

Some Church!

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It. Okay, we're going to stand for the reading of God's word. We're going to read from two places today. First in acts, chapter 17. Start with a few verses there, and then move over to first Thessalonians, chapter one, acts 17.

And first Thessalonians, chapter one and 17. One says, now, when they had passed through Amphibopolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. And saying, this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Jews and not a few of the leading women. And then they suffered persecution. Go over to first Thessalonians now, and we're going to read the first three verses there.

Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy. To the church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly missing you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father. Your work of faith and labor, of love and steadfastness, of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we just rejoice in our salvation. We acknowledge that it's through our Lord Jesus Christ and him alone. That he alone paid for our sins. Provided a way for

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us to be reconciled to you, our heavenly Father, to bring us into this glorious grace that we experience when we are Christians.

And we thank you from the bottom of our heart for that. Lord. I pray as we begin this letter to the Thessalonians. That you would be speaking to each one of our hearts, Father. That there be truths there that would comfort us in our faith, would encourage us to go further than we've gone.

To give us the confidence to believe that your spirit is working in each one of us. And so open this book to our hearts. I pray. Thank you for Cheryl's friends. Who have traveled up from Florida to be with her at this time.

And we ask your blessing on them. And may they be a real comfort and joy to her as she's going through this cancer. Thank you for Isaiah and the position you've placed him in at the jail. And pray that his life, maybe he won't be able to share a lot with his words, but share with his life the joy that comes through knowing Christ. And somehow that'll have an impact on the men and women that are incarcerated there.

Lord, we now pray, as Jesus taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallow be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. You may be seated.

Somehow, as I was preparing for this message, I was reminded of a book, a book that was written by E. B. White. Everyone know who E. B.

White is?

Okay? No, I'm not that E. B. White. E.

B. White wrote children's books, and one is considered the most famous children's book of all times. And that's Charlotte's Web, Charlotte's Webb. Has anybody read the

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book or seen the cartoon movie? It's a great story.

And, of course, in that story, Wilbur is born. He's the runt of the litter. And the farmer, we don't have enough feed to feed the runt. He's going to get rid of him until the farmer's daughter says, I'll take care of him. I'll take care of him.

And she does. And Wilbur starts to grow. In fact, he grows so much that the farmer decides, I have to sell him. He's worth money. So he gets sold to another farmer, and he tries to make friends with the other barnyard friends, but none of them will befriend him.

They don't want to even give him the time of day. And so he's lonely in his little pen, until he meets Charlotte. And Charlotte is a little barn spider up in the corner, and they start to have a relationship. Well, Wilbur finds out that he is being fed so he can be slaughtered. That's not a good feeling.

So he shares his remorse with Charlotte, and she says, let me think about this. Let me see if I can do something for you. Well, that next morning when the farmer came in, Charlotte had weaved in her web up there in the corner of the pen some pig. And he was just shocked. I thought Wilbur was just a regular old pig.

And now I find out he's some pig. He shares that with the neighbors. They all come out. Wilbur gets famous. Charlotte keeps working for him, and on her web, she spins.

Terrific. And people are even more excited about Wilbur the pig. Finally, the farmer thinks I need to enter him into the county fair. I mean, he is some pig. Terrific.

So he does. And Charlotte hitches along with him, and she writes radiant up there, and everybody expects that Wilbur's going to win the pig of the year award. He doesn't, but he gets a special award that he's going to live the rest of his life out on a farmer's ranch. And, of course, he's really excited. So Charlotte, she finally weaves the word humble.

Humble. Charlotte, being a spider, doesn't live long. She knows she's dying. She lays her egg sack, and it goes back with Wilbur to the farm so that her progeny will go on. You might ask, well, why am I telling this story in church, the story of Evie white?

Well, two reasons. Two reasons. We are starting the book of, first Thessalonians today, and Paul thought that the Thessalonians were really special. They were some church, okay, radiant, terrific. All of those things.

