

1 & 2 Thessalonians
A World-Changing Faith
Levi Lusko

SERMON OUTLINE 1

The Word Is Out

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1. Introduction

- A. Levi Lusko opens by reminding us that none of us “have made it.” We all continue to grow in our faith. Thessalonians is the perfect place to explore the claims of Jesus and what this whole faith thing and Christianity is all about.
- B. Lusko references Chuck Swindoll, a very well-respected minister:
 - 1. He once said that 1 Thessalonians is the perfect place for every new believer to begin.
 - 2. Swindoll also pointed out that 1 Thessalonians really is a primer. It covers nearly every significant major doctrinal area in a very clear way.
 - 3. It was written to new believers by someone who himself at one point would never have believed he would be a believer.
- C. Paul does a really good job of giving a crash course on what you need to know before you go on this faith journey. He wrote to people who, at one point, didn’t know anything about Jesus. Then they became believers and Jesus changed their lives. Paul wrote to help the Thessalonians grow in their faith.
- D. For a new believer 1 & 2 Thessalonians is a great chance to get his or her feet wet. For those who have known Jesus for a long time, these two books will still speak to you, grip your heart, and transform your life.

2. Teaching

- A. Paul wrote the letter to the Thessalonians based on reports from Timothy. Paul

had been in Athens and Berea, then made his way to Corinth. Timothy arrived in Corinth as well. Paul asked how the Thessalonians were doing. He had a parental love for them and was truly concerned and eager to hear about their progress. Timothy responded that in many ways they were doing very well and growing very strong, but:

1. Some were lacking in faith.
2. Others were lacking in love.
3. Another group was lacking in hope.

B. Paul got out his pen and began to write his letter to the Thessalonians. His agenda was to help them grow in faith, help them grow in hope, and help them grow in love. Paul makes some connections for us as he begins the first chapter.

1. Affirmation and correction: To affirm someone is to tell them they're doing well. Paul was telling them what he had heard from Timothy, that they were doing well. He also was correcting them (verses 2-3). Paul was a wise leader and knew the best way to help them grow was to praise them for what they had done well. So, Paul, by praying and thanking God for the very areas where the Thessalonians were exhibiting some amount of faith, some amount of hope, some amount of love, was his way to affirm and therefore to correct. He hoped to see more of the very same thing he wanted them to grow in.
2. Communication and demonstration: Paul said, "I didn't just tell you what to do. I lived it out in front of you" (verses 4-6). And that is so incredibly important, because the truth is what gives power to our lives. It's not just teaching the Word, but it's living the Word. It's not just telling our kids and telling our friends, "Here's what the Bible says." It's living it out and letting that be the beautiful agent to change in our lives. So, Paul demonstrated—and thus was willing—to connect the dots between what he communicated in the pulpit, to what he was

living out day in and day out in their midst. And that's a powerful connection.

3. Tribulations and jubilation: Jubilation is excitement or celebration. We know Paul felt that way about this church. He, in fact at one point, called this church, "my glory and my joy." He said, "You are our glory and our joy. It's a joy to watch what God's doing." Paul took great happiness and took great pleasure in hearing about their faith and knowing that they were reaching people with the gospel. There's a connection though because it took tribulation to get to that jubilation. Remember Paul didn't just preach it, but he demonstrated it. He lived among them with a back that was still healing from the wounds inflicted upon him at Philippi, the city where he had been prior to being forced to leave to come to Thessalonica. Through his own personal tribulation, Paul showed that we can face trouble believing God for joy, for every time God begins to do something great, there's going to be opposition and there's going to be persecution.
4. Reception and transmission: Paul shared that the Thessalonians let the word out (verses 8-10). They had heard about Jesus, accepted Him, and then spread the news freely.

3. Application

Don't make the mistake of just receiving the truth, transmit the truth. Believers have been given a gift they should be sharing with others. It is our responsibility to tell everyone about the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Never Give Up

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

I. Introduction

The context of 1 Thessalonians is Paul's love for a city that he did some ministry in for several months, but it was a very powerful time. The church sprang up, there was great revival, great zeal and hunger for God, but he was attacked, both physically, verbally, and spiritually, and as a result had to leave the city unceremoniously and very hastily.

