

In Our Prayers

1 Thessalonians Introduction – 1:2

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~ **Our Spiritual Safari** time machine moves us forward from Isaiah in our last report, to rejoin Paul in this report; but not in the Roman Mamertine prison we left him in previously in Colossians. No, we're with Paul in Athens now. Paul is young again, if you please, as he writes his first epistle.

Thessalonica was an important colony in the Roman Empire. It was located 100 miles west of Philippi, roughly 200 miles north of Athens. It was the chief city of Macedonia. Cicero said, "... *Thessalonica is in the bosom of the Empire.*" It was first named Therma because of hot springs in the area. In 316 B.C., Cassander - who succeeded Alexander the Great - named it in memory of his wife, Thessalonike, a half-sister of Alexander's. Thessalonica is still in existence, and the present-day name is Salonika. The church in Thessalonica was a model church. They had no issues with Paul – but they did have questions. It was likely the first church Paul established on his *second* missionary journey. Paul cited it to the Corinthians as an example; see first Thessalonians chapter one verse seven and second Corinthians chapter eight verses one through five.

The Roman Empire dealt with the subjects they captured and conquered quite differently than we do today. The United States attempts to Americanize people throughout the world — as if that would be the ideal standard. Personally, I have doubts whether that would make an ideal world – but you can form your own opinion. Either way, America once sent missionaries around the world in an attempt to further the cause of Christ. Today, that's a relic of the past. Rome was much wiser than we are today, because they never sought to change the culture, habits, language, or customs of the people they brought into subjection. What they did was choose a strategic geographical location nearby and start a colony. The luxury and wealth would cause people to desperately want to be like the Romans. Roman laws were accepted without even knowing what those laws were. Without culture shock, people willingly complied with any legislation set forth.

So, that brings us to the earliest known writing by Paul the apostle. It was written from Athens, or possibly Corinth, on his second missionary journey. You will recall that Paul and Barnabas had separated by this time; and Paul had chosen Silas and Timothy. Dr. Luke also joined Paul at this time. They visited the churches in Galatia, and attempted to make a wider circle, because of the tremendous population explosion. They were in modern day Turkey; also known as Asia Minor. Well, the Spirit of God blocked their way and wouldn't let them go south. So, Paul tried to go north to Bithynia, but they were blocked again by the Holy Spirit. Then, Paul arrived at Troas, where he had the vision of the man of Macedonia, and subsequently crossed over to Philippi. That's where Paul discovered that the "*man of Macedonia*" was really a woman named Lydia. Paul led her and her group to the Lord by the river; and that church was established. Then, Paul left Philippi, and came to Thessalonica, where he "*... reasoned in the synagogue*" for three Sabbath days.

Of course, that means Paul was in Thessalonica for less than one month — as confirmed in Acts chapter seventeen verse two. There, Paul led multitudes to Christ as he touched on many of the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Paul taught doctrine that some modern-day churches know absolutely *NOTHING* about; even though they have been in existence for decades. Among the doctrines Paul brought them was the rapture of the church, the great day of wrath, and the second advent of Christ to establish His earthly Kingdom. Evidently, Paul didn't think those doctrines were too far above the heads of baby converts. Interestingly, and unfortunately, many churches today haven't the dimmest awareness of what this epistle really conveys. The particular theme of first Thessalonians is the rapture. The rapture aspect is quite different from His catastrophic and cataclysmic second advent in glory to establish His kingdom on earth by putting down all unrighteousness; as taught in Revelation chapter nineteen verses eleven through sixteen — and as we just finished learning all about in the prophecy of Isaiah! During the rapture, Christ won't be coming to the earth; no, the church will be *GOING* to meet Him in the air. They're altogether different events.

Paul had to leave Thessalonica after that short time "*posthaste*" — due to intense opposition. To be perfectly clear, he was run out of town on a rail. I

feel as if a certain group was prepared to stone him. The enemy pursued him to Berea and, again, he was forced to leave there. He left Silas and Timothy at Berea, and went on to Athens. We aren't told how long Paul was in Athens; but, apparently, it was there that Timothy brought Paul greetings from the church in Thessalonica – see first Thessalonians chapter three verse six. The church had questions – primarily concerning the rapture, because they had been told they missed it! So, Paul wrote this first epistle to explicitly instruct them concerning the imminent coming of Christ for His church — the rapture — and Jesus' second advent.

Credible fundamental conservative scholars agree on three main purposes for writing this epistle: (1) to confirm young converts in the elementary truth of the gospel (2) to condition them to go on unto holy living, and (3) to comfort them regarding the next event in the prophetic program of the Lord: the *RAPTURE*. A heathen inscription in Thessalonica read: *"After death no reviving, after the grave no meeting again."* See, the rapture of the church is an inspiring hope for the correctly instructed saved man. While we look and wait for our Blessed Hope, we are to serve Him; which we want so badly to do — and do properly, if we're genuine. When we serve Him completely, we receive purifying and comforting hope – and that means in everything we do, friends. All of these things should prompt us and arouse us into an educated, sincere, proper, correct, complete, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led work for the Lord. When all of that falls into line, our attitude and thinking towards other people, towards the world, towards life in general – suddenly becomes right thinking. That's when we will begin to act right.

