter to the Philippians.

Let's first look at some information on the historical background of Thessalonica.

Historical background

- Thessalonica was located at the intersection of two major Roman roads, one leading from Italy eastward (Ignatia Way) and the other from the Danube to the Aegean. Thessalonica's location and use as a port made it a prominent city. In 168 BC it became the capital of the second district of Macedonia and later it was made the capital and major port of the whole Roman province of Macedonia (146 BC). In 42 BC, after the battle at Philippi, Thessalonica was made a free city. Today the modern city of Thessaloniki is the second most important city of Greece and home to a million inhabitants.

It was a key commercial, military, and political city then, as it has been throughout its history to today. In Paul's day, it had about 200,000 inhabitants, with a large enough Jewish population to warrant a synagogue. It was the capital of the Macedonian Province. Today Thessalonica (also known by its anglicized name, Salonica) is Greece's second largest city.

After this historical background let's quickly look at its Biblical significance.

Biblical Significance

- Paul (with Silas and Timothy) came to Thessalonica from Philippi on his second missionary journey, stopping in Amphipolis and Apollonia before arriving here (Acts 17). He preached in the city's synagogue, the chief synagogue of the region, for at least three weeks. His ministry was strong, and he established a Jewish-Gentile church, although it was more heavily Gentile (1 Thess 1:9). When Paul faced great persecution at the hands of the mob, he fled to Berea, but Thessalonians eventually forced him to leave there also (Acts 17:13-14).

In the book of Acts we find the report about Paul's trip to Thessalonica in chapter 17.

We will not go through that chapter today, but I advise you to read it somewhere this week, just to get clear background information on the start of the church in that city.

Let's go to some background information on the first letter of Paul to the church there.

Background of this letter

- In this first letter Paul commends the congregation for her zeal and emphasizes his unselfish intentions. He has heard from his fellow missionary Timothy that the municipality is doing well. In chapter 4 he answers a question from the congregation about the hereafter: according to Paul the deceased wait for eternal life. In the last chapter the apostle states that the church must be vigilant because the "day of the Lord" can come any moment, like a thief in the night.
- The letter is Paul's oldest letter, presumably written around the year 50-52. It is thus also the oldest writing in the New Testament. The second letter to the Thessalonians was probably written considerably later.

I do not have to explain this information.

Just one remark: although all scholars agree that this letter is one of Paul's earliest letters, some hold the opinion that the letter to the Galatians was his first letter and that this one was therefore his second letter.

That however doesn't change anything to its content and its importance.

So, let's now go to the first verse of it.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

- Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paulus, Silvanus en Timotheüs aan de gemeente van de Thessalonicenzen, die in God de Vader en de Heere Jezus Christus is: genade zij u en vrede van God, onze Vader, en van de Heere Jezus Christus.

Paul includes in his opening greeting also his co-workers Silvanus (or Silas as he is mentioned in the book of Acts) and Timothy. So, we might say that it is a letter on behalf of the three of them to the church in Thessalonica, where all three were involved at the time of the establishment of the church.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-4

- We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.
- Wij danken God altijd voor u allen, wanneer wij aan u denken in onze gebeden, en zonder ophouden denken aan het werk van uw geloof, de inspanning van uw liefde en de volharding van uw hoop op onze Heere Jezus Christus, voor het aangezicht van onze God en Vader. Wij weten immers, geliefde broeders, van uw verkiezing door God.

Again we see that Paul mentions the fact that they are still praying for the church in Thessalonica, as they still remember all these wonderful things about the church.

2 things specifically ask our attention:

- The patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ: do we have and experience that also? Does our hope in Christ also produces patience in us?
- Their election by God: all too often we think it depends on us whether or not we are going to be saved. But that is not true, as we see here. It is God who elects those who He will save. We see that also reflected in Acts 2:39 and in Exodus 33:19

Let's look at those verses.

Exodus 33:19

- Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."
- Maar Hij zei: Ik zal al Mijn goedheid bij u voorbij laten komen, en in uw aanwezigheid zal Ik de Naam van de HEERE uitroepen, maar Ik zal genadig zijn voor wie Ik genadig zal zijn, en Ik zal Mij ontfermen over wie Ik Mij ontfermen zal.

As we are all sinners none of us deserves to receive grace or compassion from God. None of us can claim a right on grace and compassion.