And we're going to see that he gives thanks for this church. He takes all of the first three chapters to thank God for the work that he's doing in their lives. An amazing thing. Second, though, because I think you're special. If I had the ability to weave something, I'd put up in that corner over there, some church, and back over there, terrific.

And over there, radiant. And, of course, we would be humble. Right. And that's the way that God sees you and I doesn't mean that we're perfect. It doesn't mean that there's a work that he needs to do in our life.

Doesn't mean that we've fallen short in a lot of ways. But in God's eyes, if you are a member of the body of Christ, you are some church. He loves you, and he is working in your life. And that's what Paul wants to communicate through this letter of first Thessalonians. This is one of the first letters that is written in the New Testament.

Right behind James and Galatians. We see it was written by Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy to the Thessalonians. Thessalonica was a city of about 250,000, the primary city in Macedonia. It was named after Alexander the Great, Sister Thessalonici, and had been around for a long time. We looked at some of the account of Paul's visit there in acts, chapter 17.

He had been in the city of Philippi, where he had witnessed, but he had also driven out an evil spirit out of a woman. As a result of that, he was arrested. He was beaten and he was thrown into jail. At midnight, while he was singing hymns, the Lord sent an earthquake, and all of the things that were binding them fell off. Of course, the philippian jailer thought they'd escaped.

He was going to kill himself. But, no, we're all here. He came to the Lord, but as a result of that, he had to leave Philippi, and he went through two towns until he finally came to Thessalonica. We don't know exactly how long he was there, but he was there at least three weeks, preaching in the local synagogue to the Jews, and that was a custom. Someone was traveling.

They'd be asked if they had something to say. As a result of that, it said, some Jews, we don't know how many, and many gentiles came to the Lord, and the church started there. And, of course, once the church started, there was persecution. As a result of that, Paul had to leave the city. He went to Athens, where he preached.

Not much fruit there, and then finally to Corinth. But he was so concerned about the Thessalonians and their faith that he sent Timothy back there to see how they were doing and to give further instruction in the way of the Lord, because he hadn't spent much time there. Well, Timothy had just come back and gave a good report. They are doing good in the Lord. They love you.

And so Paul, out of that, he is led to write this letter to encourage them. And as we go through this, you need to be aware that the majority of the topic in this letter is about the last days. The last days and this book, first and second Thessalonians, along with Matthew 24 and revelation chapter, all of revelation, give us much of what we know about the last days. And, of course, we are in the last days and maybe rapidly approaching the end of the age. So, in that sense, this is a letter that is written to you and I, and that's what we want to look at.

So let's take a look at it. First of all, we saw in verse one the authors and the recipients of the letter. Notice that this letter is addressed. It says, to the Church of Thessalonians. Thessalonians.

To the Church of Thessalonians. It doesn't say to the believers in Thessalonian, but to the church. And what this tells us is that he has a high opinion of the church. The Church of Jesus Christ consists of the believers that meet together to worship the Lord and to study his word and to serve him in any way they can. If you are a true believer

in Jesus Christ.

You are a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. You belong to the church. One of the sad things that happened in our country is they say, they estimate that 50% of people who claim to be Christians in America don't attend church.

They don't darken the doors. I can worship from home and they don't attend a local assembly. Claim to be Christians, but don't attend church. I think from reading this book, Paul would question if they were true believers or not. But even if they are, they are missing out on the benefits and the blessings of being a part of the church.

Doesn't mean there's not hardships, doesn't mean there's troubles. There are, but there are blessings and benefits from being a part of Christ church. Back in the volunteered for prison fellowship and we would go around the different prisons and share Bible studies with inmates. And one of the things they required, if you were going to minister with them, you had to be a member of a local church. If you were not a member of a local church, they labeled you lone wolves.

Lone wolves. And they found out that they couldn't trust lone wolves to do ministry in those prisons. So it's important for us to notice that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what makes us Christians, that we are in God and in Christ. And we see a reference to the Trinity there little later in verse five, it talks about in the Holy Spirit.

And we are trinitarian. We believe God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. And as a result of this relationship with God, we have a relationship with each other. Don't say, oh, no, you should say, oh, boy. We have that relationship with one another, and the result of that relationship, he prays grace to you and peace in your life.

