

A Teaching on Thessalonians

by Jim Cymbala

1 Thessalonians is a letter that provides valuable insights into the early Christian church, emphasizing the importance of faith, love, and hope, and the significance of the church as the body of Christ.

Duration: 41:21

Scripture: Luke 1:1

Topics: "Teaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the early Christians who faced persecution but chose to trust in God and were filled with joy. The speaker compares these early Christians to fashion models on the runway, highlighting their dedication and commitment. The sermon emphasizes the importance of laboring in love for God and others, using examples such as a mother caring for her baby. The speaker also references the story of Paul preaching to Jews and Gentiles, breaking down barriers and creating a model church.

Transcript

We're going to have a little Bible study now, and then I hope this will help you as you read the Bible, so you can understand strategies in looking at a passage. We have read through the book of Luke and the book of Acts already, and now we're reading today is the first chapter of the first letter that Paul wrote chronologically. So what have we read? We've read through Luke, which is the life of who? Christ.

Then we read through the book of Acts, and that is how the Christian message spread, and how churches were founded, and how Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the church, got converted on the road to Damascus. And now we saw in the book of Acts how he traveled on missionary journeys, was persecuted, went through a lot of stuff, but preached the gospel, and then founded churches, and put people in charge. Remember now, go back with me, no New Testaments, nothing to hand to anybody, no microphones, no public buildings.

This is how the Christian church began. So now the book of Acts ends, Paul is in Rome in a house under prison guard, but able to receive visitors. That was our reading for yesterday.

Today is chapter one of the first letter the experts say that he wrote, which is 1 Thessalonians. Why is it called 1 Thessalonians? Because it's the first letter of two that he wrote to the church at where? Thessalonica. Everybody say Thessalonica.

Got it. And we get Thessalonians from that. This is the earliest writing, probably in the whole New Testament, all the gospels were written after this, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

This is the first letter that he wrote. This is probably written about 51 AD. Christ died around 30 to 32 AD.

So this is just 19 years later, and now we're seeing the first writings, which are going to become part of the New Testament. This is interesting too. Paul's just writing a letter and there's no hint that he's aware that what he's writing is going to become part of something we call the scripture, the New Testament.

There's no awareness. God took the casual writing, inspired him, facing handling problems, and now ended up becoming part of our sound foundation for faith and doctrine, the New Testament. But this letter, when it was sent, just went to the church at Thessalonica.

So let's read the first chapter. It's only 10 verses. Let's look at it.

I want you to notice how letters were done then. It wasn't dear John or dear Jim or dear Mr. Jones. It was first the name of the person sending it.

We put that at the end. They put it at the beginning. Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Who are Silas and Timothy? We know those are converts and workers that traveled with Paul. Notice, though he was this great apostle, notice his humility that he includes Silas and Timothy with him. He doesn't say, Paul, the great apostle, and a bunch of guys that are with me.

No, he gives them equal space there. Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father. Some translations have belonging to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace be to you. So the way the letters were written back then, you're going to see every letter is basically this way. Who wrote it? Who is it to? And then a word of greeting, like we say, hello, how are you feeling? I hope everything's well.

He wishes them grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. Notice he thanked God for people.

I wonder when the last time any of you here thanked God for a person, not a job, not a healing, not some blessing, but for a person. I think we've lost that practice, but we ought to thank God for people, shouldn't we? 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.

Now that's an important verse which we're going to look at, so let's analyze it. We remember before God our Father, when we're in prayer, when we're thinking about you, your work, what was the work produced by? Faith. Faith produces what? Works.

Your labor prompted by what? Love prompts what? Labor. And your endurance inspired by what? Hope. So what do we have there? Faith, love, and hope.

Everyone say those three. Faith, hope, and love. Faith, love, and hope.

I'm sorry. Now you'll notice in 1 Corinthians 13, which is a passage you are aware of, it lists it in a different order. It says, now abides faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is what? Love.

And love is put last, but only because that chapter, that part of the letter is all about love. But this is the way it happens in your life. First faith, then hope, then love, then hope.

For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you. For because our gospel came to you, notice our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and deep conviction. That conviction is not conviction so much in the listener, it was the conviction in the speaker of Paul and Timothy and Silas.

