

Paul's First Epistles

I want to share a little bit with you tonight on the approximate time at which the books of I Thessalonians and II Thessalonians were written. On the close of Paul's second itinerary the last major stop was at Corinth. He spent a year and a half at Corinth. The other areas he was at was for a short period of time, he taught the Word, was persecuted and had to move on, like at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Berea, and Athens.

At Corinth God said, "I've got some people here that need to hear the Word. You just stay and speak the Word and their going to hear." And He said, "Paul, don't be afraid. No man here is going to hurt thee." They'd touched him at a few other cities; a few stones, a few whips, jail. He had to sneak out of town at night once. Now at Corinth God says, "Nobody is going to touch you." Sense-knowledge wise, how could that be? In all these other cities, they had raised persecution against him. You sort of figure when something happens over and over again it's going to continue. But not when God says it's going to be different. If God told you the sun wasn't coming up tomorrow, you better get out your blankets. God said there wasn't going to be any man in this city that would touch Paul. It says he stayed there a year and six months.

In I Thessalonians chapter 1 Paul's writing back to those who are in Thessalonica. He had already been there. He's writing back to them. There are areas in I Thessalonians where he talks about having been there.

I Thessalonians 1:1:

Paul, and Silvanus [Sila], and Timotheus [Timothy], unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Silas and Timothy are with Paul.

I Thessalonians 1:5-6:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

And ye became followers [imitators] of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

This tells you that they had already received the Word.

"received" – *dechomai* – when they first received it, inherently

“affliction” – *thlipsis* – the pressures of life or mental pressures – the kind the Jews were raising.

I Thessalonians 1:7:

So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Thessalonica is right in Macedonia. He said, “You became examples of all those in Macedonia and also down in Achaia, or Greece. Achaia is where Corinth is. It’s where Athens is. Where was Paul first, Macedonia or Achaia? He was in Macedonia and then to Achaia but the Macedonian believing was heard of down in Achaia as well as all over Macedonia.

I Thessalonians 1:8:

For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

Why was their believing spread abroad? Because it was one of the three major trade cities around the Aegean Sea. People passing through heard the Word and they would take it abroad.

I Thessalonians 1:9:

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

“what manner of entering in” – he’d already been to Thessalonica

“ye turned to God from idols” – that must mean that were into worshiping idols

Two things I want you to keep in mind:

- 1) They received the Word in much pressure (affliction).
- 2) They turned from idols.

Acts 17:4:

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

“devout Greeks” – religious Greeks. They were the ones who served idols; very religious. These were they who he says had turned from idols to serve the living and true God.

Acts 17:5-9:

But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set

all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, *one* Jesus.

And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

There's the affliction, the pressure. How they assaulted Jason's house, took him to jail and released him on bail.

I Thessalonians 2:1:

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

“know our entrance in unto you” – He'd already been there. He'd already entered in unto them. He's talking about the first time he was there.

I Thessalonians 2:2:

But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

“suffered before” – before their entrance into Thessalonica; before they first came to Thessalonica.

“contention” – *agōn* – a type of fighting that involves real intense struggle, where you put every muscle you've got into it. We get the word “agony” from it. It doesn't mean it was agony but it's really putting your heart and soul and everything you've got, into it.

It says, “We taught at Philippi and we suffered for it. Now we teach at Thessalonica and we got a big *agōn*; a big contention.”

I Thessalonians 2:3:

For our exhortation *was* not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

I Thessalonians 2:7:

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

He said they were gentile when they first came to Thessalonica. What did he do when he came to Thessalonica? He taught them the Word, opening and alleging that Jesus was the Christ, that God had raised him from the dead; gentile.

I Thessalonians 2:14:

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews:

Did the Jews at Jerusalem and in Judea do a few things to the believers there? There was persecution. What about the countrymen in Thessalonica? They took Jason. That's what he's talking about.

I Thessalonians 2:15-17:

Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

“being taken from you for a short time” – they had only been gone from them a little while.

The one thing they did when they got out of there is they wanted to get back there. They wanted to see them again. They wanted to find out what was happening; were they still on the Word; what were those persecutors doing? They wanted to see them face to face. They had been gone from them only a short time but it was only in presence; their hearts were there.

