May God richly bless you with the Holy Spirit

Well, election day is coming shortly; and with it lots of angst and strong emotion. I have no intention of getting political here, just Biblical.

Things may or may not turn out the way you hope. That’s why it’s crucial to remember that we are just passing through; our citizenship is in heaven.

The apostles Paul and Peter both tell us to be submissive to those in authority; to the government. Government is an institution established by God for His purposes. His purposes are mainly to establish civil order, but He can also use governments to bring about His judgement. Any government set in place is God’s doing. To go against it is to go against God’s ordinance. The only exception to this is when government goes against God; then we go with God.

Regardless of how things turn out, God is in control. He will have things work out according to His will and plan. As His children, we are safe.

Our hope must not be in earthly governments; they will fail us. Our hope is in almighty God through Jesus Christ. He is our Saviour and the One we look to. He will never fail us.

*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Matthew 28:20b

In Christ’s love

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1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

The people of Thessalonica had an heritage of conquering. This was the people of Alexander the Great. Alexander is pictured in the book of Daniel as a leopard with four wings. He and his army of Thessalonians moved with great speed as they defeated nation after nation to become the third world empire. Only the untimely death of Alexander and fighting between his four generals ended their domination.

The Thessalonians were eventually defeated by the Romans, but they continued to rise up in rebellion until Rome was finally forced to crush them economically and politically along with armed force. After some time, Rome granted them a favored status which gave them freedom and benefits. With this, the people were willing to cooperate with Rome. But that same heritage of the people was still in their hearts; they were still conquerors.

Once they became Christians, God was able to use that innate predisposition for His purposes. They immediately began imitating the missionaries and the Lord Jesus and then they went out to conquer on behalf of Christ’s Kingdom. They didn’t conquer people with bow and sword; they attacked satan’s kingdom with the Gospel and won lives for the kingdom of Christ. And like all warriors, they did so while enduring hardship. And unlike earthly warriors, they endured it with joy.

Their reputation spread throughout the entire province of Macedonia. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, which is in the province of Achaia south of Macedonia. Paul’s group would talk to people about Christ, only to find out that they had already heard the Gospel from a Thessalonian. Paul exaggerated when he said he no longer needed to say anything about the Gospel, but it was a good compliment. It is no wonder that the Holy Spirit brought Paul out of Asia and to these people. These were people ready to work and useful to God.

Certainly, not every Thessalonian Christian went out as a missionary evangelist. There would have been those who cared for the flock at home and those who would have supported the missionaries. They would have been willing to continue to speak to friends and neighbors at home to bring them to Christ and also those who were traveling through. There would have been time spent studying the Scriptures and learning from those gifted with teaching and understanding. And very importantly, there would have been much prayer.

Prayer is a major part of the battle. It rattles the gates of hell. Prayer is pleasing to God and He is happy to hear from His people. In response to faithful, earnest prayer, God will move and tear down the strongholds of satan. Success of missionaries, pastors, and churches depends on prayer. The Thessalonians were a race of warriors, but if they had fought for Christ’s Kingdom in their own strength, they would have failed miserably. Their success only came by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is not enough to simply hear about the Thessalonians and be impressed with their zeal for the Lord. We are called to be doers of the word. Each of us must consider, every day, what we are doing for the kingdom of heaven. Are we spreading the Gospel, or supporting the proclamation of the Gospel with our money and prayers? Are we praying for God’s servants and against the forces of darkness? Do we make our decisions based on things of this world or do we consider eternity and our citizenship in heaven? Even while we go about the necessary things in our lives, our focus should be on Christ and His kingdom.

Paul mentions them receiving the Gospel in the midst of tribulation. Problems did not stop them; they received the good news of Jesus Christ deep within their souls. The Bible is clear: tribulation is part of being a Christian. If you attack satan’s kingdom, he will fight back; and he has most of the world on his side. Still, we are called to attack his kingdom by spreading the Gospel and winning souls for Christ.

I think we are all very aware of how easy we have it in this country regarding suffering for Jesus. The worst we have to deal with is being mocked for our belief. But consider the writing on the wall. Persecution is starting and it is coming. Will we be able to follow the examples in the Bible?

In Acts chapter 5, the apostles were taken before the Sanhedrin, charged not to speak of Jesus, and then flogged. Verse 41 records their response.

*So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*

Or how about Hebrews 10:34?

*For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better and lasting possession.*

Are we ready for these things? It is good to consider our reaction before they come to pass. It is critical to remember who is involved here. As Paul said in verse 6, “*the joy of the Holy Spirit*”. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us able to endure these things and even be thankful for them. (And this makes no sense to the carnal man.)

The Thessalonians, like the apostles, knew what Jesus went through on their behalf. They were happy to endure some small suffering on behalf of Christ. To suffer for His name meant they were doing something right for the kingdom of God.

The Thessalonians, like the Christians in Hebrews, were looking with eyes focused on eternity. They knew that whatever they lost on earth was worthless compared to what they would gain in heaven; especially because they lost property for believing in the name of Jesus.

Not too many years ago, ISIS forces went through a Christian neighborhood demanding that everyone convert to Islam or leave everything they owned and flee. The vast majority left everything and would not renounce their faith in Christ. These things are reality in our world. It may not be so in this country, but are we at least willing to claim Jesus regardless of the consequences?

If we believe we are willing, the proof lies in where we started in this message: Will we spread the Gospel; will we support those who do; will we pray against satan and for the kingdom of Christ? If we do these things, we can have confidence that we will stand for Jesus when tribulation comes.