You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. You welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering.

What's that about? And yet, even though you were going through severe suffering, you had this tremendous joy, but where did you get that joy? From the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model, a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. That's the two areas that we now call Greece.

Macedonia was northern Greece, Achaia was southern Greece. The Lord's message, the gospel, 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 when we came to you. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. They turned, they believed, they served, and then they waited for Jesus to return.

That was their attitude. Now, when you read a Bible, when you read these letters, what you should think of is, this is the letter to the church in Thessalonica, right? Have we heard about Thessalonica somewhere in our recent readings? Yeah, in the book of Acts. This is the letter to the people.

We can actually go back and learn a little bit of what went down, which might help us understand why he wrote to them this way. So let's look back in the book of Acts. You go back and in Acts 17, when Paul and his companions had passed through Amphiphilus and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica.

There we go, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days, what was the Sabbath day back then? Saturday. So if he did it for three Sabbath days, how many weeks would that be? Three weeks.

So for three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. This Jesus, I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah, he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks.

These were Greeks who had turned their back on the pagan 10,000 gods of the Roman empire and believed in the God of the Hebrew Bible, and quite a few prominent women. So what do we have? Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and quite a few prominent women. But other Jews were jealous.

So they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. Look at that. You have revival, people getting converted, and you have a riot going on at the same time.

Look at that. So how does God do? Does he bring revival or does he bring riots? Sometimes he brings both. So there's a riot now, and they rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd, which would have been a bad thing.

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting, notice the accusation, these men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They're all defying Caesar's decrees, the head of the Roman empire, saying that there's another king, one called Jesus. When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil.

Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go. They posted bail. As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.

They were afraid for them, and they got them out of town just in time. Now, months later, Paul goes to Athens, and he's concerned. How are the Christians doing in Thessalonica? So he sends Timothy, and he says, check it out for me.

I want you to bring this letter to them and go and check out how they're doing, and come back and tell me. It's like a mother wanting to find out how the child's doing in school, because I was only with them, and this is wild, only with them for such a short time, and yet a church was formed. Some of the experts say he was only there for three weeks.

Others say, no, he was just teaching in the synagogue for three weeks, but he stayed maybe five, six weeks more, but most people believe he wasn't even there for three months. So how do you start a church in three months, and now send Timothy to find out how he's doing, and when Timothy comes back, Paul now is writing this letter to say, Timothy came back, as we'll learn this week when we read through this, only has four chapters. You'll see what Timothy came back and told Paul.

So you've got an anxious father heart worrying about his spiritual children. That's the way pastors are supposed to be. They're supposed to be concerned not how much money they make or what kind of car they drive.

They're supposed to be worried and concerned about their spiritual children. That comes before anything else. A real man or woman of God cares about the people, not about their own comfort zone.

There's a lot of lessons in here for all of us, but let's just focus before we close on a couple key words, because you have to know what these words mean as you read through the rest of the New Testament. First word is church, to the church at Thessalonica. Well, what's a church? Has nothing to do with the building, nothing at all to do with the building, because they didn't know church with building.

We say, we're going to church. That means we're going to a building, 17 Smith Street. They didn't know anything like that.

Church to them was the unit that God had created for his people to dwell together and fellowship and learn and serve. It's called the church. Now, the church in the New Testament has two pictures.

There's the universal church, all Christians who have been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen that church at one time because it's in Bangladesh. It's in Latvia.

It's in Lithuania. It's in Bolivia. It's in China.

It's in downtown Brooklyn. It's meeting in different places at different times. No one's ever seen that church, but that church, that universal church is called the body of Christ.

What does that mean? That means he, Christ, is the head, spiritually speaking, and we're his body. What does the head do to the body? It gives orders to the body. What does the body do? It's supposed to carry out the orders of the head.

The church is the body of Christ. We're the ones who are supposed to carry out the will, the directions, the plans of the head. Not what the pastor says, what Jesus says.

Not what some church growth book says, what Jesus says. He's the head of the church. You don't belong ever to a pastor.

Someone visiting or watching, you're in some controlling church where the pastor rules over you. We have a deaconess here in the front row who was part of a cult where you couldn't get married, Christian cult. You couldn't get married without approval from the pastor.