I Thessalonians 2:18:

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

“hindered” – prevented – Paul went down to Berea and the Jews from Thessalonica came down to Berea and would have gotten to Paul but Paul got out and went down to Athens.

I Thessalonians 3:1:

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

He was in Thessalonica, went down to Berea then down to Athens in Achaia. Who was to be left at Athens alone? Paul but who is the “we”? It couldn’t have been Luke. He was left up in Philippi. We better look at Acts. Remember, in chapter 16 of Acts is where he was at Philippi and it says he was shamefully entreated there.

I Thessalonians 2:2:

But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention [*agōn*].

That’s where they were beaten and thrown in jail. That’s what he was writing about. In Acts chapter 16 is where they were at Philippi and they were beaten and thrown in jail. Then he goes to Thessalonica and they’re going to beat him again but they get Jason instead and Paul leaves.

Acts 17:10:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 17:13:

But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Paul wanted to go back to Thessalonica. Satan hindered him and he couldn’t go back there. There was too much persecution, too much trouble in the city. Twigs could meet but Paul couldn’t go back yet. So, do you know what they did?

Acts 17:14-15:

And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens...

Silas and Timothy stayed in Macedonia. They were in Berea and Berea is in Macedonia. He left Timothy and Silas up north in Macedonia and he went down to Athens. Do you know why I know why it wasn’t specifically Berea? Let’s read I Thessalonians 3:1 again.

I Thessalonians 3:1:

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

Who’s the “we”? Is it Silas? Timothy? Luke? They’re not with him are they? Who was with him? Go back to Acts.

Acts 17:15:

And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

“they that conducted Paul” – that’s who the “we” was in I Thessalonians 3:1.

I Thessalonians 3:1:

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

We thought it good for me, Paul, to be left at Athens alone.

I Thessalonians 3:2:

And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

In Acts 17:14, it says Silas and Timothy abode there still. In Berea? No, Macedonia, while Paul went down to a new country; Achaia. Silas and Timothy stayed in Macedonia. They were at Berea but Paul left and went down to Athens. Before he left, he told Timothy and Silas to stay there but specifically, it tells us in Thessalonians, he told Timothy to go to Thessalonica.

Timothy could do that. It was Paul they were really after. That’s why Silas and Timothy, in Acts 17:14 abode in Macedonia but before Paul left he sent Timothy to Thessalonica; another city in Macedonia. Silas stayed at Berea.

I Thessalonians 3:1:

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

“to be left at Athens alone” – “for me to be left at Athens” – “for me to go ahead on to Athens and be left there alone.”

I Thessalonians 3:2:

And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith [believing]:

“sent Timotheus” – from Berea back up to Thessalonica which is near by in Macedonia.

I Thessalonians 3:3:

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

After Paul, Silas and Timothy left Thessalonica and went down to Berea, the Jews were still there doing their persecution number. So, Paul sent Timothy back up there before he leaves to go down to Athens and tells Timothy to establish and comfort them concerning their believing.

“for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” – you know it’s going to happen. It’s not that God wants us to have persecution but it’s going to happen because the devil gets mad and kicks up his heels every time the Word moves.

I Thessalonians 3:4-5:

For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation [pressures]; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

“when I could no longer forbear” – here he repeats it – “When I could no longer forbear; I couldn’t stand it. I couldn’t go back. Satan had hindered me from going back. I had to go on down to Athens because of the things happening in Berea and all over Macedonia. I left and went down to Athens but I sent to know your believing. I sent Timothy back up there to know what’s going on.”

Remember Luke? Where is he? He’s up at Philippi. Where’s Timothy? He’s up at Thessalonica. Where is Silas? He’s at Berea. Where is Paul? He’s down in Athens. Luke’s in Philippi. That’s the first place Paul went when he got there.

Timothy is in the second place Paul went, Thessalonica. Silas is in Berea. Paul is down on the front lines again, reaching out into a new area. But none of those areas are left uncovered. He’s got leadership in every place. He didn’t have it in Thessalonica for a little bit because of the persecution. But now he had to send somebody back there to establish them in their believing; to get them built up because they didn’t know whether Paul had “flown the coup” or they’d got him down at Berea. So now he sent Timothy back up there. Now he’s got some leadership to work there a little bit. He’s got Silas in Berea and he is down opening up a new area.

