

REJOICING IN ONENESS IN CHRIST

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Their Conversion

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

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This is the first of two letters that was written to the church at Thessalonica. We previously looked at the 2nd letter to the Thessalonians. In that message it started with this, "Paul was primarily addressing the church in regards to false teachings and what appears by Paul's wording, that even false letters had been written in Paul or the Apostles' names that was saying that the "Day of the Lord" was already upon them. What lent to that false supposition was that at that time there were persecutions of the church and it was then being said, by false teachers, that Jesus had already whisked away the saints and was now judging the evil on the earth or even that there was and is no resurrection. When Jesus comes back again to gather up His saints there will be no mistaking it. As

Jesus said, "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:26-27)

The enemy of our souls, that presently is given a certain amount of authority and power is operating and moving the world in one direction, away from Christ, and God, but Christ is calling us "out of the darkness and into His marvelous light." The bottom line for us to take hold of and trust God in, is that GOD IS IN CONTROL. No matter how crazy it gets. When one reads the book Revelation, it IS going to get worse. Yet, God is sovereign over all of HIS creation. **Psalm 24** begins with, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters." Psalm 24 ends with this, "Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah" Selah, meaning you can rest assured in that!

The world is calling us back, to look to the world for our comfort, our peace, and our satisfaction. Two prominent stories in the Old Testament, both of which are in the book of Genesis, speak to how the enemy of our souls is looking to get us looking in the wrong direction. The first was in the Garden of Eden to which Satan told Eve, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (**Genesis 3:4**) How did that work out for Adam and Eve? The second example is in the story of the building of the tower of Babel. They said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." (**Genesis 11:4**) How did that work out for them? Disobeying God and wanting to be one's own god will only get you so far. Praise the Lord God Almighty for His great love for us that, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (**Romans 5:8-11**) Paul mentions reconciliation back to God 3 times in those verses. Through Christ we are reconciled back to God so that we can have a relationship, fellowship with God, the Father! In Christ we have become alive to God!

There it is! That is what we have to remind ourselves. Each day that we rise from our sleep, He is with us. Around every turn, before every obstacle He is there. With everything that comes against us, He

is there. "As many as call on the name of the Lord will be saved" has deeper implications than just being saved from God's wrath and inheriting eternal life. Each and every time we call to the Lord, in our time of need, and really, in everything, He is there, working on our behalf, according to His eternal purpose. That will not mean that God makes all of our problems to go away. It doesn't mean that we will not have heartache and pain and even suffering at times. It does mean, that if God allows it, after we've taken to Him in prayer, His perfect will is enacted upon it. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand [the Lord is near]. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 4:4-7**)

The primary goal of God, as it pertains to us, is He is presently building and establishing His kingdom. He is calling us unto Himself, to be our Lord, our God, and our Savior. Those examples of the Garden of Eden and the building of the tower of Babel are contrary to what God is intending for us. HE is to be our God. HE is making a name for Himself. We will be richly rewarded for our faith and trust in Him. Right at this present He is bringing us into the unity of the faith in Christ Jesus. Jesus' prayer just before He was to be crucified, He prayed this, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

Jesus Prays for All Believers (that's us)

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (**John 17:14-23**)

I know that some have ridiculed and mocked with scorn, that we took the name One in Christ Mission as the name of our ministry. They say, "yeah the devil is working towards an ecumenical, one faith, one world government to where the gospel of Jesus is being watered down and that all religious roads lead to the same place." Yes, the enemy of our souls masquerades (or transforms) at times as an angel of light. (**2 Corinthians 11:14**) But God is calling us to be one in Him,

in Christ, so that the world may believe that God sent Jesus to die on a cross for our sins, and rose the third day, conquering death, so that we can be reconciled to God, and that we too will overcome death and live in Christ eternally! All those in Christ are the family of God!

Even though we typically associate the letters to the Thessalonians as from the Apostle Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are said to be co-authors (on some level). Perhaps Paul was just being polite by including them but what it says is, that all three of them were present as this letter was being written. By the way, Silvanus is assumed to be Silas, who accompanied Paul in some of his missionary trips after Paul had a bit of a disagreement with Barnabas about taking Mark along. What it should say to us, is that God IS presently building His kingdom and calling us into the unity of faith in Christ Jesus. Paul says, "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain." You ever wonder what God is doing in what we are doing here, why we gather here every Sunday? Even if you love hotdogs, or some of Susie's concoctions that she mixes up and seasons to perfection, we are here because of what God is doing. This is HIS plan and purpose.

Paul goes on to say, "But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit." You can be absolutely guaranteed that if you are living in Christ, and sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ, you will be persecuted. Jesus stated, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) That tribulation that Jesus spoke of is that word thlipsis, the pressing in, the surrounding that seems like there is no way out. But with God all things are possible! (Matthew 19:26) Jesus spoke that about it being extremely difficult for the rich man to inherit heaven. The same goes on the other side of the spectrum. When you're down and out, full of despair, no way of possibly being able to dig yourself out of the pit that you're in—"with God all things are possible!"