He told you who you could marry. And if he said, no, you can't marry, no. And they were talking about Jesus.

Am I correct? And they were talking about worship and total control. You couldn't travel without permission from the pastor. That is totally wrong.

You don't belong to any pastor. All of us belong to Jesus Christ. Can we put our hands together and say amen to that? That's the universal church.

But how else is church used? Local churches. If you were a Christian, you were part of a local church. Everyone who was getting saved was joining a church.

The idea of being a Christian and roaming around and not being part of a local assembly, that would be totally foreign to anybody in the New Testament. We've developed that idea. What church you go to? Well, I just float.

I just like to just follow the wind of God and blow about. Well, follow the wind of God, but then you better find a church. Why? Because we need each other.

We need to work together. How many say amen? We need to learn together, worship together. We need leaders.

And God has said in the church, in the church, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and other ministries. Why? So that we would all get mature and represent him in the right way on earth. So that's church.

You'll find in the New Testament, Jesus, God never speaks to anyone, but individuals and local churches. In the book of Revelation, Jesus writes, he reveals himself to John, an individual, and then he writes seven

letters to seven churches. So he's speaking words to all of us that are in the body.

And he says, I want you to do this. Or he'll write a letter to the Brooklyn Tabernacle. You're doing good here, but you're not so hot over here.

Every one of us has to realize the importance in Christ's mind of the church. That picture of him trying to get in the UN, he's not trying to get in the UN. He's trying to get in his church in some cases.

To one church, he says, you're neither hot nor cold. Lo, I stand at the door and knock. If anybody will hear and let me in.

What is he trying to get into? He's trying to get into his own church. He's outside the doors of his own church. The church is all important.

Very quickly, Paul uses another phrase. You know how our gospel came to you. Now you got to remember, there's 500 gospels out there.

I was told in a radio interview that I did this week, I did five interviews in one day this past Wednesday. And a guy, I think from California, was talking to me and talking about the book I wrote, Storm. It was a good interview.

And then he said, Pastor Jim, you're so right about what you're writing there. Because you know what I heard a guy say on the radio, or I heard a well-known speaker, he wouldn't say the name on radio. And he said, you know what the guy said? The guy said, you know what's stopping the church and you know what's really slowing us down, is we're too much involved with the Bible.

There's too much of this Bible stuff. Bible says this, the Bible says that. What we got to do is get away from the Bible and just love Jesus.

Notice how seductive that is. Listen to it again. We got to get away from the Bible and stop talking about what this, it's a 2,000 year old book, this speaker said in the hearing of the guy who interviewed me.

It's a 2,000 year book. It's antiquated. Things have changed.

We got to get away from that and just focus on loving Jesus. What do you think about that, Pastor Jim? He said to me, so I had to be alert and ready to move there on that interview. I said, well, obviously the question is, which Jesus? Because if you throw the Bible away, what Jesus do you have? You got a white Southern conservative Jesus? You got a black angry Jesus? You got a Latino Jesus? What kind of Jesus do you have? You make up your own.

You got a Jesus who permits certain sins because things have changed. I don't see it that way. And that's the Jesus that you make up.

So the only way we're going to know what the gospel is by looking at the gospel that's in the Bible. So what is the good news? The good news is the message that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him would not perish. Perish from what? Eternal punishment.

Would not suffer that punishment, not be doomed, but be saved. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him would not perish. That doesn't mean physically dying.

We're all going to do that. But not perish, but have everlasting life. Why would some people perish? Because they commit sins like we all have, but they refuse the savior who came to forgive them of their sins.

They won't believe in Jesus. Several times in the book of Acts, we read where Luke says Paul preached, some believed and were saved. Others refused to believe.

It wasn't that they couldn't believe. They refused to believe. A lack of faith is not, I just can't believe.

No, you refuse to believe. Paul was there. He told you that he saw Jesus.

He had all these men who gave their lives that they saw him after he rose from the dead. You refuse to believe that many times because you want to keep your lifestyle. What lifestyle? A lifestyle of self first sin.

What is sin? God saves us. Jesus came. His name shall be called Jesus for he shall save his people from their what? Sin.