The last two verses of this chapter have a lot in them. Along with spreading the Gospel, the Thessalonian Christians are telling about the arrival of Paul and the other missionaries. It was customary for the traveling philosophers to arrive in cities with great pomp. News of their arrival would precede them and many would go out to meet them. The apostolic band arrived with no fanfare, but their preaching came with the power of the Holy Spirit and they were eagerly received by those who would have eternal life.

Paul noted that they, “*turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God*”. Notice that two things happened here: they turned from idols and they turned to God; both are important.

There were some Jews, proselytes, and God fearers who turned from Judaism to Christianity. But the majority of the converts were pagans. These pagan beliefs permeated all of life for these people; religion was involved in politics and all of social life. There were lots of different deities to choose from and the people lived in fear of all of them. At any time one of them could become angry and cause problems. There were also all kinds of immoral cult practices that the people would engage in.

God makes it very clear that He does not tolerate idolatry. He is God, and He will not share His glory with anyone or anything. If a human being felt that way, it would be sinful arrogance; but not God. He truly deserves all glory and honor and is right to claim it. There are other problems with idol worship. At best, a person is worshiping an inanimate object or some ideal. It cannot move, it cannot breathe, it cannot do anything; it is no help at all. At worst, the idol has a demon associated with it; this is the most likely case. This demon will trap the worshiper with fear and desire for the practices of the cult. The person becomes a slave to satan, a slave to sin.

Simply turning from an idol is not enough. Another one will take its place. As the Thessalonians did, one must turn to God. It’s kind of an interesting concept. When we are freed from satan by Jesus, we are freed from slavery. But that must be replaced by submitting to Christ; in other words, slavery to Him. The thing is, that it is only in slavery to Christ that we can find true freedom. Jesus is the truth, and the truth makes us free.

We must be careful of idolatry. There are still unfortunate parts of the world that live in fear of demons living in the forest or in a nearby waterfall; that still fall down before wooden statues. We would like to think that these things don’t take place so much in this country, but they do. Things like witchcraft and druidism are making a comeback; interest is rising in native American rituals to various gods; new age practices focus on the created rather than the Creator; some main line religions such as Roman Catholicism pray to and worship statues and relics.

I pray that we are all free of these things, but we must still be careful of idolizing such things as our jobs, our houses, our hobbies, a political party, even our family or spouse. Anything that takes the place of God in our lives has become an idol and it is very easy for something to slip in.

As opposed to idols, the God of the Bible is *a living and true God*. He is alive; He has life in and of Himself. He is God; He is far above all things and is the creator of all things. He exceeds us in wisdom, intelligence, strength, and love. He is so far above us that it is our privilege to worship and serve Him. How wonderful is our triune God: The Father devised a way for us, the Son made that way possible, and the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to accept that way. All in grace, all in love; still, God was able to maintain His justice and His holiness.

The Thessalonian Christians turned from idols to God and they served Him. That’s important; they worked to serve their Saviour. Jesus has a number of parables showing that He expects us to be working for His kingdom when He comes back. Our work includes spreading the Gospel, loving God and loving our neighbor, prayer, ministering to the sick and imprisoned and lonely and needy, participating in the fellowship of church, and whatever special ministry God has laid on our heart. As long as we draw breath, we continue in what work we are able to do. Be sure the Master catches you working when He returns.

While the church was working, they were also waiting. They were waiting for Jesus to come back. We are still waiting; but be assured, He will come back; and whether we are alive or dead when He does, there will be no hiding place. Be sure He is your Saviour.

Paul makes four important points about this man they, and we, are waiting for. He is the Son of God and He will be coming from heaven; that’s where He is now. In Acts the disciples were told that He would return just as they saw Him leave; through the clouds. In Revelation we learn that He will come through the clouds with much noise and power. He is the only begotten Son of God so He is equal with God and is God.

God’s Son actually died on the cross and God raised Him from the dead, never to die again. Because we are to be like Christ, we also have the promise of bodily resurrection. Our bodies will rise perfect and new, never to suffer again.

This Son of God is Jesus. The real person that we read about in the Bible; the person Paul would have proclaimed to the Thessalonians. He is God who actually became a man and lived a life here on earth in order to fulfill God’s plan of salvation.

Fourthly, Jesus rescues us from the wrath to come. He is the only way; any who reject Him as Saviour will suffer the eternal wrath of God. How precious Jesus is. The coming of God’s wrath is sure; it’s not something that might happen. The Bible is very definite that God is biding His time because He is merciful. He is giving people a chance to be saved. But the time will come when His justice must be satisfied and it will be satisfied in wrath.

Jesus rescues us by taking the punishment we deserve, thereby satisfying God’s justice and holiness. If we don’t accept His gift, we will pay the price ourselves.

The Christians of Thessalonica grasped this important truth. They turned from their errant ways and turned to God through Jesus Christ. Realizing what they had coming in their eternal future, they worked for God and disregarded worldly pursuits. All the while, they looked up, expectantly awaiting the arrival of their Saviour. Theirs is a good example to follow.

Prayer

Merciful God, the Bible tells us to not only be hearers of the word, but doers of the word. Help us to truly hear what You have to tell us, so that we can do Your will.

May the Holy Spirit give us the heart to follow Your word. Give us love for You, love for the truth, and love for others. Help us to see them as You see them; lost and in need of a Saviour. Let us behold them with Your heart.

Keep us true to You. Any place else we look leads to slavery with a cruel master. It is so much better to serve You; You are the Master who is good and kind and merciful and loves us beyond what we can imagine. Blessed are You, O Lord.

We pray in Jesus’ name

Amen