Grace and peace are always in that order. Grace is the gate that leads to the path of peace in your life. And one of the reasons that so many people do not have peace, even in the church, is they don't realize that they are recipients of the grace of God, God working in them, causing everything to work for their good and for his glory. And

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that's a result, I believe, one of the results of belonging to a church that glorifies God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy spirit, that we can experience his grace and his peace in our life. After greeting the Thessalonians, Paul begins his letter giving thanksgiving for them.

Giving thanksgiving for them. And he devotes the first three chapters of this letter, and there's only five of thanking God for them different things in their life and showing us how important thanksgiving is. He'll close this letter in chapter five, verse 18 with this command. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Thanksgiving, I believe, is one of the keys that unlocks God's blessings in our lives and something that we should be practicing habitually.

Everyone enjoys whiners and complainers, right? No, we don't. And God doesn't either. He loves it when we give thanks to him for the work that he is doing in our life, even when it is difficult. Well, I want you to notice something here in verse two.

It says, we, the we is referring to Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy. We give thanks to God always for all of you. That's a novel concept, isn't it? Thankful for every one of you. That should be the mark of a good church, that everyone in that church is important and someone that God cares about.

And we should always be giving thanks. Does that mean we're perfect?

No. That's right. There you go. There's a sermon in a nutshell. No, we are not perfect.

Chuck Swindahl says, if you find a perfect church, don't go there, you'll ruin it. And that's true. We're still sinners being saved by grace. But he is thankful for every one of them. And on the surface this is kind of surprising because as you look at the book, you're going to find out that some of them were warriors, some of them were loafers, some of them had bad doctrine, they didn't understand the last days, yet he is still thankful for every one of them.

Paul's going to deal with those issues and just because we're thankful for one another doesn't mean that we don't need the truth about ourselves and that we don't need to

grow in Christ. But still he is thankful for them if they are real believers in Christ, because they are brothers and sisters in Jesus. And the fact is, it doesn't matter how gifted you are, how hard you're working, if you are a true believer and Christ is working your life, you are just as important to him as anybody else. And if you're important to Jesus Christ, then you should be important to us too.

And that's the mark of a good church. I believe that everyone in that church is important. I think one of the dangers that every church faces, and I've seen this over and over, is church clicks church clicks when I went to the church in Idaho, the reason the pastor was not there any longer. He talked about how important the core group was, and they were the real believers, the ones that were getting together and doing the work. And all those other people out there just sitting in the pew, well, not so much.

And that end up dividing that church. Everyone has value if they're coming to worship Jesus Christ. And again, some people are more gifted, some people work harder. There'll be rewards for that. But God still loves every one of his children.

If you put your faith in Jesus Christ. And one of the reasons he brings us into a body of believers, just like a family, is we are to care for one another. We're to love one another. We're to lift one another up in faith. Yes, we're even supposed to challenge people if they're not living for the Lord.

But even that has to be done out of love. So one of the signs of a healthy church is it values everyone in that church. And sometimes that's difficult. Sometimes it's difficult, but that's still what God calls us to do. So how does Paul give thanks here?

Well, notice he says, we constantly remember you in our prayers. One of the greatest ways that you can express concern and love for another person is to pray for them. There's needs in the church. One of the reasons we allow people to share before the message is we know there's needs. And how can we pray for them if we don't know what the needs are?

And so we should be reminded on a daily basis. Somebody comes to mind, pray for them. It's showing your concern and love for them. Evidently, Paul and Sylvanus and Timothy would meet together regularly, and when they did, they would pray for people that they remembered in the churches that they had established. And that's a challenge for each one of us, isn't it?

It's a whole lot easier to remember the fact, did you know what so and so said about me? Did you know so and so doesn't appreciate me? You can go on and on with those things, can't you? And they're all true, but instead, we're supposed to remember to pray for them. Last week we had a young lady sitting over here from Uganda.

