

## **Devotions for the Week of August 11, 2019**

### **LARGE-PRINT**

#### **You've Got Mail:**

#### **A Journey Through A Few of Paul's Letters**

#### **OBEDIENT – A Letter to The Church in Thessalonica**

#### **North East United Methodist Church**

#### **By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

### **Sunday, August 11, 2019**

#### **Read I Thessalonians, Chapter 1.**

I Thessalonians is one of Paul's earliest letters, written about A.D. 51 to the church in Thessalonica, the capital and largest city (about 200,000) of the Roman province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was on the Roman highway, extending from Rome to the Orient; therefore, it was wealthy, flourishing, and filled with men and women from countless nations who brought many heathen religions and cultural influences. Paul is writing to a young church who is struggling with persecution because of their faith and the challenges of an international community with multiple beliefs. Remember, Paul had to leave Thessalonica in a hurry after planting the first Christian church in A.D. 50 because his life was threatened (Acts 17:1-10).

Paul commends the Christians in Thessalonica for: (1) turning to God; (2) serving God; and (3) waiting for Christ's return.

First, Paul commends them for their "*work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus*" (v. 3). He commends them for receiving the Word, turning to God. "*And you became followers of the Lord, having received the Word in*

*much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (v. 6). Have you turned to God? Have you received His Word, His promise?*

Secondly, Paul commends them for *“from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth...in every place...Your faith toward God has gone out...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (v. 8-9). How are you serving God? Has your faith “sounded forth” into the community, “in every place”?*

Lastly, Paul commends them for *“wait[ing] for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (v. 10). Do you look forward to Christ’s coming? Do you live your life as if He could return at any moment?*

Like the Thessalonians, are you turning to God, serving God, and waiting expectantly for His return?

## **Monday, August 12, 2019**

### **Read I Thessalonians, Chapter 2 & 3.**

In these chapters, Paul mentions the persecution that the Thessalonians are dealing with for their faith in Christ. He writes, *“For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us...” (v. 14-15). Paul explains to the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy “to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions...For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation...” (v. 2-4). Paul’s letter to them is further encouragement.*

When we take a stand for Christ, we may end up facing opposition, disapproval, and ridicule from neighbors, friends,

and even family. Not only that but Paul, wanting to visit the church in Thessalonica, writes, “*but Satan hindered us.*” Not only do we face persecution for our faith, we have an enemy that attempts to prevent us, tempt us away, from our faith and the work God wants us to accomplish.

Do you need encouragement? Are you dealing with tribulations and trials? Are you dealing with persecution because of declaring your faith? Take encouragement from Paul’s words to the Thessalonians and from his prayer at the end of chapter 3 (vs. 11-13).

Who do you know that needs encouragement? Who can you share Paul’s prayer with and for? Take time to pray for encouragement and faith to deal with whatever trial you face. Pray that God lays a name on your heart of one you can pray for and encourage.

## **Tuesday, August 13, 2019**

### **Read I Thessalonians, Chapter 4.**

Paul calls on the Thessalonians to walk in obedience. He writes, “*...we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus*” (v. 1-2). He says, “*For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness*” (v. 7).

Paul reminds them that sexual sins, as well as fraud and idleness. Later in chapter 5, Paul reminds them that they must respect their leaders, live in peace, uphold the weak, be patient, resist revenge, pray without ceasing, not quench the Spirit, and avoid every kind of evil. He says, “*...each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor*” (v.

4). As we live a Christian life, we should be growing, becoming sanctified through the Holy Spirit, conforming more and more into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Remember, this is only possible with God...as Jesus said, in John 15, “*apart from me you can do nothing.*” Paul reminds them that when one is disobedient and speaks or acts against a brother, or gives into passion or lust with someone, they do “*not reject man, but God...*” (v. 8).

Are you being obedient to God’s Word in your life? Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to grow you into the image of Christ, putting away behaviors that are harmful and speech that is hurtful? Are you allowing God to help you become more holy? Take time in prayer and ask God to help you grow. Pray, as Paul prays in I Thessalonians 5:23, that the “*God of peace Himself sanctify you completely*” & that you may be “*preserved blameless*” at His coming.

