

Evening Worship - 1 Thessalonians

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[0 : 0 0] so if you keep your bibles open and i don't want to repeat too much of last week but i just want to look at the geography a little bit last week i think i did it in some detail so this week just a quick summary um pictures come up there oh you remember paul went to thessalonica he preached the gospel it was an exciting time lots of people responded but after three sabbaths he was chased out of town he ended up in berea and then when he got to berea he was chased out of there too by people who came from thessalonica and first timoth first paul went to athens and then he was followed uh well he had he had he was on his own in athens that's where he preached uh his famous sermon there and then we see that uh um timothy and in fact silas followed on later now when he got when they were all in athens paul was anxious not surprisingly when you think about it uh there were his children in the faith up in thessalonica paul himself couldn't go back to be with them and he was desperate to hear how they were getting on so he sent timothy up there to find out how they were then timothy then paul himself goes on to uh corinth and corinth isn't an easy place either for paul uh but while he after he's arrived in corinth timothy arrives and brings exciting news that all is going well in thessalonica and that is where we've got to when our passage opens starts in verse six but timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love i find that an interesting verse um but what i'm saying now i didn't find in any commentary so you can decide if it's true or false for yourself but the thing that struck me is that timothy talks about faith and love but what feature of the whole letter of faith and love and hope ros read that bit at the very beginning that spoke about your work produced by faith your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope when paul first went there all those three things were very visible and when we looked at last week's passage it seemed to me that paul exhibited those same things he exhibited love for the thessalonians he exhibited hope as he looked forward to being with the thessalonians when the lord jesus comes for they will be his hope and joy and crown and then he exercised faith in sending timothy up to thessalonica to encourage and strengthen them in their faith but now timothy comes and he brings a message about and he says about faith and love and i just asked the question if there was any weakness in the thessalonians now it does seem to be in the area of hope because in the next few weeks we shall hear others preach on issues to do with hope we'll be thinking about the dead being raised we'll think about the second coming all those issues will come up i just ask you that but i didn't find it anywhere else and maybe i'm wrong but that's what struck me when i read that verse but i want to but paul basically is very positive the thessalonians are going well

and when i said last week there was this interesting parallel between how paul his life as a senior apostle is characterized by faith hope and love and it's just the same for the thessalonians as babies in christ and we saw how last week as a spiritual parent paul longed for his children and sent timothy to encourage them so this week we seem to have the image of that we're told how the thessalonians long to see paul it's that same pattern they both long for each other it's a mutual relationship and last week timothy goes to encourage them but this week we see how they encourage paul last week we heard about the afflictions and distress that they were in thessalonica now we hear that paul is in distress and affliction and he's being encouraged by them it's this brilliant mutuality that we see now we expect senior christians to have a ministry of encouragement to younger ones but here we see encouragement going the other way i don't think it's it's so much planned it's not that the thessalonians are planning to send encouragement to paul but they are it goes both ways it's this wonderful relationship that we see between parents in the faith and children in the faith encouraging each other bringing them blessing perhaps the summary of these first few verses is in verse 8 for now we really live since you are standing firm in the lord i mean what's it take for me really to live would a fast car make all the difference would i like a georgian mansion would that enable me really to live no says paul if i'm really to live it's finding my spiritual children standing firm i said last week and i'm saying it again that the best parallel i can find to this paul thessalonian relationship is the tent leader at a scripture union camp as a leader as a tent leader you go you're with your little group for a week and in that time you seek to share the faith with them and if someone responds you're so excited and you pray with them and you encourage them and then after a week they're torn away from you on the bus and you wave to them as they go and you're not allowed to follow them up too enthusiastically in my day you were allowed to send a postcard i think there's a modern equivalent but you weren't to follow them up too keenly you just have to keep on praying and you look forward to the reunion and you look forward to next year's camp and you send them that postcard to encourage them to come and you remind them and then they do come and you're enormously excited because your child in the faith is standing firm because he or she is standing firm in the lord

you really live F.F. Bruce puts it like this in his commentary which I think expresses it better than I could when I'm sure it does Paul's concern for his converts and sense of oneness with them breathes through all his correspondence when they were led astray he was indignant when they slipped back he was distressed when they showed evidence of living lives worthy of the gospel he was overjoyed and then F.F. Bruce goes through different letters and shows how the importance of standing steadfast as the faith is emphasized in 1 Corinthians and Galatians and Philippians so what's the application of those first few verses to us well I guess it's actually about priorities and it's a challenging priority because it prioritizes the opportunities to share the gospel that's why Life Explored was so exciting that's why SU Camp is so exciting now as again as I said last week