A year later, upon getting reports about what was going on in Thessalonica, he sent word back to them through these letters, sort of his way of blessing them and encouraging them as best as he could from a distance. But in these words, he really speaks to this idea of never giving in, of never giving up, having a faith that won't quit, a faith that won't stop.

A. A personal story from Levi Lusko:

"I'm going to tell you one of the most important things is just to not give up, to not quit, and to not stop. I was in a church a while back in Atlanta, Georgia, doing some ministry. While I was there, the guy who was driving us around the city mentioned that he had just been given a promotion to a greater level of leadership within the church. That kind of peaked my interest.

And I said, 'Well, how'd that happen? How long have you been on staff? How long have you been on the team? What did you look after at first?' And I was just kind of grilling him a little bit on his story. And then when he had mentioned the promotion, I said, 'What was it that occasioned that happening?' And he goes, 'Well, honestly, I just never quit. And years later, eventually someone left or someone moved on, and they looked around and I was the last man standing, so to speak. I just was there.'

The way he said it just really encouraged me. 'I just never quit.' Indicating there were obviously times and seasons where he felt like quitting, times when he felt like giving up, times where he felt like it would just be easier to throw in the towel. And as you serve God—as you do all that he's called you to do—there are going to be plenty of opportunities to do that."

- B. Paul is communicating to us that there comes a great victory in life when there's the tenacity that says, "I'm never, ever, ever, ever, ever, in something large or something small, going to find reason to quit showing up—not marriage or family or doing business with integrity. I'm going to be like the apostle Paul, who was willing to continue ministering and doing all that God had called him to do, even when it was hard."

II. Teaching

Levi Lusko points out several areas where Paul was specifically not willing to give up.

1. He never gave up, even when it didn't seem to be working. Paul starts setting the stage in verse 1 and 2 with these words, "You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know." Paul was ministering in Philippi. There was great revival and then things changed. He was forced to leave and made the journey to Thessalonica.

Just when it seemed to be working in Thessalonica, he ended up having to leave again. He made his way to Berea and Athens, and then set up shop in Corinth where he planted one of the most successful churches he ever pastored.

Even when you don't think it's working, it's still the right thing to do. When Joshua led the nation of Israel around the walls of Jericho, they had to do laps day by day. And then even on the last day, they had to go around seven times.

But when the walls finally fell, they fell as a result of the faithfulness on all the days that they had been willing to do it. So, in your life right now, you might be on lap two or three and be tempted to give up. It's working, even though you don't see the results you want to see, even though it doesn't seem like it's working. Don't quit and you will see a harvest.

2. Paul was tenacious and never gave up, even when his motives were misunderstood, the rumor mill started up, the fellows with a baser word or the hooligans who were jealous of Paul, angry at Paul, and

didn't like Paul, after they drove him from the city and physically tried to hurt him. Paul did end up having to move on. If you try and do something for God, one of the difficult things is jealousy will cause people to rise up against you. It happens every single time God uses someone. Look at David and Daniel. David was attacked by Saul with spears and Daniel was thrown in the lion's den. So, any time you face difficulty as you're trying to do good things, remember when God uses someone there will be opposition.

In Luke 6, Jesus shares that you should be worried when you're serving God, if only positive things are said about you. The truth is anybody who's doing what God has called them to do is going to attract some enemies. So don't give up, even when you deal with people who are spreading lies about you.

3. Paul never gave up no matter the difficulty he encountered. The hardships he endured would be enough to make anybody want to quit. And yet Paul, even when it was hard, said, "I worked my own fingers to the bone. I was willing to persevere and to continue going." So don't give up, even when things get hard, and difficulties fill your life.

III. Application

- A. When you're tenacious like Paul and not willing to quit, even when it's hard, even when you're being slandered, and there's opposition; there are some benefits.
- B. Three benefits of Paul's tenacity:
 1. The word of God was received. Paul says in verse 13 that, "We thank God continually because you now receive the word of God, which you heard from us. You accepted it, not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God."

