Grace Fellowship Church Series on 1 Thessalonians Rick Griffith

12 October 1986 Message #1

***Let Me Introduce Some Special Friends***

A Monologue Introduction to a Preaching Series on 1 Thessalonians

**Topic:** Love

**Subject:** The reason Paul wrote the Thessalonians

**Complement:** was to reaffirm his love for them by settling misunderstandings and doctrine.

**Purpose:** The listeners will sense my love for them as their pastor.

PAUL: (Walks into the room from the bathroom, looking around curiously) Shalom… Excuse me… You people don't happen to be the saints in Christ Jesus in Fort Worth, are you? Possibly Grace Fellowship Church?

ART: Why, yes. We certainly are. How do you know about us?

PAUL: Well, I had just written this letter to Thessalonica and was on my way to give it to a messenger to bring it to the church there. But on the road, I met a rather strange-looking character, a magician, in fact. Well, he said he was working on a new trick that could transport people instantaneously and wondered if he could try it out on me. Before I could say anything, he waved his arms like this, said some silly words, and the next thing I knew, I was in that room back there [the bathroom]. I guess he still has a few bugs to work out yet.

I heard about you all from a man named Rick there. He said he stopped in that strange room for a minute, and then I appeared. We only talked for a few minutes. What kind of room is that back there, anyway? They sure don't have those where I come from.

ART: Well, maybe we shouldn't get into that right now.

PAUL: Oh… Well, Rick was dressed strangely with several peculiar articles of clothing. In fact, he dressed very much like most of you. I asked him why he had this flat piece of cloth around his neck, and he said, “Oh, this [pointing to his tie]. We've been trying to figure out why we wear these for decades."

He also told me that he recently became your pastor, which really encouraged me -- you know, that he was a Christian. He asked my name, and I said, "I'm Paul."

"You don't mean the Paul of Tarsus?" he responded, as if he'd heard of me before!

I said, "Well, that's just who I am. My Jewish name is Saul, but since I became a Christian, I've been called Paul."

"You're not going to believe this," Rick said, "But I'm about to preach through one of your letters to my church outside that door for twelve weeks. Remember the letter you sent to the Thessalonians?"

"Do I remember it?" I shouted with glee, "Why, those dear people are some of the most precious people on earth to me! How did you ever get ahold of one of my letters, though?"

"That's a long story, Paul," he said, "But right now, before we get you out of this room, let’s have you tell the people out there about the Thessalonians."

Well, right then, he disappeared! So here I am. Are you interested in learning about the Thessalonians?

**Historical/Geographical Background (Acts 17:1-15)**

O.K. Well, my good friend Barnabas and I had a tremendous privilege a few years back. We were sent out by the church at Antioch on a missionary journey in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. In fact, it turned out so well that we decided not too long after to revisit all those churches and maybe even go even farther west…

That's when Barnabas and I had a pretty sharp disagreement over John Mark, his cousin who had deserted us during our first trip. We felt that the differences were not reconcilable, so we decided it best to separate and each pursue the direction we believed God was leading us. Barnabas took John Mark and set sail for the island of Cyprus, but I took Silas and began to visit the churches established the year before. During the trip, a young man named Timothy came to Christ, so he joined us, and we kept pushing westward toward Greece.

We crossed the Aegean Sea to Macedonia, the Roman province north of Greece, and first visited the city of Philippi. After that, we came to the wonderful city of Thessalonica.

**City of Thessalonica**

I sure wish I could take you back to Thessalonica with me sometime—if we don't have to go through that room back there. The city was built in 315 B.C. by Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals. In fact, Cassander's wife was a half-sister to Alexander, and her name was Thessalonica, so it's no wonder where it got its name.

Cassander chose this place for a city because of its ideal location on the sea and proximity to Therma, an ancient city named for its hot springs. It's quite an important city, the largest city in the province of Macedonia, with a population of about 200,000. Thessalonica is the key city on the Egnatian Road, that great military highway stretching from Rome to the Orient. Not only does it have a great highway for land transportation, but it has a sheltered harbor that the Romans equipped with docks to make it into a central naval station and a natural outlet for sea traffic from all points. It is the chief seaport in the whole province of Macedonia.

I guess you caught on that all this commercial activity in Thessalonica makes it a very wealthy city. Most of the native inhabitants are Greeks, and many rich Romans settle there, as well as many Jewish merchants eager for money from the commercial advantages. Macedonian women there have a higher social position than anywhere in the world, too. But don't get the idea that everyone is rich, though. Most of the citizens make their living by manual labor.

But if you've ever been around seaport cities, you'll recognize some real negative traits too: evil living and all kinds of sexual perversions. Thessalonica even has strange rites of the worship of the so-called god, Cabiri. That's why, near the end of my letter to the church, I warned them to keep themselves pure from any kind of sexual sin.

**Events at Macedonia**

Do you see why Timothy, Silas, and I saw Thessalonica as a very important city for the gospel? Thessalonica is in direct contact with many other important cities by land and sea! We felt that if we could reach those people for Christ, they would be a sounding board to the other parts of Macedonia and beyond!