It is God who decides who He will save and on whom He will have compassion.

And He is the only one who knows on whom He will have compassion and to whom He will show grace.

That's why we still must continue to proclaim the Gospel as God will use that to draw those to Christ Jesus to whom He will show grace.

We see election confirmed in various Scriptures, for instance by Peter in Acts 2:38-39

Acts 2:38-39

- Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Look at verse 39!

Isn't that exactly in line what God said in Exodus 33:19?

Remember also what our Lord Jesus Christ said in John 6:44

John 6:44

- “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.
- Niemand kan tot Mij komen, tenzij de Vader, Die Mij gezonden heeft, hem trekt; en Ik zal hem doen opstaan op de laatste dag.

Whoever is brought saved is saved by grace alone.

We cannot do anything in order to be saved, it all depends on God's grace towards us.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul says it as follows:

Ephesians 2:8-9

- For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.
- Want uit genade bent u zalig geworden, door het geloof, en dat niet uit u, het is de gave van God; niet uit werken, opdat niemand zou roemen.

So often people will say one of the following things:

- I have decided to follow Jesus
- I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior
- I choose to follow Jesus

As our salvation is the work of God from beginning to end, both providing the way for us to be saved as well as bringing us on that way, these kinds of statements take away glory from God for our salvation.

We shouldn't do that!

How good it is for us that our salvation does not depend on us, but on the faithfulness of God. That is what makes it sure!

Let's continue.

1 Thessalonians 1:5

- For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.
- Want ons Evangelie is niet alleen met woorden tot u gekomen, maar ook met kracht en met de Heilige Geest en met volle zekerheid. U weet immers hoe wij in uw midden geweest zijn ter wille van u.

Preaching the Gospel is not just a matter of speaking the right words, it also matters how we live our lives and how we behave ourselves towards unbelievers, towards the people with whom we share the Gospel.

We see that coming back in the next verses.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

- And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.
- Ook bent u navolgers geworden van ons en van de Heere, toen u het Woord aannam temidden van veel verdrukking, met blijdschap van de Heilige Geest, zodat u voorbeelden geworden bent voor alle gelovigen in Macedonië en in Achaje.

Maybe it seems strange to you that Paul here speaks of the Thessalonians following his team and the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says it as follows:
Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

In 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter says it as follows:

1 Peter 5:1-4

- The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:
- Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

When searching for elders and deacons most often churches will look at the requirements as mentioned in 1 Timothy 3: 1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. But I believe that in this letter Peter also gives some essential information regarding elders, especially telling them to be examples to the disciples entrusted into their care.

Let's be honest, shepherds are there for the sheep, not the sheep for the shepherds. It is good to keep this always in mind.

Let's also think about what our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said in Matthew 20:25-28

Matthew 20:25-28

- But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.
- “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.
- “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Our greatest example of servanthood is indeed the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Some other important verses regarding these things we find in Ephesians 4:11-12

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

These verses make it clear that all these persons with special gifts are there for the church, not the other way around.

Let's go to the next verses from 1 Thessalonians 1.

1 Thessalonians 1:8

- For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.
- Want van u uit heeft het Woord van de Heere luid geklonken; niet alleen in Macedonië en Achaje, maar ook in alle plaatsen heeft uw geloof in God zich verspreid, zodat het niet nodig is dat wij iets daarvan zeggen.

Obviously, the Word of God was brought to other places from Thessalonica. They were indeed involved in missionary work.

That work had been fruitful as we also can conclude from the last verses for today.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

- For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and 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, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
- Want zij vermelden zelf over ons hoezeer wij ingang bij u gekregen hebben en hoe u zich van de afgoden tot God bekeerd hebt om de levende en waarachtige God te dienen, en Zijn Zoon uit de hemelen te verwachten, Die Hij uit de doden heeft opgewekt, namelijk Jezus, Die ons verlost van de komende toorn.

Here we see the confirmation of the fruit that Paul and his team had from their mission in Thessalonica.

And Paul reminds them of the ultimate outcome of their faith in the Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not know when the Lord Jesus will come back, we just know that somewhere in the future that will happen.

And then we have the assurance that our faith will not have been in vain.

That is the hope we have in Jesus and that makes it possible to wait patiently for these things to happen.

Shall we pray?