I don't want to overemphasize the ministry of the evangelist others have ministries of support of making the tea making the coffee making the meal so that Life Explored actually happens all these things are incredibly important but this particular passage is about the relationship above all about the relationship between a spiritual parent and a spiritual child and how important that relationship is and how we have to prioritize it and how we have to respond to it I'll think a little bit more about it later on there was a particular application I shall come to so suppose we had been at camp last summer and someone had responded well as I said prayer is the thing that we have to do especially if prayer is the only thing that we can do so what does prayer look like in Paul's eyes

Paul's prayer starts with thanksgiving he doesn't rush into intercession in fact the whole letter starts in thanksgiving when Ros read to us from the beginning we have these words verse 2 of chapter 1 we always thank God for all of you then in chapter 2 verse 13 and we also thank God continually because when you received the word of God you accepted it not as a human word but it's interesting that the thanksgiving is very personal particularly here and in chapter 1 we always thank God for all of you made me think I wonder how one does that one thing I've used from time to time partly to stop myself rushing into intercession or even worse that makes me sound what I really mean stopping me rushing into petition for myself would be a more accurate description but to try and think of different things that I might give thanks for starting with different letters it works fine until you have to have x-rays and zebras and things at the end it can get a little bit artificial but near the beginning thinking of different people and different things so as to spend time giving thanks this particular verse is I think an echo of Psalm 116 verse 12

[11:52] I mean our verse is literally what what thanksgiving can we return to God for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you and Psalm 116 verse says what shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me and then the psalmist says I will sacrifice a thank offering to you psalmist thinks about God's goodness and he responds in thanksgiving so we think about God's goodness to us and we respond in thanksgiving now thanksgiving is a matter of basic gratitude there's a verse in Luke 635 that challenges me where Jesus says God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked lack of gratitude links us to the wicked in fact last time I used this verse which wasn't very long ago I said I had to rush back and write some thank you letters and now tonight

I've got here and I still haven't written them so I don't know whether I'm going to have time to write them before I fly on the 6am flight to Holland tomorrow but I still I'm still behind in thanksgiving on a human level let alone on a divine one and thanksgiving as I say involves remembering individuals it involves particularly remembering what God has done we remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope it reminds us that these good things came through God's grace and goodness not our effort and that the God who has been faithful in the past will be faithful in the future but there's another thought like this one I got from Don Carson which is that by telling the Thessalonians about his thankfulness

Paul has simultaneously drawn attention to the Thessalonians spiritual growth and thereby encourages them and insisted that God is the one to be thanked for it thereby humbling them so the thought that I had from that particularly was well as I give thanks for people is there someone that I might tell them that I'm giving thanks for them and thereby encourage and possibly humble them as well is there someone that I might do that for particularly as we think about spiritual parents and children maybe in that category there's someone that I might contact so Paul looks back in thanksgiving and he's actually one more thought about remembering his spiritual children in Thessalonica always have pleasant memories of him and Silas and Timothy that's all part of thanksgiving but I was trying to move on from looking back to looking at the present situation there's a series of prayers here night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again notice the intensity of Paul's prayer he prays at all times he prays most earnestly one of Paul's complicated Greek words where he stuck an extra hyper

I think on the front of a more common expression and first he prays simply that he may see them I like that I suppose that's the picture I had of turning up at the reunion or turning up at camp next year simply seeing them is what he wants first and foremost and then he says that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith just as Timothy went to strengthen and to encourage last week so Paul's prayer is to see and to supply it seems to me both the personal quality that I see in seeing and encouraging and also the more definitely teaching activity in supplying and strengthening we see Paul's concern for love and for truth it's not as if the Thessalonians faith was specially deficient but he wanted to fill in any gaps as might be expected in someone who's only had the gospel for a matter of weeks as far as