Those men stayed there and worked with those believers until they were strong enough to stand on their own; until they got their own leadership in that area. They weren’t just there a day and a half. They spent some time in these communities. I know because Paul was down in Athens a while. He was in the synagogue on the sabbath. He was teaching in the marketplace daily. He was up on Mars Hill and finally goes over to Corinth. Silas and Timothy never came down to meet him until he got to Corinth.

I Thessalonians 3:6:

But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good

tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also *to see* you:

“Timotheus came from you unto us” – When was that? When Paul was in Corinth.

Acts 18:1:

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

Acts 18:5:

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit [engrossed in the Word], and testified to the Jews *that Jesus was Christ*.

They came when Paul was at Corinth.

Acts 18:11:

And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

They spent a year and six months in Corinth with Paul, Silas and Timothy being together.

I Thessalonians 3:6-9:

But now when Timotheus came from you unto us [at Corinth-Acts 18:5], and brought us good tidings of your faith [believing] and charity [the love of God in the renewed mind in manifestation], and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also *to see* you:

Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith [believing]:

For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

“We’re just tickled pink. I haven’t seen you but Timothy told us how things are really going there. You’re really believing. You’re higher than a kite.”

I Thessalonians 3:10:

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

“We’ve only been there once. We’ve got to get back and do something for you; build your believing.

I Thessalonians 3:11:

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

“We’re coming some day. We just haven’t been able to so far.”

II Thessalonians 1:1-3:

Paul, and Silvanus [Silas], and Timotheus [Timothy], unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

“because that your faith groweth exceedingly...” – How did Paul know this? Timothy gave him the report when he got back with him at Corinth.

II Thessalonians 1:4-6:

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

“God to recompense tribulation to them” – They’re going to get it back. Just like Sosthenes got it back only some of them are going to wait maybe until after the gathering together.

II Thessalonians 1:7:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

Don’t go back and seek revenge. Until the time when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, we’re in a spiritual battle. But when Christ returns, he says, “You’re going to take a vacation; you’re going to rest with us from all this *thipsis* [pressures].”

II Thessalonians 1:8:

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Those that don't believe, that want to kick up the persecution, are going to suffer their tribulation later. I'd rather have a little tribulation now. Tribulation now is not so bad compared with the future tribulation. Did that tell the picture of Thessalonica where they had assaulted the house of Jason? Sure, and all the things that must have followed that. That's why Paul, Silas and Timothy had to get out of there so quick.

II Thessalonians 2:7:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

"letteth" – holds him down

In other words, when you and I are gathered together, then Satan will have his run of the world but until that time he's sort of held down. He can only go so far. He can't have the things that will happen in the day of wrath.

II Thessalonians 2:8:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

II Thessalonians 3:1-2:

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you:

And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith.

Not everybody in this world is born again. That's what he's saying.

II Thessalonians 3:7-8:

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought [nothing]; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

Acts 18:1-3:

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

And because he was of the same craft [occupation], he abode with them, and wrought [worked]: for by their occupation they were tentmakers [saddle makers].

They worked together; same occupation. Remember the principle: Paul worked to support himself until the work of the ministry was big enough to support him. He worked and he wasn't chargeable to anybody there then, till the ministry was big enough not only financially but heart-wise to support him. Is that the only place where Paul worked? No, he worked at a lot of places he went to like Thessalonica.

II Thessalonians 3:8-9:

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought [nothing]; but wrought [worked] with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

He worked. Not because he did not have power but to make himself an example. Anybody, except those that have a sufficient work in their area, provides an example by working, that you're not chargeable, that don't start shoving a few things down your throat. Then when the work is big enough, financially and heart-wise to see that they need somebody to carry it, then you don't have to work in that capacity.

II Thessalonians 3:10-12:

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

Quit living off of welfare. Quit begging. Go to work. That's what he is saying. Just like he had done at Corinth; the same thing he did at Thessalonica. He did the same thing in every area he'd go into. It was an example to the believers.