Her name was peace and she was with Jeffrey. And it reminded me that when I came to this church in 1992 that we had a visitor that summer, a preacher from Uganda. And it turns out that he had spent some time in the Seattle area, attending University of Washington and Northwest University. He got his college degree and he got his seminary degree. At the same time, he was staying with Margaret Razor's sister, and so he was invited to come down here to church.

So he was there in the church. He'd come back from Uganda after being gone five years, and he said something that just floored me. He had been there five years earlier in this church. Five years earlier, last time he'd been there, he said, every Thursday morning at 10:00 in Uganda, I try to envision people's faces in your church. I don't remember any names, but I try to envision people's faces and I pray an hour for them.

And I thought, man, what a ministry. And God was using him in Uganda. But it's a reminder to you and I that we need to be praying for each other. And I would challenge you to do that, as God brings someone to mind, and you may envision their face, whatever it is, say a prayer. You may not know what their need is, but God does.

And that shows your real concern for them. Well, we see what Paul remembers in verse three. It says, remembering before our God and father, your work of faith and labor, of love and steadfastness, of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. And so there's two triads here. The first triad is the triad of faith, love and hope.

We've seen that somewhere else in the Bible, haven't we? Anyone know where they're combined together a little bit different order? One corinthians 13, the love chapter, and it says there. So now faith, hope and love abide. But the greatest of these is love.

And the fact is, we're involved in a lot of things in life, and we have to be. We have daily things that we have to do. But three things that will abide that will last forever. Faith, hope and love puts in a little different order here because there's a different emphasis on their situation, that they need hope. And these are gifts that God gives every one of his children.

Faith in Christ, love for Christ, and hope, and eternal salvation through Christ. And that's a gift that every believer should have, and thank God for that. I like the way the Niv speaks about these gifts. It says, faith produces work. Love prompts labor, and hope inspires endurance.

And the truth is, if the Holy Spirit is in you, if you are a believer, then he is going to use faith in Christ to produce work for his kingdom. He will take you beyond that when you fall more and more in love with him, to labor in the work, and then to a place where you will endure, whether you think you're going to receive something out of or not, because the hope that you have. And so what we see here are three stages of work in the church, in life, in business, three different stages. And we'll look just at those real quickly. When someone puts their faith in God, they come into the kingdom, they are given a work to do.

Every one of us, it's not the same work, and we may not have the same results, but God has something that he wants us to do. That's why he called us into his family. One of the things I love living close to Jeremy with his nine boys and his one daughter, is they're all working, even down to the littlest of them, and out there getting the eggs or somebody's milking the cow or somebody's doing this or somebody's doing that. And that isn't why he had kids, because they are a lot of work, too, but you expect them to learn how to work in the same way. When God calls us into the faith, the faith should produce a work that will glorify him.

And we do that by faith. When you go to work, you go to work in faith believing that somebody's going to pay you, don't you? How many of you get paid up front? Most of us don't, do we? Now, sometimes if you're a contractor, we get some of it, but most of us finish the work and I'll pay you.

That's the way it works, doesn't it? And you have to have faith to believe that they're actually going to give you a check in the same way we work for the Lord. By faith. Well, there's a second stage, and it says labor prompted by love. Labor is a little bit more difficult, isn't it?

Work? Yeah, I'm working. But when someone is laboring, it means they're working hard. They're going beyond the normal amount of work. If you're driving a truck up a hill with a big load on the back, that truck starts to labor, doesn't it?

It's not just cruising along. It is working hard. And he's saying here that some of them are laboring and you don't do it for the wage. You were going to get paid anyway. That's where you do it for love.

I'm going beyond just what I can get out of it. I love to do it. I was reminded of a time I went to help Jeremy when he had his ministry down in Los Angeles, and they were cleaning out this warehouse, and there was a 50 foot container in the back, and it was a hot day. And inside this container were paint cans that were stored from the floor all the way to the ceiling, all the way back. And it was our job to get them out of there.

They were old, and some were punctured, and others had just crumbled, and there was paint everywhere. And in that hot sun, the fumes just were suffocating. No air in there. And trying to remove those paint cans. And Jeremy remarked to me, says, you couldn't pay me a million dollars to do this job.