What is sin? Sin, again, can only be defined by the Bible. It includes hatred, stealing, lying, cursing, immorality, all homosexual practices, sexual activity outside of marriage. That's called sin.

I don't see it that way. Well, that's how you see it, how I see it. That's not what we're talking about now.

We're talking about what the Bible calls sin. How many say amen? Sin doesn't start with man defining it. Sin means we have the humility to say, oh, wow, I got things in.

I got a thing for white people. I just don't like white people. Man, I read about slavery.

I got a thing for white people, boy. Or I got a thing for black people. I don't like black people.

That's sin. To hate, to have prejudice, those are sins. To be proud, to gossip, to slander, these are sins.

To abuse drugs and hurt your body, probably also to abuse food. These are sins because you're taking God's temple, which is my body and your body, and you're treating it like you owned it rather than honoring him. That didn't get any amens, but it is so accurate.

It's so true. So that's what we're saved from. Well, someone says, I don't see it that way.

Well, there's no argument. I'm not going to argue with you. I can just declare what God says.

I didn't make up what any sin is. Someone says Christians are so narrow. We're not narrow.

We're just saying what the Bible says. Now, Christians can be narrow. They can be judgmental and mean, but we're not supposed to be, but we're not supposed to compromise truth either.

We're supposed to stay with the truth and preach it with love that comes from Jesus. So now you got important words, church. Everybody got what church is now, right? It's not a building.

It has nothing to do with the building. Number two, now you know what our gospel means. So when someone talks about Jesus on television, the radio, you got to listen a little closer because not everyone who talks about Jesus is talking about that Jesus.

Am I right or wrong here? It was on one of those interviews where I said, you know, in second Corinthians, Paul had left Corinth and some false apostles had come and they did horrible things and put him down and misled the people. And here's what Paul said. I really fear for you because you've received a Jesus, but not the one I told you about.

And you believe the gospel, a good news, but not the gospel I told you. And on top of that, this is the most mysterious. You've received a spirit, but it's not the Holy Spirit.

Now that was written to Christians. So just because someone says Jesus doesn't mean it's the Jesus of the Bible. Are you with me? How many say amen? Remember that folks watching on the webcast.

Just because someone says Jesus doesn't mean like, I can rest now. It's Jesus. It's which Jesus? Is it the Jesus who died on the cross for our sins? Who's the son of the living God? Who's coming back to judge the living and the dead? That's the Jesus that Paul preached.

So we have to read the Bible carefully, find out the true Jesus and the gospels and the epistles. And we got to make sure the gospel that we hear is not a prosperity gospel or a legalistic gospel or a cult gospel. It's the good news of Jesus Christ dying for our sins.

One last other word that struck me as I meditated on this first chapter, the word model. The only place in the where Paul says that a church or believers are models. It's this church.

This happens to be my favorite letter of all the ones that Paul wrote is first Thessalonians, even though it's short and it's not heavy with doctrine like Ephesians or Romans or Galatians. It's just, there's a sweetness. And I've seen so many things that have convicted me about the way Paul did ministry versus the way I have failed God so many times, but not being the pastor and minister I should be.

That book has encouraged me so much on a floor in a hotel room in London, more than 20 something years ago, I had a little new Testament with me and I was spending time with God. And I opened and began to read this and the words came flying off the page. How many have read the Bible? Sometimes you had read it like 10 times before, but it just starts to come alive.

How many have ever had that? Like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. What is this? Well, that was happening to me. I remember just sitting and then laying prostrate on the floor, just crying because I was so convicted about how Paul treated and felt about his people and about how mechanical and stiff and self consumed I was in comparison.

Insecurity and wanting to get through and not flop is a horrible form of selfishness when you should be caring about the people and pouring yourself out for them. So now we learn that this church was a model church. He said, everyone's heard about you.

What church? Who was in this church? Jews who had gotten converted, prominent women, probably Jewish, Gentile believers, Gentile who were part of the synagogue who believed in one God. And then other Gentiles got saved who were flat out Gentiles. How do we know that? Because Paul says at the end, everyone talks about how you turn from idols to serve the living God.