So, this entire epistle stresses the Christian's earthly living in relationship to the rapture of the church. I know there are a lot of people today who want to argue prophecy – but they never seem to spend much time studying it. They get so worked up over denying the second coming of Christ, and railing against the doctrine of the rapture, but they *NEVER* demonstrate a holy life! To understand and believe that Christ is going to remove the church before the Great Tribulation period begins is our earthly purifying hope. It's a hope we need – especially in this day and age as things become catastrophic in terms of man's problems on the earth. A right comprehension of all of these truths will affect our living, our thinking, and

our actions. Candidly, I'm not concerned with how sensational and emotional you can get yourself worked up to about the Great Tribulation – or any prophecy - I want to know how you're living – what type of life are you demonstrating to a lost and dying world? Well, my beloved safari readers, this is another epistle that is going to truly get down to the bluntly frank and rude nitty-gritty of life. See, it's your life that reveals who you are in Christ – not stuffy religious theory, philosophy, or prophetic interpretation, nor the abject failure that you call a victory concerning converting others.

Again, to be clear, in this first epistle to the Thessalonians, and the emphasis is upon the rapture of the church. Christ is going to call the church to meet Him in the air, and go to be with Him in the place He has prepared for us. The church then becomes His bride, and returns with Him in His second advent to rule and reign with Him forever. In the *SECOND* epistle to the Thessalonians, the emphasis is going to shift to the coming of Christ to the earth to establish the Millennial Kingdom. As we have just learned in our safari through Isaiah, there happens to be all the difference in the world between those two events. The church going *UP* to meet Jesus, and Jesus coming *DOWN* in judgment, simply couldn't be any more different. A failure to understand this fundamental, basic tenet of Scripture is why we have so many upside-down theologians running around today. They are usually coming down when they should be going up – as did Elijah. Don't kid yourself – this is real....

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, 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.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

~ This is the typical greeting Paul used in his letters to churches that were spiritually sound; with a few subtle differences. Silas and Timothy had just rejoined Paul, so Paul includes them in his answer to the question they had brought back. If Paul had not associated himself with these men, they

would have remained completely unknown. That makes this a very noble gesture on Paul's part. It is always a worthy cause to identify ourselves with our brethren. However, we need to be careful and balanced about that; because putting a preacher on a pedestal is dangerous nonsense. If a man desires to be on the public pedestal of Christian work, then you'll know you have the worst possible man for the job. So, there's a definite, extreme balance to be struck; and falling from that balance is the difference between life and death, spiritually speaking. Pastors today seem to make a point of advising others of their spiritual status - because they think they are superior, different and special. Well, they're not different - and they aren't special. They're very much fallible human beings - just like you and me.

If a man believes himself to be above others in preaching or teaching, then he can never meet the needs of those who are looking to him. I'm just a poor Bible teacher. That's what I am. I don't know anything about the Bible that anyone else could not know *IF - IF - IF* they will simply take a few minutes each day and actually study. I am extremely aware that I am giving out *HIS* Word - not Andrew's Word. Because He has Personally ordained me to handle His Word, I believe it is *CRITICAL* for me to esteem others better than myself - *AND* to place the welfare of others above my own. That's where your Spiritual Safari comes from, friends. Some of you may not think I do it very well - and maybe I don't do it as well as I could - but my intent is to do it the best that I can. *ANY* distinction between clergy and laymen is a false distinction as far as the Word of God is concerned. I wish I could get that truth through to more of these super-duper saints around this forum on which I teach; but, of course, those people aren't reading these reports - no, they quit reading a *LONG* time ago.

A paid ministry is one of the most damaging curses to the church today. The most damnable heresies in the church have come in by paid pastors. That *MUST* be recognized. Now, don't get me wrong, I don't see how it could really be done otherwise; and a pastor deserves to be fed *IF - IF - IF* they are handling Scripture in sound doctrine, and teaching the entire Word of God to the entire world; but, other than that, paid clergy is bad news. There are two things that are extremely dangerous to any church. One is the minister who lifts himself up, and the other is a layman asserting

themselves as authority on the Word of God, when they have never really studied the Bible. Those are recipes for splits, divisions, cliques, hurt feelings, unconverted church members, and very poor giving. Those are the ones that go off on their tangents – and I *PROMISE* you they *NEVER* care much for Andrew Curtis Hunt. They profess to love everyone; but they don't even like me. The greatest discipline in my life has been teaching the entire Word of God.

Now, I know I sometimes call myself a one-note song for Bible study; but, the reality is, if you're going to teach the entire Bible, you'll need to know how to play on every key on the board. Every stop will necessarily have to be pulled. There is no hobby to be ridden teaching Scripture this way. There are many things I would like to emphasize, but I have to emphasize *ALL* of it — or it's just no good. I wish we had the type of discipline in the church today that compelled them to go through the whole Bible. Candidly, if you don't do that, you'll go down the wrong path — sooner or later. So, I love the introduction in this first epistle the apostle Paul wrote; however, this is as far as we can go. Let's close this leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Bible with a very appropriate and applicable poem....

~ Sickened with slaughter
 Weary of war ~
~ Torn by bereavement and pain
 Daily our eyes ~
 ~ Are searching the skies
For signs of Christ's coming again ~
 ~ Longing we pray
 For the dawn of a new day ~
~ Lord, wilt Thou come before noon?
 Imploring Him yet ~
 ~ In the fading sunset
Oh, blessed, Lord Jesus, come soon ~
 ~ Precious Thy Word
 Thy ear of faith heard ~
~ Lo, I come quickly, My bride
 This longing of thine ~
 ~ Is not greater than Mine

To have thee at last by My side ~

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