Every person's been given different spiritual gifts, and every person's been called to work in different environments, surrounded by different people. Not everybody's supposed to be a pastor, not everyone's supposed to be a missionary. We are all called to share God's message in our daily lives. So, when all of us are doing what we're called to do, wherever we're called to do it, God's message is

being planted in the hearts and minds of the people in our circle of influence.

2. The word of God will spread. And that happened here. Paul said, “For from you, the word of God has sprung forth.” Sprung forth. In verse 14, he talks about all the churches being ministered to. He talks about Judea and all the different areas where his own ministry spread to. And then from the Thessalonians, Paul said in chapter one, it went all over the Via Ignatia. It went all over Macedonia.

When we hear a blessing, we then transmit it, and then more people get to be blessed as well.

3. When you don't give up, God releases strength in your life to face all those roadblocks. For Paul, it was the roadblock of Jewish persecution and the roadblock of the thorn in his flesh. But he was given strength from God for each of those things.

The result of not giving up is you unlock a new level of power, a new level of strength, and God's able to give you what you need to keep going.

SERMON OUTLINE 3

Born for This

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

I. Introduction

There are two days that are the most important days of your life: the day you're born and the day you figure out why. When you understand your purpose and do daily life with it firmly in mind, it will unlock your ability to maintain perspective and tap into power. When you're aimlessly doing anything, you can be easily discouraged and can easily make bad decisions. If you listen, you will begin to hear God whisper into your heart some things about your purpose and some things about what His calling for you. Whatever God calls you to, He will give you the strength and the ability to do.

II. Teaching

- A. Paul had been speaking in Thessalonica in person for several months. His ministry to the Jews and to the Gentiles was effective and then some locals began to cause problems. Paul was removed from the city for his own safety. But that didn't stop Paul. He continued to minister to the church at Thessalonica through Timothy.
- B. Paul knew his purpose and approached everything with the perspective of the purpose God had given him.
 - 1. Paul had the perspective of a parent. He compared himself to a mom in 1 Thessalonians 2:3 and a father in 1 Thessalonians 2:11.
 - 2. Paul was like a mom in love and like a dad in leadership.
 - 3. Having the perspective of a parent allowed Paul to tap into his purpose

as an apostle and a preacher.

C. Three areas where purpose can fill up our lives:

1. You were born for adversity. It is important to remember in the hardships we face, we were born for this. God has a plan and He called us here. It's not a mistake that we're dealing with these things.

Warren Wiersbe has a great statement about God's plan and difficulties. He says, "The trials we face are not accidents, they are appointments." That's because our God is a sovereign God. He sees the end from the beginning, and we can lean into His sovereignty and trust that nothing gets to us that hasn't gone through Him first. So just remember, God's trying to make you more like Jesus, so He can see His face in you; and in those hardships, He has a plan. So, you were born for adversity.

2. You were born for affection. That's to say the family love, the friendship love. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 3:5, "For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith, because I was afraid that in some way, the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain." Isn't this Paul just caring about them with love like we would have for a best friend or for someone we're dating or for our mom or our dad? There's an affectionate tone to Paul's heart as he says, "I was worried about you, thought you might have been deceived. When you build affectionate relationships with other Christians, it's going to help you to grow for your own self. The affection being stirred up in your heart, towards your fellow Christians is going to help you to grow. Remember, you were born for this.
3. You were born for progress. You were born to grow. Paul says in verse 12, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other, and for everyone else just as ours

does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with His holy ones.” When you accepted Jesus, you were a baby in Christ. If you have truly grown in your relationship with Him, you have grown in your desire to live a life that is pleasing to Him. There is so much to know and to learn about living the Christian life and pleasing the Lord, it will take a lifetime—a lifetime of progress. It’s a good thing you were born for progress.

III. Application

God is ready to take you into a place where you abound even more in grace, where you’re even doing more for God. He is never willing to stop. The Bible says that He will finish what He started in us. The one who began our faith is also the perfecter of our faith, and Paul, the good father, the loving mother, the great coach says, “You’ve been doing good, but let’s now work on this. God’s not going to stop until you have fully lived up to the purpose that He put in you when He built you.

