



+ This week at MRC we started out new Autumn series in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church. We began by acknowledging a number of the hard things going on in the world at the moment that at times make it very difficult to be 'hopeful', as well as personally in our lives the reality of situations that can do the same. I know a number of people at MRC struggle with the idea of hope because of the reality of life.

The antidote to this, though - the reality of Christian hope, sits at the heart of the letter. At the end of each chapter Paul refers to the future reality of our faith in Christ. Because we know Jesus is coming back, so we can press on through hard times now but we also know what matters now.

We also briefly thought about the context that Paul was writing in - namely attacks from (probably) the local Jewish Synagogue who are questioning his credentials as an apostle. They seem (as is often the case today) to go for both his track record / results of his ministry, as well as personal attacks upon him and his character and methods. As he highlights the beauty and maturity of the Thessalonian church (esp chs 1-3) he is also defending himself and his ministry from their criticism and questions.

We just focussed on chapter 1 (though you might like to read the entirety of the letter through your study to get some broader bearings, as well as Paul's encounter with Thessalonica in Acts 17) and hung the ideas off 2 broad terms.

We noted that the fledgling church (from Acts 17 Paul was probably with them only 3 Sabbaths) was an example firstly in

1. What you do with your bible

From v4-8 we see a number of extraordinary (and to be honest very challenging) facets to the way this baby church received the word of God as it came to them with power, love and deep conviction from the Holy Spirit (see also 2v13). They accepted it, not as a human word but rather a divine word such that they were even willing to suffer for what they believed. They would have lost family, friends, business and status

as they trusted Jesus for themselves. This was no nominal faith but rather life transforming.

The second extraordinary aspect of how they received the word was that they didn't just then keep it to themselves, but rather were a model to others as the word rung out from them all over the region. The danger in the West is that faith is seen as purely private, the bible knows nothing of a private faith that is kept behind closed doors.

2. What you do with your life

This transformed church who had received the gospel and been changed by it, says Paul is also a model for how God has changed them.

We noted that the triad in v2-3 (faith, love and hope) parallels v9b-10 (turn, serve and wait). Meaning because they have *faith* in God they have *turned* to him from idols and so work - faith is not dormant but active. Because they now *love* him and his people, so they are now those who *serve*. Rather than ultimately serving or loving self, He is the one whom we live for (rather like the pattern in the Lords Prayer). And those who have turned and who serve are to be a *hopeful* people. *Waiting* for the risen and ascended Christ to return and for his judgment to be meted out upon those who oppose people.

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As always please use these questions as starters but feel free to tweak and adapt for your context.

As you look around the world - as you look at your own life, how hopeful are you?

How much does 'Hope' affect your Christian faith day by day? Why? Why not?

When you encounter the bible do you think you are 'Thessalonian'? How willing are we to accept it?

How much does it change us? How willing are we to be persecuted for it? How much do we see it as divine or human?

In v2-3 and v9-10, as you read the faith/turn - love/serve and hope/wait parallels - how much do we see our lives built around them? Explain what they might practically look like...

1 thing to take away? What has struck you most? What do you need to think through more carefully?