### **Wednesday, August 14, 2019**

#### **Read I Thessalonians, Chapter 5.**

At the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5, Paul addresses the concern many of the Christians in Thessalonica had concerning why many of their fellow believers had “*fallen asleep,*” died, before Christ returned. Many had believed that Christ would return immediately. When He didn’t, they questioned what would happen to their loved ones.

Paul explains that no one knows the time of Christ’s return. In the time we have, we are to live moral and holy lives, ever watchful for His coming. We must not neglect daily responsibilities and work to please the Lord. We must pray without ceasing, always ready. Paul writes, “*the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...you, brethren, are not in*

*darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief...therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober...putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (vs. 1-8).*

Secondly, Paul answers the Thessalonians’ concerns. He writes, concerning their departed friends and family, *“God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...and the dead in Christ will rise first...then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds...” (v. 13-18).*

I pray that each of you do not *“sorrow as others who have no hope,”* but find great comfort in the fact that *“the dead in Christ will rise.”* One day we will see our loved ones again. All believers will stand reunited in God’s very presence, safe and secure.

Take time to thank God for the promise of the resurrection and the opportunity, through Jesus, to spend eternity with Him. And pray that when Jesus returns, you will be found ready. Ask God to help you prepare, to prioritize, to become more like Christ.

## **Thursday, August 15, 2019**

### **Read II Thessalonians, Chapter 1.**

Paul wrote this letter less than a year after he wrote I Thessalonians. The Thessalonians had responded to his letter well and were still growing in the faith, but there were many false teachings springing up about Christ’s second coming. In fact, many were quitting their jobs in order to wait for the end of the world. Furthermore, persecution continued and the church was faced with trials and troubles.

In chapter 1, Paul describes the coming of Christ and addresses the Christians' suffering. He mentions two dimensions of relief to suffering and persecution:

- (1) We can gain relief in knowing that our sufferings are strengthening us, making us ready for God's kingdom, helping us grow into the likeness of Christ, who also suffered; and
- (2) We can gain relief knowing that one day all will stand before God and wrongs will be righted, evil will be destroyed.

Reflect on the day of Christ's return. Does it bring you comfort to know that one day all wrongs will be righted? As you reflect on your tribulations and trials over the years, how did they strengthen you and your faith? How did those trials bring you closer to God?

### **Friday, August 16, 2019**

#### **Read II Thessalonians, Chapter 2.**

Paul urges the believers to "*stand fast*" for he knew they would continue to face pressure from persecutors, false teachers, and the culture around them. He explains to them that Satan is at work and people will continue to be deceived, and because they are deceived they will perish "*because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*" (v. 10).

Paul reminds them in verse 13 that salvation begins and ends with God. We can do nothing to earn our salvation; we must simply accept God's gift (remember the Roman Road). Paul calls on the believers to "*stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.*"

Are you in God's Word? Are you holding fast to the truths you have been taught through God's Word? Do you find yourself tempted? Have you observed others being deceived by the world, led away from faith? Who can you tell about Jesus "*who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace*" (v. 16)?

Pray that you may not be tempted and pray for those you know who do not know Christ or are failing to "*stand fast*" in their faith.

### **Saturday, August 17, 2019**

#### **Read II Thessalonians, Chapter 3.**

In chapter 3, Paul calls the believers to obedience, telling them to "*withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly*" and not to keep company with anyone who "*does not obey our word in this epistle*" (vs. 6, 14). Paul tells them that he has "*confidence in the Lord concerning [them], both that [they] do and will do the things...[God] command[s]*" (v. 4). Paul is clear that it is God who will give them the strength for it is the Lord who "*is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one*" (v. 3).

Pray that God will "*direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ*" (v. 5). Pray and ask God to help you be obedient, to help you follow His commands and teachings. Pray for strength against the evil one.

**Take Time In Prayer w/ God Tonight &  
Don't Forget To Invite Someone To Church.**