God planned His purpose for us from before the foundation of the world. When we stand before God in heaven and He’s looking at our works and we’re able to throw those crowns at His feet, we will be delighted to know that we did everything possible to see God’s design for our lives, our purpose, fulfilled in Him.

Mind Your Business

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

I. Introduction

As we make our way into 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is going to tell us effectively that there are some things we need to be mindful of. There are some things we need to take care of. Paul is being hard on them. Remember what Jesus said in John 15? He said, "If any branch bears fruit, my father prunes it so it will bear even more fruit." In verse one of chapter four, he says, "I want you to do this more and more. I instructed you to live in these different ways." He says, "Now I urge you to do it even more." He's saying, good job with that fruit, God has more for you, more for you to mind.

"Mind your business," was actually a statement on the first penny in the United States. Mind your business, Ben Franklin put it there. He chose to have the penny have a sundial, and then below it, the phrase, "Do your work" or "Mind your business" was written. The intention was the sundial communicated that time flies, therefore, we must all mind our business and do our work.

II. Teaching

Levi Lusko reminds us that time flies, our life is going to be over before we know it, therefore do your work. So, we're going to try and abound more and more in our calling, minding our business, and doing the things God's called us to do. We have the incentive to do so because our lives are going to be over, and Jesus Christ is going to return.

Three areas we can seek to grow in:

1. Abound in purity: Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality." There's no confusing Paul's intent here. Lusko points out that when it comes to relationships and dating and sex, the Christian ethic is so far from just about any culture it gets transplanted into. But nowhere was that the case more so than the places that Paul was preaching on his missionary journey in places like Corinth and Athens. There was deity worship, prostitution, and more. This is the culture in which the gospel was being communicated. So, Paul is

helping them understand that God has a different plan for relationships. We live in a culture where with just the use of an app on your phone, you can access “no strings attached” encounters. God is calling us to approach relationships differently than the world we’re living in. He wants us to enjoy the gift of sex in marriage as He designed it.

2. Abound in our relationships: In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, Paul says, “Now about your love for one another, we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 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.” We were created for relationship. Lusko encourages us to really believe and really understand that there is power in community that will transform our lives almost more than any other thing. How does that work? Well, iron sharpens iron. A knife can’t get sharp all by itself. It needs something scraping up against it, rubbing up against it for there to be sparks of discipleship and transformation flying.
3. Abound in your example: Everyone around you is watching you. They are looking to you as an example. Look again at verse 11, Paul brings the subject up when he says, “You should make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.” Remember Ben Franklin’s penny statement, “mind your business.” Paul told the Thessalonians (and us), “You should mind your own business and work with your hands just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders. And that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

III. Application

Levi Lusko encourages us to quit talking about how much we love God and actually do a good job. Let our individual lives do the talking because that’s when everyone will want an audience with us. When they ask how or why you live the way you do, you can say, “I love Jesus and want to honor him by the way I live my life.” When you start living that way, people will be drawn to you. They will want to hear the gospel that you claim to be so passionate about and you’ll have the opportunity to point them to the God who saved your soul. So let your example more and more, be one of excellence and integrity. Be quiet, mind your own business, do a great job. People will come wanting you to tell them about your faith.

SERMON OUTLINE 5

Between Now and Then

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

I. Introduction

In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul tells us heaven is coming. Christ is going to return He'll rule and reign with a rod of iron. Yes, we'll get to live in perfect bodies forever after we're raised from the dead. Yes, all of that's in our future. And that gives us hope, and gives us peace, and gives us power. It would be so easy to focus on when and how Christ will return. But between now and then, there are some things he wants us to do. Let's serve Jesus here and now. He has a plan and wants that plan to include us.

II. Teaching

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 Paul shares three things we need to be doing between now and then and they all start with the word honor.

1. Honor up: This means honor those in authority. In fact, in verse 12, Paul puts it this way: "Now we ask you brothers and sisters to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord, and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love, because of their work. Live in peace with each other." Honor up. That means honor anybody who's put over you. We're not just talking about spiritual authority within the walls of a church. We're also talking about others with authority in your life like police officers, the crossing guard at your school, your teacher in your classroom, or your boss at work.