Jews wouldn't have been serving idols. So this was a church with Jew and Gentile together, which broke down a barrier, which makes our black and white racial problem in America look like a walk in Prospect Park because the Gentiles hated the Jews. Anti-Semitism is older than dirt.

And the Jews looked at the Gentiles and called them dogs. And we're not allowed to go because of their traditions into their houses to even eat. Here we have all of that broken down and this church has become a model.

So then we want to ask, how long did it take to make this church a model? How long did it, and this is the wild part, three, four weeks, five weeks, two months. How do you spend time there? Preach that gospel, the true gospel with the Holy Spirit helping them and then leave. And now you put people in charge and you leave and they have a church and they're going to go on.

Not only that, but we heard that when they started the gospel, it wasn't easy for them. If you're visiting here today and you don't know Christ and you hear the gospel, you can become a Christian, goes home, nobody will bother you. But we learned from the book of Acts what happened when Paul was there.

There were riots. There were riots going on. So Paul's referring to the suffering they went through.

These guys lost their jobs. These people were attacked by the local citizenry. They had a bullseye on their back.

Why? Because they were Christians and they still believed. We look at someone, someone looks at us wrong, we're going, oh, pray for me. They were facing persecution right when they got born into the kingdom.

And they said, no, let's roll this way. God will help us. And they were filled with joy.

What a model. Does not mention anywhere that I can find where he says, you're such a model. You know what a model is.

The name of this message is the model on the runway. I saw something on CNN where they have all these fashion shows the last few weeks. Did anybody see any of those? And these models, how thin can a woman be on some of these models? They look like, wow, gaunt.

And they're walking and strutting and showing up and everyone's watching. And Paul says, no, you're the model on the runway. Wouldn't you like to be a church that Paul would be able to say, I'll speak for myself.

I'd give my right arm for Paul to be able to say, you know what? Brooklyn Tabernacle is a model. What a commendation for the apostle Paul to say, other believers hear about you and go, yo, do you know what's going on with that church in Thessalonica? They are the real deal. And when they heard the gospel, they had a lot against them and they still believed.

And when people pushed, they just said, I'm still going to serve Jesus. So in closing, just what made them a model, notice this three things that they had. They had these three virtues that God wants in all of us.

So let me just take Vanessa here as an example. God wants Vanessa to be filled with faith. Why? Because true faith always works.

Remember what James said? Faith without works is what? Is dead. Notice faith works. What does that mean? There'll be a change in your life when you really have faith in Jesus Christ.

If there's no change in your life, you don't have real faith. Oh no, I believe. Don't judge me.

I don't know. No, listen. Faith without works.

Jesus said, you'll know them by their fruit. Now we shouldn't be overdoing fruit inspection and looking for everyone's fruit, but here's what we do know. Nobody can keep living the way they're living, keep sleeping with who they're sleeping with.

Nobody can keep doing things that are against the Bible and then say, no, but I have faith in Jesus. Because faith always produces works, a change in your life. If there's no change, there's no faith.

Is it a perfect change all at once? No, but anyone who has really put their faith in Jesus Christ and has been born again and the spirit lives inside of them, they cannot live in sin. Impossibly. They cannot do it.

It drives them crazy. How many are with me on that? Say amen. How many have found that in your own life as a Christian? Come on.

You just were afraid like to raise our hands. Raise your hand. It's good.

Come on, everyone. We can't live that way. We can't go back.

Everyone says, no, but that's okay. Don't let anybody judge you. You express yourself.

Here's the newest saying they have in those circles that the radio guy was telling me about. Premise number one, God wants Sylvia happy. We want, yeah, he loves her.

He wants her happy. This is what makes Sylvia happy, whatever the sin is. Thus, God says, I don't care.

You do it because it makes you happy and I love you and I don't want to ruin your day and hold you back from anything. Notice how seductive that is. So faith works.

Love serves. The first thing you have when you become a Christian is not love. You don't love Jesus first.

You trust Jesus first. And as you trust Jesus and you get to know him, then you fall in love with him because you realize I love him because he first loved me. So faith makes for a change in your life.

Notice this. If you're battling with a besetting sin, don't try to fight the sin. Ask God for more faith because faith will break the power of that sin.