Well, as I said earlier, after an earthshaking experience in Philippi, we went through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica and started preaching in the synagogue. That's where I always try to start out in a city since the Jews have much in common with me: I am a Jew myself; we hold a common respect for the Old Testament, we have similar theological concepts, and we share many cultural practices. I preached there for three straight Sabbaths, trying to persuade the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

But you know what happened? Not only did some of the Jews believe, but a whole multitude of Gentiles, too—those who were interested in Judaism and attended the Sabbath services at the synagogue. God really worked there among several of the prominent women who also came to Christ. It was great!

However, the synagogue leaders didn't think it was too great to see people leave it. They were jealous -- so teed off that they organized some roughnecks from the market, the kind of guys who love to be in a brawl. These men set the city in an uproar and went over to Jason's home, where we had been staying. (Jason was a prominent Greek who had come to know Jesus only a few days before.) They were really ticked off when they got to Jason's house to get us, and we weren't there since we had gone out on an errand. The people dragged Jason before the authorities and accused him of treason for taking "revolutionaries" into his home since we taught that Jesus is a higher king than Caesar! The rulers saw through their deceptive plan, though, and only required Jason to guarantee that we would leave the city and not return.

One thing I didn't tell you about Thessalonica earlier is that the people of Thessalonica helped Antony and Caesar Augustus to defeat Brutus and Cassius, their archenemies. In appreciation, the Emperor gave the city status as a free city in the Roman Empire, exempt from taxes, and autonomous in its internal affairs even though it was the home of the provincial governor. You see how serious a threat this was to the Jews after me to think that I was teaching another king other than Caesar? They didn't want to believe in Jesus and lose their tax-free status! The charge of treason was a very convenient way to get us thrown out of the city.

It was a very effective way, too. That night, the believers immediately sent us away in secret to Berea, a city down the road towards Greece. I wasn't thrilled about leaving since the church had been planted less than a month earlier, but we knew God had a purpose.

Oh, then get this. While we were preaching in Berea, those same Jews in Thessalonica traveled forty miles and came to Berea also and stirred up the crowds there! This caused me to have to leave Berea, also—this time by sea where they couldn't follow so easily. I set sail and traveled all the way down to Greece, but I left Timothy and Silas to take care of the church at Berea.

Soon, Timothy and Silas joined me in Athens, but I was still concerned about the Thessalonians, so I sent Timothy to find out how they were doing. I also sent Silas back to Berea and Philippi.

Not too long later, Timothy and Silas met me in Corinth, Greece. When Timothy arrived, I immediately asked him how things were for the Thessalonian church, especially since the Jews had been antagonistic. He told me the church was doing great despite all the opposition! Not only had the Jews continued their persecution, but some of the Gentiles had joined in as well, yet the church remained a strong testimony for Christ.

**Purposes of the Epistle**

I was thrilled and knew God wanted me to write them to let them know it! This is only my second letter to one of the churches [holding up the parchment]. After returning to Antioch following the first missionary journey, I wrote my first church letter to the Galatians. But this time, I felt compelled to write the church right there from Corinth before returning to Israel. I needed to encourage them by sharing how excited I am about their progress in the faith. So that's just what I did, and I have the letter right here in my hands.

There's a second reason I wrote the letter also. Those Jews in Thessalonica are slandering me to try to discredit me. They're saying that I broke the law in the city and that I only came there for the money! Ha! These charges are so ridiculous that I debated not even defending myself, but Timothy says that some of the believers have started to believe it! After prayer, I devoted over half of this letter to explaining my motives. If they don't know the truth, this could discredit my entire missionary work in all of Macedonia.

A third reason I wrote to the people is some doctrinal problems, especially concerning the Lord's Return. Somehow, some of the Thessalonians got really confused about the fate of those Christians in their church who had died before the Lord's return. There's also some misunderstanding about church life and some of the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit. I dealt with these issues in the latter half of my letter.

**Paul's Love for the Thessalonians**

I don't want to be misunderstood about what I'm telling you concerning the Thessalonians, though. They've had a few struggles, but all in all, they are a wonderful group of people. I was there when the church was born—in fact, they are my baby! I have a love for them like a mother does a newborn child. I care for them as a father does his own children.

**Rick's Love for Grace Fellowship**

In fact, in the few moments I had with your pastor today, I can honestly say that I have seen this same desire and care for you in him. He loves you deeply as God's flock, not his own. He told me that his wife and he have prayed for months that God would provide a small church that sincerely desires to follow Christ, and now God has answered their prayers through you!

His anticipation of what God was going to do through you really excited me. I guess that's why he wanted to explain my letter to the Thessalonians to you. (I still don't know how he got a copy of my letter!) Rick feels very positive about what's happening here and thinks that the Thessalonian letter communicated the same. As the author of that letter, I can tell you that this is exactly what I meant in the letter. You're doing great—just keep doing more of the same!

Rick explained to me that he and his wife have been praying for you all each day that you would live in a manner pleasing to the Lord Jesus. I can tell that you all are embarking upon a great adventure.

**Conclusion**

Speaking of great adventures, somehow, I have got to get back to my own people of God in my homeland.

(Looking at his hand sundial) Wow, from what I can tell by the sun, it appears to be approaching midday now. I hope someone invents a more accurate way to tell time someday. My only problem is: how do I return to where I came from?

ART: Boy, I'm not too sure how you can do that either, but why don't you give this a try? Go back into that room, look up, and say, "Beam me up, Scotty."

PAUL: (Looking confused but willing) O.K., I'll give that a try. Thanks. Shalom and Maranatha! (exits into the bathroom).