Remember that Paul, when he wrote about authority, was living under Caesar Nero, a wicked barbarian king who had Christians put to death. And yet he spoke about that same king, as one he should give honor to, pray for, and ultimately view as God's

agent. That is not to say God approved of everything that king did, but that God allowed that King to be placed in authority. When we fight against authority, we're fighting against our own best interest. Because we cannot become who God has called us to be without the rules and the understanding that God is the one ultimately in charge.

2. Honor down: Look to verse 14. Paul said, "And we also urge you brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened and help the weak. Be patient though, with everyone." He shows that as you relate to those who perhaps are not doing as well in their walk with God, as you are, you are honoring down. You are showing grace to each situation with the approach that's warranted based on the situation. So, he says that ministry is not one size fits all. You're going to have some who are idle, some who are disheartened, and some who are weak.
3. Honor God: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, "May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. So, brothers and sisters pray for us, greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters." In all things and in all situations react and respond with the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Honor God through your choices and your love for those He places in your life.

III. Application

Approach each day with a God-perspective. Look for those people He places in your path and then engage them in a way that shows the love of Jesus. Paul is pointing us toward being healthy on the inside and healthy on the outside by living a life centered on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. First and Second Thessalonians is one of the first places in Scripture that deals with the fact that we have a threefold nature just like God. We are not just a body. We're body, soul, and spirit. Just like God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God wants us to embrace and honor His threefold nature to be healthy inside and outside so we can do everything He's called us to do between now and then.

Keep Calm and Carry On

2 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

Second Thessalonians is a rebroadcasting of the message of First Thessalonians written by Paul—the same Paul who got saved dramatically. He had been a terrorizer of Christians. He was considered the enemy of Christians and was there when the first Christian was put to death. He went about the whole area doing anything he could to destroy the church of Jesus Christ until one day, one fateful day, he met Jesus. Jesus showed up in a brightness and a glory, and Paul fell to the ground and he said, “Who are you, Lord?” God said, “I am the same Jesus that you’ve been persecuting.” It should encourage us to know that everyone in your life, everyone you love, everyone who is antagonistic towards you are all on a journey with God and He’s working on their lives.

Paul was aggressive and antagonistic until God did a work in his life. God calmed him down. Once he was saved, he used that same passion that was used for evil for good as he began trying to reach as many people with the gospel as he could. He carried on with God’s purpose and plan for his life.

II. Teaching

Levi Lusko shares the big points in 2 Thessalonians:

1. Paul addressed and acknowledged that persecution still existed. It exists today. He wrote claiming “Grace and peace” for the Thessalonians and for us today. To have peace with God, you first have to receive the grace of God. That’s why grace always comes first. If you want to walk in peace, well, the solution is accepting God’s grace. When you walk in His grace, the outcome is always peace. He said, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so because your faith is growing more and more” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He says, “The love all of you have for one another is increasing.” So that’s good. “Therefore, among God’s churches, we boast about your perseverance and faith,” and then he says this, “In all the persecutions and trials, you are enduring.”
2. The second thing he brings up is the second coming of Jesus Christ. He points

once again to the fact that Jesus hasn't come yet. The word on the street was that Jesus had already come and they missed it. So, Paul clears this up in chapter two, verses 1 through 3. He says, "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you brothers and sisters not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us, whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by a letter." Jesus is going to come back. For us to not acknowledge that and to not communicate that and not believe that is to ignore so much of Scripture. The second coming comes up over 1800 times in the Bible. Jesus spoke more about the second coming than just about any other thing.

III. Application

Paul talks about standing firm in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ. So, then brothers and sisters, stand firm," carry on, keep calm. "And hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter, and may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."

So, until Jesus comes back, there is work to be done, people to reach, people to love, families to raise, businesses to start, and life to do. All done with a calm spirit knowing that Christ is seated on the throne of the believer's heart. One day every eye will see, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But until then, let's carry on and reach a world that God so loved He was willing send His Son to die to save it.