How long was Paul in Corinth? A year and a half.

Acts 18:18:

And Paul *after this* tarried *there* yet a good while [certain days], and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into [towards] Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn *his* head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

Then he goes to Ephesus and who's with him? Priscilla and Aquila.

Acts 18:21:

But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Did Priscilla and Aquila go with him? No, because before he gets back Apollos starts up there and Priscilla and Aquila grab Apollos and show him the way more perfectly. Paul hasn't even gotten back from Jerusalem and Antioch yet.

Paul was with Silas and Timothy at Corinth after these records we read in Thessalonians. There's no other record in Acts that mention Silas and Timothy being with Paul. Perhaps Silas and Timothy were with Paul together at other occasions. I don't know. That's possible. There's one place I know he was at Ephesus with Timothy but it doesn't mention Silas any more after this second itinerary. Silas later goes over with Peter into Babylon. It says so in I Peter.

I Peter 5:12-13:

By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

The *church that is* at Babylon, elected together with *you*, saluteth you; and *so doth* Marcus my son.

The most probable time that I & II Thessalonians were written, when you put all these things together, knowing how in Thessalonians it talked about Timothy going up to Thessalonica then coming down and rejoining Paul at Corinth, the most logical time for these epistles to have been written is while Paul was at Corinth in Acts 18:1-18. He was there a year and a half.

He taught the Word to a lot of people but all that time he's concerned about those Thessalonians. He said he wanted to see them face to face. "When Timothy came back, we were sure joyed but we still want to see you." That's what Paul said. The most logical time for him to have written them was while he was at Corinth for that year and a half. That gives you the approximate time at which those epistles were written and therefore they must have been the first epistles that Paul wrote.

The first thing that God had put in writing was the things regarding the hope of the return.

Because with all that flack that they had to put up with, the one thing that kept them going was keeping their eyes on the goal. The first thing is: keep your eyes on the hope of the return. When you lose sight of the hope, your reason for living subsides. Keep your eye on the hope of Christ's return. Don't look at the task. Don't look at the pressure that the world puts on. Look at the hope of the return. That's where you have the rest. Maybe you get a few sleepless nights. Great, there's a rest coming. You've got a hope like nobody else has. It's not when you die. It's the hope of the RETURN of Christ. Keep your eyes on the hope then the tasks become easy.

When you work a garden and keep your eyes on the tasks, pulling weeds, digging dirt, "Man this is terrible work." Or keep your eyes on that beautiful food you're going to be eating next summer, "Man look at those weeds go down. Wow!" Keep your eye on the goal; on the end result. Keep your eye on the hope of Christ's return. That's the first thing God had Paul to write.

Paul's down at Corinth. He's got a year and a half there, teaching the Word of God but he's concerned about those back there. I say, "Paul wrote back." That's right. Paul was the writer but what did he write? What God told him to write? It's God breathed. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. What Paul wrote to those Thessalonians was God's Word. Why did God have it written in His Word where it says, "Timothy came up to see you to build you up a little more?" What do you think a person is supposed to do? God sends His people in to build us up; to build up our believing, to comfort us, to encourage us. That's why He sends the in there.

Why did God tell in His Word about Paul being so concerned about them? Because God is concerned about every believer. What is our crown of rejoicing? Leaders who walk on the Word, what are they concerned about? The success of the people in their believing; whether they're really on top of it. Are they living a more abundant life or not? If not, what can we do to help them? That's the principle. That's why God had those things written.

It also tells us the approximate time those books were written. Which is kind of neat because it was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of all the epistles to be written. The first thing is to keep your eyes on the hope of Christ's return not on the immediate task. If you keep your eyes on the hope of Christ's return, all the work that you do now is a joy. All the effort that you put into it is worth it. It says in Corinthians that the light tribulation, the *thlipsis*, is only a moment compared with eternity and the things that we're going to receive.

II Corinthians 4:17:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

Keep your eye on the hope of Christ's return and when you keep your eye on that hope all the *thipsis*, all the pressures and all the other things just seem insignificant and the work that you're doing is the greatest joy you can have.