Another thing to note is Paul saying, "For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ." Sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ will not always bless others. I was at the store one day,

buying the juices for our Sunday service. A stocker commented about how that was a lot of juice. I told him how it was for, and said how most of the people who show up are homeless. Oh, that seemed to bless him. "Wow, that's great", he said, or something similar. He then said, that it was a wonderful thing that we are doing. Then I said, "it is His idea, not mine", as I pointed to the sky. Suddenly a frown came upon him and he just grumped. WE are not saving the world, delivering the world, or bringing healing to the world. Jesus does that! We are sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ and as He decides when and where, Jesus will save, Jesus will, deliver, and Jesus will heal, for the glory of God. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) We just let His light shine through us and He does the work! Amen? "Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain." (Psalm 127:1) "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10) We are just letting God work in us according to His purpose of building His kingdom. ALL glory goes to God. He will reward us in the end and we will be glorified in Christ but make no mistake, to God be the glory!

"You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

Mahandas Ghandi is reported to have said that if it wasn't for Christians, He would embrace Christianity. First of all, as Christians, we are pointing people, leading people, to Christ. He alone is our Wisdom, and Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. Let anyone who glories, glory in the Lord! (1 Corinthians 1:30-31) So then, God is working in us His Righteousness, making us into the very image of Christ. We are not becoming Christ, we are becoming like Christ. He will always be God, and we are always going to be sinners saved by the grace of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) All of our boasting is in Christ Jesus. Our boasting too, as was with Paul, in what God is doing through each of us. Praise the Lord, God gave us the breath of life today, to all gather together in the name of Jesus, for the glory of God!

The world IS watching us, watching you. Are we are walking in His holiness, His Righteousness, His goodness, His love, those folks of the world should notice a difference. Maybe for them to say, "I want what you have." Also, in our abiding in Christ (as Jesus spoke of in John 15), we are encouraging one another, being a blessing to one another. If God blesses you, there is a likelihood that you are then to pass that blessing along. Not always. If God blesses you in a way for you to pay the electric bill, then He probably won't call you to give it away. Jesus said this, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:37-38) Give and it will be given to you. That is not a call out on tithing for our church building fund. If God wants us to have a building we'll have a building, if not praise the Lord! Jesus was saying though, that as we treat others, it will be done to us. That doesn't mean everything becomes perfect and magical to where we always get our way. It also doesn't mean that God is telling all of us to just give away everything we have. HE IS OUR WISDOM! "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:14)

The world is watching, the world is in desperate need of Jesus. Jesus alone is our only hope. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:12) I've heard prominent preachers hem and haw when asked about those who live morally good lives, those who don't know Jesus, as to whether they will inherit eternal life. Before the rulers, scribes, and high priest, Peter said this concerning Jesus, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Someone thinks that they can get there another way? It was a great price that Jesus paid for our redemption and reconciling us to God the Father. "For you were bought at a [great] price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:20) We are being called to be like Jesus, no longer being slaves to sin. That is not just for our witness to others, it is because that is what God wants us to be, to live in His Righteousness, to follow His ways, to be like Jesus.

Paul was very intentional about making sure he wasn't doing anything that would cause others to stumble. The prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:10, was this: "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested." Susie and I are going back to that prayer all the time. That we would be blessed so that we may be a blessing, that our territory would be enlarged, to us meaning that we will bear much fruit for His glory, that His hand would be upon us and He will keep

us from falling into any traps of the enemy, and that we will not cause harm to the body of Christ. That is what Paul was saying to the Thessalonians. He was doing everything possible to make sure the folks of Thessalonica were being blessed and growing in the Lord and that Paul was only being a positive influence for them and then that he could rejoice in what God was doing through them and for them.

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

The world will have a myriad of ways to get you distracted and focused on your glory and your kingdom. We've looked at some of the writings of American authors in history and it doesn't just remain in the annals of history. Even today, there are teachings and writings and preachers that will point you to YOUR success, YOUR kingdom, YOUR ministry. "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters." "Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah"

This is God's plan and His purpose and He is building His eternal kingdom and He is getting His people ready to be joint heirs with Jesus (**Romans 8:17**) and that we will reign with Him. (**2 Timothy 2:12**) The world doesn't like it, but Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no one gets to the Father but through Him. (**John 14:6**) We are being called to trust God in all things, good or bad, as He is working out the details for His eternal kingdom. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (**Proverbs 3:5-6**)

As Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were rejoicing over what God was doing with the Thessalonians, we are rejoicing over what God is doing with each of you. We are rejoicing as the Holy Spirit is working in us to be of the same mind, spirit, and purpose, in Christ, for the glory of God! God loves you, Jesus loves you, and keep clinging to Him, for He is our life! AMEN!