And I thought to myself, we're doing it for free.

That's work done out of love. That's laboring. That's going an extra step and doing it for the Lord. The third stage, it says, is endurance inspired by hope. Endurance inspired by hope.

Philip's translation calls this sheer, dogged endurance. It just keeps going. Although it doesn't seem like we're going to accomplish anything, I can't see where this is going to work out, but this is what I've been called to do. I am going to do it, and we're going to see that. The Thessalonians hope was the return of Jesus Christ, and they may or may not get to experience the benefits and the blessings of this endurance for Christ, that they knew that when he came back, they would be rewarded for that.

There's five chapters in this book, and it turns out every one of them ends with the hope of Jesus Christ returning. And ultimately, that is the goal of the christian life. Do I enjoy life? I love life? Do I enjoy the blessings that God pours into my life?

I love those blessings. But even if he didn't, I'm looking for the return of Jesus Christ, spending eternity with him, and knowing that whatever I did for him will be worth it. See an example of that in Paul's life. Over in two Timothy, chapter four, verse five through eight. And again, Timothy had been with him in Thessalonica and also helped write the letter of Thessalonians.

And Paul knows that he's going to die in the arena, that his life is just about over. So he's writing to encourage him. He says in verse five, as for you, always be sober minded. Endure sufferings. And that's the endurances that he was talking about in first Thessalonians, endure suffering.

Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. Great words for each one of us, whatever our ministry may be. If you don't know what your ministry is, cry out to God. God, what do you have for me to do?

It might just be praying for someone else. But ask him what it is. Fulfill your ministry. Then he says in verse six, for I'm already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day. And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. And ultimately, as Christians, we should come to that place out of our love for Jesus Christ, that we

love his appearing, that we're looking forward to seeing him face to face and spending all of eternity with him.

It doesn't mean we're not involved in the things of life and doing what we're called to do, but we keep our eyes on the goal, and that will take not just work, not just labor, but endurance to keep going, no matter how difficult it may be. And then when we see Christ, the parable in Matthew, chapter 25, the two servants who had taken what he had given them and they'd used it for his glory, he said to them, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I'll set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

Enter into the joy of your master. And the people who experience that joy are the ones who are most dedicated to wanting to do the work he's given them, even laboring at it and enduring, if that's necessary. Well, what amazing words to say about a church.

I can't imagine anything greater that can be said about a church. But I can't also help but wonder, if Paul were to visit our church, what would he say about us? Maybe the same thing doesn't mean there's not room for growth. But would he commend us for our work, our labor and our endurance? And as a group, but also as individuals?

I'm not even going to pretend to know what he would answer. We wait till Christ will make that judgment. And of course, he knows our hearts and he knows what we're doing. But I can say that while we wait, we should be remembering one another constantly, praying for each other, that God would fulfill that work, that labor, that endurance in our lives. And that will require more faith.

It'll require more love and require more endurance. And we need to know that that's part of the deal. That's the only way that we can grow and become mature, is to really apply ourselves in those experiences.

And when you do that, you will experience the grace and the peace of God in your life. The grace and peace of God in your life. There is nothing greater in this world than grace God's riches to us according to Christ, and the peace with God and the peace of God in our lives. An amazing gift and a world that's filled with tumult, and we don't

know what's going to happen. And yet, if we are involved in the work Christ gave us, we have that grace and peace.

May God, through his holy spirit, do this work in each one of us. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you that you've revealed your love for us through this letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and God. We confess that sometimes we don't feel loved. We know we don't deserve love. Sometimes we have a hard time handling love. But just open our eyes to see that this is your great love for us.

It's why you called us, to pour out your love into our hearts and God. I pray that out of that love, the more we experience that, the more available we'll be to you. Not just to worship you, but also to work for you. That Christ will be exalted through our lives as individuals and through our church as a body of believers. We pray that not just for us, but all the churches around us that put Christ first and put his word first and who are faithful to Jesus Christ.

I pray in Christ's name. Amen.