

Our midweek services this year will focus on a few passages that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the church in Thessalonica. The church in Thessalonica was struggling with some teachings about the coming of Jesus on the Last Day. Paul wrote a letter to them to help them come to the proper understanding concerning the end of time.

1 Thessalonians is a book that has a lot in common with the two-minute warning. The Apostle Paul warns the Thessalonians that world history is almost over. The time is short. The church has always lived in eager readiness for that day when the Lord will reveal His presence to all people as He executes final judgment on the earth. Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians is one of those places where the Lord informs us about His coming on the Last Day.

Paul begins by wishing grace and peace to His fellow Christians. Yes, we are to live as though Jesus could return at any moment to judge the living and the dead. Yes, we all will appear before God's judgment throne. But this does not mean that we need to panic. It is not time to freak out.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to remind the Thessalonians and us that we are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That means that we have the Holy Spirit's gifts of faith, hope, and love. The Holy

Spirit's gift of faith receives the gifts of God ... especially the gift of forgiveness earned by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit's gift of love that comes along with faith reaches out to serve one another. The Holy Spirit's gifts produce hope that looks forward to the day when the Lord returns to raise the dead and give eternal life to all who believe in Him.

After his greeting, Paul continued to write: "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything."

The time is short so we can't waste it on unimportant stuff. We don't know when the Lord will return. We also don't know when the end of our time on this earth will come. The Lord could return while I am preaching this sermon. You could go home tonight, and the Lord could call you home in your sleep.

The time is short, and Paul says that the Thessalonians are an example of how to use time. They are making the most of every opportunity. What are they doing? Paul says that the word of the Lord sounded forth from them. This means that they were confessing their

faith, not only to each other, but their confession sounded forth from them into the world around them.

When Paul says that the word of the Lord sounded forth from you, he used the Greek word from which we get the English word "echo." An echo simply bounces back the original sound. Our confession echoes God's word. We don't need to create our own confession. God wants us to echo what he has said.

The echo is quite simple: the Word of God teaches that I was conceived and born sinful and under the power of the devil until Christ claimed me as His own. I would have been lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent His Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for my sin, and the Holy Spirit has given me faith so that I trust Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sin. Therefore, I have the clear promise of God that I shall not perish but I already have eternal life. The promise of eternal life is not just for me, but it is for all people. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!

Paul noted that part of their confession was that they had 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. Thessalonica was only fifty miles from Mount Olympus—the supposed residence of the

Greek gods. But when the Holy Spirit opened the Thessalonian's hearts to the gospel, they realized that all their gods and idols could not offer a real solution to their greatest problem. They discovered that their greatest problem wasn't their harvest, and it wasn't their business dealings. Their greatest problem was that they had offended a holy and just God. But Paul told them that Jesus poured out his blood to forgive them. He rose on the third day to embrace them. And He is coming again to restore them.

Unfortunately, we have just as many idols in our culture. It may be a lover, a Lexus, our labour, or our leisure time. The Lord may return at any time. We don't have time for competing gods. Paul admonishes us to follow the example of the Thessalonians and turn from our idols. He admonishes us to turn to the Living God instead, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

People who have survived fires in the wild have a small idea what the coming wrath might be like. Sometimes you hear of someone who survived because they started a backfire. They saw the smoke on the horizon and realized that the fire was coming faster than even a horse could run. The only choice was to start a small, controlled fire that would use up the fuel around them before the big fire came. They

stood in an ever widening circle of blackened earth and waited for the fire to come. The fire was terrifying as it drew near, but it bypassed the people who stood where the fuel had already been burned.

When Christ returns the judgment of God will be like that fire. It will be powerful and destructive. But if we stand in the burned over place we will be saved. And where, you ask, is the burned over place? The burned over place is the foot of the cross. There Jesus has already endured the fire of God's wrath. He has used up the fuel of our sin. So it is at the cross we stand.

The time is always short, for no one knows when his time will be over. The proclamation is what it has always been. Jesus Himself proclaimed the gospel of God ... saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Amen