*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 3 - 8

Letters of Paul

**Monday, January 3 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6**

“We thank God and pray for you”

In giving thanks and praying for the Thessalonians, Paul models behavior he will later encourage them to practice (5:17-18). Here, Paul gives thanks for their active faith, their hard-working love, and their patient, enduring hope. This familiar triad of faith, love, and hope functions almost as a shorthand summary of the essentials of Christianity: *faith* as the assurance that God has acted in Christ to save his people, *love* as the present expression and experience of the restored relationship between God and his people, and *hope* as the confidence that the future is securely held by God.

Paul states two reasons why he knows that the Thessalonians have been chosen by God. (1) They welcomed the message – that is, they accepted the gospel preaching and converted to Christianity. (2) They then became imitators both of the missionaries and, more importantly, of the Lord, in that in spite of severe suffering, they experienced a supernatural joy given by the Holy Spirit.

*Father, may my faith be active, my love hard-working, and my hope enduring. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 4 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10**

“You have become an example”

A consequence of the Thessalonians becoming imitators of the missionaries and of the Lord was that they in turn became a model to believers not just in the two Greek provinces of Macedonia and Achaia, but everywhere. The spreading report of the Thessalonian Christians focused on the gospel message and on its impact on its hearers: they turned to God and away from the idols of their pagan heritage. Paul spells out what this conversion involved.

1. It involved a commitment “to serve the living and true God,” a description that echoes Old Testament language, emphasizing the monotheistic nature of Christianity. (2) It included a commitment to wait for his Son from heaven – that is, Jesus, here described as the risen and delivering one. Thus Paul explains conversion in terms of both present activity (a wholehearted commitment or devotion that expresses itself in active service to God, not merely acknowledgement of him) and future hope (trust in Jesus the Risen One as the agent of God’s deliverance at the time of judgment).

*May I be an example to others, Lord, of a person committed to Christ. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 5 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4**

“We speak as messengers approved by God”

The result of Paul and his fellow missionaries’ visit to Thessalonica was a success, as evidenced by the conversion of those to whom he is writing. Having mentioned the results of their visit, Paul goes on to focus on the way in which he and his coworkers conducted themselves during that visit. Despite the missionaries’ suffering and insults experienced in Philippi (see Acts 16:12-40) and despite encountering in Thessalonica strong opposition, with God’s help they dared to speak out freely and boldly.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that his appeal did not involve delusion, impure motives, or trickery – a trio of words that reflected traditional charges against traveling charlatans of various sorts. To the contrary, nothing of the sort could have motivated the forthright behavior of Paul and his companions, especially in the face of such stiff opposition; only a sense of purpose arising out of God’s approval could have prompted such boldness. They are responsible to God, not (in contrast to conventional expectations) to the crowds whom they address.

*As your messengers, Lord, we are responsible to you for how we share your truth. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 3 - 8

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, January 6 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8**

“We shared with you God’s Good News and our own lives”

Paul once again calls on the Thessalonians to verify the missionaries’ claims that they were not seeking human approval, since (1) they avoided the use of flattery, (2) nor were they seeking to promote their own financial self-interest, (3) nor were they looking for fame or honor. Behind this concern over means and motives is Paul’s obvious concern for the integrity of the message. He deliberately avoided behavior or actions that might lead people to doubt or suspect the integrity of the message or the sincerity of his preaching.

Paul goes on to describe how they did behave by using a maternal metaphor, that of a mother who nurtures and cherishes her children. He further develops this image of love and tender concern by stating that they freely chose to share with them not only the message they had been commissioned to deliver, but also themselves – because, as things turned out, the Thessalonians had become beloved by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The development of such deep affection was perhaps unexpected, though certainly welcome.

*May our actions, Lord, be characterized by gentleness and motivated by love. Amen.*

**Friday, January 7 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12**

“We worked hard among you”

Paul’s prior claims that the missionaries were not a financial burden and did give of their very selves are now confirmed by their behavior and lifestyle. He and his companions not only preached the gospel, but they also worked – probably as leather-workers. The artisan’s shop that Paul and his colleagues operated would have been a recognized setting for discussion and instruction; and in view of the long hours that his low-paying occupation would have demanded, Paul of necessity likely carried out some of his missionary activities while working.

Once again Paul uses a parental metaphor, this time a paternal one. Here Paul is indicating not only how he related to the Thessalonians in the past (during the original missionary visit) but also how he continues to relate to them. Both then in person and now via the letter he sought and seeks to encourage and comfort them. The goal of all this “fatherly” activity is that the Thessalonians might live a life that is worthy of God – that is, a life that reflects the character of and brings honor to the God to whom they have committed themselves.

*Strengthen me, Lord, to live a life worthy of you. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 8 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**

“You suffered persecution”

After beginning with a thanksgiving statement, Paul reveals why he is thankful: The Thessalonians have received and accepted the message preached by the missionaries not as a merely human message, but in accordance with its true nature, as the word of God. The clearest evidence of the Thessalonians’ acceptance of the gospel as the word of God was their willingness to suffer for it.

The suffering that the Thessalonians experienced placed them in solidarity not only with the Lord Jesus and the missionaries, but also with other gentile believers and congregations. By their acceptance of “Lord Jesus” they implicitly rejected the claims to sovereignty of “Lord Caesar” and the civil religion of the imperial cult, and they thus were perceived as threats to the established social order and government. While the suffering of their Jewish brethren took a different form from that of gentile believers they, like the Judean Christians, were suffering for their faith in Christ.

*In spite of opposition, Lord, I will remain faithful to you. Amen.*