Faith works, not you work. Faith produces works. The spirit is released as we trust God more and more.

Then they fell in love with Jesus, this model church. And what did that mean? They began to labor. When anyone loves the Lord, don't believe anything else from anyone.

When someone loves God, they begin to labor. And that word for labor is hard toil, like what Sue was talking about we need in BT Kids. When you love God, you want to serve him and people.

End of story. When someone has no time for people, don't want to help anybody, don't want to give themselves to a choir practice and all of that, just want to be loose, hang in the balcony, move in, move out, not be involved in anything. They don't love the Lord.

They don't love the Lord very much. Can't because your labor of love, love always labors. Why does the mother get up at two in the morning with the baby? Because she loves the baby.

Why can I put up with my grandson Levi when he's very hyper at five, but I go on an airplane? I was on one yesterday and there was a child right in front of me going nuts. I wanted to jump out of the window at 30,000 feet. Why didn't I want to just cuddle that baby? Because that baby, I don't know that baby.

Now if Levi was crying, I would say, oh, how sweet. Look how he cries. How many have noticed that with children, right? The parents like, oh, he's so sweet.

No, he just destroyed an entire chandelier. Yeah, he's just different. He's just, but he's so sweet.

Love labors. Oh, let's ask God, how many want more faith? Say, amen. So that we'll, we'll see more change in our lives.

How many want more love in their lives? So that will labor. This is why most churches have a shortage of volunteerism. It's not because of organization.

It's because a lack of volunteerism comes from a lack of love. You want to serve people. Paul was ready to die for them.

In this letter, there's a sentence that has stayed with me since that hotel room in London. He said, for when I was with you, I was like a mother nursing her baby. I was ready to give you not just the gospel of my life.

And the picture in the Greek is a woman taking a baby and bringing the baby to her breast and saying, drink of my own milk, and I'll care for you. And he says, that's how I was when I was with you. I was no professional preacher looking for a buck.

Oh, that's so callous. That's so commercial. Preachers are supposed to be holding the believers to their, to their breast and loving them and caring for them.

Why did Paul do that? Because he loved them. When you, when you love God, you'll start to love his people and you'll start to serve them. I've seen it in people's lives right here within my reach.

I can tell you when I met them, how they were and how I watched God change him because of his love. And finally he said, the endurance that you have because of the hope you have that Christ is going to return. Life doesn't end when you die.

And because of that, you're willing to put up with anything because you know, Hey, the worst you can do is kill me. And if you kill me, I go to be with Jesus. So I'm not going to be intimidated by you.

Oh, have we lost that hope today? How many want that hope stronger in your life, right? See, um, false religions like this radical form of Islam and promising people you'll, if you blow yourself up, you'll go and there'll be all these virgins waiting for you and all that stuff. Because of that hope, they take their own life. The kamikaze pilots in Japan in world war II, they dived onto the ship wanting to kill themselves.

Why? Because they had a hope that there was some honor coming to them. So Paul says, you are so patient and you have such perseverance because you know, there's something bigger than this life. Because if only thing we have is 70, 80, 90 years, if that's all there is, and then we're just evaporate, then it's not even worth serving Jesus Christ.

No. He said, I go to prepare a place for you and I'm going to come back and I'm going to be with, you'll be with me forever. How many are planning to be with Jesus forever and ever say aloud.

Amen. They were a model. Why? Because they had a faith that works.

Always remember this real faith works, not mental faith, heart faith, where you depend and trust Jesus with your whole life. It'll always produce a different life. They had work and labor.

They labored hard. They made sacrifices. Why? Because they loved, they loved God.

They loved people. They loved his people. Then thirdly, they persevered and they had endurance because they said, it's all not going to happen here.

By the way, this passage that we read does away totally with the prosperity teaching. I'll make you the head and not the tail, which was said to the Jewish people in the old Testament, not to Christians. And you'll always lend and you'll never borrow.

That was not said to us because notice from the very get go, they were suffering trouble. They were suffering trouble. And we read through the book of Acts.

Paul was in and out of jail and got beat sometimes, but why did he endure it all? Because he knew soon this is over. It will be worth it all. When I see Jesus, it will be worth it all.

