

# Explore the Bible: March 6

*Commended • I Thessalonians 1:1-10*

*By Cyndi Grace*



Grace

I am excited to study the books of I and II Thessalonians this quarter. These epistles are little studied but offer so much encouragement as we navigate the daily trials we face. The over-arching theme is the second coming of Jesus and the hope we have because of that. Is there a better comfort than that?

To understand Paul's intention in this letter, we need to understand how the church in Thessalonica began. We find this account in Acts 17:1-10. Paul and Silas (Silvanus) were escaping Philippi where they had been jailed and remarkably freed. Acts 17:1 tells us they traveled through the Greek countryside and landed in Thessalonica. Scholars believe they stopped there because it had a synagogue and as was Paul's custom, he went first to the synagogue to teach the Gospel of Jesus. He taught for three weeks while being hosted by a man named Jason. Because of Paul's preaching, some were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas including "leading" women in the town. This was wonderful, except, some Jews became jealous and didn't want to lose anyone from their synagogue especially prominent members. These Jews reacted with violence and incited a riot against Jason's house where Paul was staying. The charges against Paul were almost laughable: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too, and Jason has welcomed them. They are all acting contrary to

Caesar's decrees saying that there is another king—Jesus.” Acts 17:6b-7 (CSB) Paul and Silas along with Jason were taken into custody but Jason paid a security fine and they were all released. The new believers encouraged Paul to move onto Berea, which he did. Eventually, Paul would make his way to Corinth where he would stay for 18 months. The road between Corinth and Thessalonica was a well-traveled one but since Paul had been expelled from entering Thessalonica he had to depend on Silas and Timothy to deliver his letters.

Why is all of that important? Because understanding that this church had been born in the midst of persecution and remained strong was the reason Paul was commending them for their faithfulness, love and hope. He encouraged them for not only accepting the Word but also putting it into action through the power of the Holy Spirit. I love what Paul says in verse 6 “...in spite of severe persecution you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit.” I wonder how many of us, if faced with severe persecution, would have joy. The church in Thessalonica was the real deal.

What was the result of their faithfulness? The Gospel spread! Everywhere they went the “Word of the Lord rang out!” (vs 8) They were known throughout the region and many were changed because of their example.

The last verse of our lesson today is extremely important: “...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” (vs 9b-10 CSB)

They were able to continue in power because they knew three things: They were changed, Jesus was coming back, and there was going to be wrath like no other. This caused an urgency in their message and they withstood the persecution of men in order to warn others of something much more horrible. Paul stated it in another letter, “*Therefore we don't give up. Even*

*though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* II Corinthians 4: 16-18 (CSB) I wonder if Paul was remembering the church in Thessalonica as he wrote those words.

So, how are we doing? Are we turning the world upside down? Are we loving the lost around us enough to withstand persecution in order to share the Good News? Are we anticipating Christ's second coming? There was an urgency within this church and it would do us well to pray for this same urgency because Jesus is coming and with Him will come a reward for those who believe and eternal wrath for those who don't. Do we care?

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