Paul was concerned in terms of his teaching the verb that Paul uses for supply is used of mending nets in Mark 1 verse 19 perhaps the picture is having a hole in one's faith and sewing it up I don't know whether that would be a good picture but Paul says they've got great faith but there's a little bit more to do and Paul wants to help them with that and we're going to see in chapters 4 and 5 how those gaps are filled in and met he wants to fill in the gaps face to face for preference but a letter will do and I'm very glad we have the letter when you think about it then his prayer continues now in the form of the optative which is as it were a wish type prayer now may our God and Father himself and our

[18:03] Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you we remember how last week Paul said that he'd been prevented by Satan from coming to Thessalonica we don't know what the particular way he was prevented whether it was a boat strike or whether it was the fact that they'd made some promise that it was going to cost money if they went back we don't know what the difficulty was but something stopped them going now if he's to get to them he asks that the way be cleared more literally to be made straight it's the verb that most familiarly is used in the last verse of the Benedictus in Zechariah's song John the Baptist would guide our feet into the way of peace it's that word guide or lead directly without deviation into the way of peace now Paul wants his way made straight to

Thessalonica so that he will see his children in the faith and then Paul prays for himself well he's praising himself here doesn't he he's praying for himself that the father and the lord Jesus would clear the way for him but his prayer is very unselfish it's not a prayer for a need of his be met not that it's wrong to pray for our own needs but he prays that he will be able to serve and no longer prevented from that ministry of service I'm just pointing out that Paul is much so selfish in his prayer than I so often am and then he goes on to pray for the Thessalonians may the lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else just as ours does for you and I'd like to have this one up it comes up in the ESV on the screen because it's quite important I think there's a significant difference between the

Greek original and the NIV text may the lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our god and father at the coming of our lord Jesus with his saints they aren't a series of different prayers the actual prayer is that their love will increase and overflow in order that your hearts may be established it's a subtle difference I think he's praying that they will serve one another and serve the people outside and then that service will lead to holy to heart strengthened blameless and holy on the last day perhaps the difference is rather subtle but either way

Paul's prayer is very outward focused here we see thanksgiving for the past praying for the present praying for himself that he will be able to serve praying that they will serve both one another and the people outside so that their hearts may be established I mean that's a challenge to us I think because people often say I need to get my own act together before I can care about others now for some people that's true I'm not saying that's never right that we don't have to get our own acts sorted out for most of us I think our hearts are established by serving others another just a tiny thought on that one is the fact that Paul is praying for the

Thessalonians doesn't mean they don't have to work at it it's quite fun in the passage the way if you just compare 3 verse 12 may the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else with 4 verse 10 and in fact you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia yet we urge you brothers and sisters to do so more and more they go together on the one hand Paul prays on the other hand they exhibit effort kind of of course sometimes but the other way around sometimes we pray and others work sometimes others pray and we work my last page has just vanished from me here we are so we've looked so Paul's in his prayer looks back in remembrance and thanksgiving it looks round praying for opportunities to serve and he looks forward to the time when the Lord

[23 : 40] Jesus will come when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones and Paul uses a special word parousia prayer which means coming it's the word used for a visit of a person of high status maybe a king or an emperor visiting a province and it's the word that's used here of Christ's coming in glory at the end of the age and it's a challenge to us it's a challenge to us to live now in the light of the coming praying that others and indeed we will be blameless and holy on that day and next week we shall see in chapter 4 the particular way in which the Thessalonians are being challenged to live holy lives so tonight we've looked at a prayer now it's not a pattern prayer like the

Lord's prayer but I think we can learn useful things from it to look back I've suggested a thanksgiving list we can look round praying for opportunities to serve and looking forward in anticipation and excitement but also awareness that God is judge and king a challenge to be as unselfish as Paul prayer isn't just a time of withdrawal of casting our cares upon God although that's important it's seeking what's best for the people of God and we do that because we love them the passage is a challenge to me because of the intensity of Paul's love maybe my prayer is weak because I don't love enough maybe if I loved more I'd pray more

I'd pray with that sense that Paul has that sense of excitement praying most earnestly in return for all the joy we have those sort of phrases let's pray heavenly father thank you for your word to us for the challenge you bring us through these accounts of people 2000 years ago for their love and their faith and their hope and we pray that you'll give us thankful hearts and serving lives until you come again for we ask it in Jesus name amen