What a day that will be when my Jesus, I shall see. When I look upon his face, the one who saved me by his grace, when he takes me by the hand and leads me to the promised land. What a day, what a day that will be.

If you take your eyes off of that day and just look at your calendar down here, you're going to be a very up and down, nervy, anxiety ridden person. But when you have your eyes on the goal, I'm going to be with Christ. One last thought here, why they were a model also was that the word of God rang out from them.

They weren't silent about their witness. Everyone knew about Jesus through them. They talked it, lived it, didn't hide it in a closet, didn't put a bushel over their lamp.

That's what made them a model church. But I love that one last thing we touched on, that when you receive the gospel under great suffering, you are still filled with joy given by the Holy Spirit. Now that brings me to a contradiction.

How can you suffer and have joy? As a Christian, you can suffer and have joy at the same time. If you're here today and you're down and you live in the basement most of your life and you live in purples and grays and dark shades, God doesn't want you to live that way. He wants to give you joy.

Notice they didn't psych themselves into joy. Nobody taught them to have joy. How do you teach someone to have joy? No, Paul said, the joy you had was given by the Holy Spirit.

You were suffering, you were being persecuted, and instead of going, well, what's going on in my life? Man, I just found Jesus and everything is broken loose against me. I got all these people hating me who used to be my friends. No, instead of saying that, you said, oh man, it's hard, but ooh, praise God, I have joy, unspeakable and full of glory.

You can have joy in the midst of really difficult times. If you'll just ask the Holy Spirit to come and fill you with that joy. We are now living in a victim society.

Everyone is a victim. It's on TV, it's in the government, it's everyone. Everyone is a victim.

Everywhere you talk to anybody about anything, you don't know how I was raised. You only knew my mother. You only knew my father.

We all have our war stories. Let's be real about them. Some of them are horrible.

But Christ says, when I come into your life, I will trump whatever you went through and I'll give you joy to overcome all the scar tissue of whatever anyone did to you. I can give you joy stronger than the natural tendency you have to depression or sadness. And why it's important that I close with this is because behind me and in front of me, if you and I are not walking in joy, we're walking in weakness because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

You can't go through life as strong Christian unless you're a happy Christian. There are no strong Christians who are moping and grumpy. Pastor Ware used to remind me of that late Pastor Ware who founded our prayer band.

He used to be praying with me and I used to just watch him. And I will remember that verse in Psalms. Let those that seek the Lord rejoice.

So those that seek the Lord will rejoice. When you and I are right with God, he's going to give us joy. He does not want you living down.

He wants you living up. He wants you rejoicing in things that the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard. He can fill you with joy.

Come on, if you believe that, put your hands together. No sadness, no depression today. You can suffer and still be happy.

In one part of you, you can be crying because you lost a loved one. But in the deeper part of you, you can be saying, thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus.

I love you, Jesus. Let's close our eyes. If you're here today, just as we dismiss and you're saying, Pastor, I want to live in joy.

I want to choose joy. I want to ask the Holy Spirit to give me the joy that I need. I tend toward despondency.

I get negative. I get sour. When people meet me, I'm not bubbling over with joy.

But I see now I should. That's what made them a model church. You receive the word in the midst of great suffering with joy given by the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice in the Lord always, Paul says in another place. And again, I say, rejoice. God wants you not sad.

He wants you glad. He wants you happy, but happy in him. If you're here today and just say, Pastor, I just want to stand while everyone else is sitting.

I want to stand where I am sitting. I want to lift my hands up and I want to close my eyes and say, God, give me that joy that I find so elusive in my life, whether it's what people did to you, memories, your father, your stepfather, abuse, verbal, physical, whatever it is, whatever is going on now. God does not want you living in the dumps.

He wants you living up, rejoicing in him. He wants you happy to be a good advertisement for him. How will people be drawn to Jesus if you and I are depressed and sad and grumpy and edgy? If you have an edge in you, let it go.

Let it go against any individual person, a group of people, a race of people. Let it go in the name of Christ. Let God fill you with his joy.

Anyone here just wants to be remembered before God. Just stand wherever you're sitting. Thank you.

Just stand right where you are.

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