



What Are We Waiting For? – 1 Thessalonians Worship, The Holy Spirit & The Word of God

Date: Sunday 30th October

Speaker: Rosie McNeil (City Centre Site), Andrew McNeil (South Site)

Key Verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

Talk Summary:

This last section sounds a bit like a random list of commands - from quenching the spirit to holy kisses!

The heart of this passage is the summary of the whole letter, Paul's prayer (v23) and God's promise over the Church (v24).

1. Paul's got the end in mind
2. He's reminding them...stick together.

Things may be tough now - But God has got you. He's set you apart. He's sanctifying you. He's faithful. You'll make it to the end.

This list of encouragements is given to the gathered Church. As you gather rejoice, pray, give thanks. Not you individually but you as a group. The assumption of the whole passage is that you are together.

God is present and at work in a different way when we gather. We got out of the habit over Covid - or we've never been in the habit. It's important that we gather as Church.

Paul is recognising that their environment is hostile. Backdrop of persecution. They need to stick together. You might feel this at school or university or in your workplace?

Image - Illustration Antarctic Emperor penguins survive temperature of -60F and gusts of 100mph by sticking together!

Paul addresses three things as we gather.

1. Worship

Rejoice – Pray - Give Thanks

Activities directed from us to God. Make a mature choice. We can easily get stuck in self-pity, grumbling, fear, passivity.

From Paul, this is straight-talking, heart-felt discipleship. He's had his own setbacks and trials. He's been persecuted repeatedly. When thrown in prison - sings hymns to God. (see Acts 16:25). Not just giving some shallow advice that he's not lived. When you gather, rejoice, pray, give thanks. Face it together, like penguins in a huddle. You can survive.

- *Rejoice:*

Rejoicing always is a choice. This is not based on circumstantial happiness. It's a declaration of the goodness of God. God's nature is unchanging so we can always rejoice.

For God's people around the world, collective worship, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs is one of the most helpful ways we can rejoice with a God directed focus. Fascinating fact. Benefits of collective singing:

www.britishacademyofsoundtherapy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Your-Healing-Voice-Article-sing-for-health-research-3.pdf

- *Pray continually:*

Paul is not saying they should pray and never stop but throughout a Sunday gathering we're in an atmosphere of anointed worship and so we're seeking to be attentive to God in a particular way.

Stay in conversation with God. Is there something you need to say to Him? Use the time. Come expectant that He wants to meet with you and speak with you as much as you want to meet with Him.

- *Give thanks in all circumstances:*

"It's one thing to be grateful. It's another to give thanks. Gratitude is what you feel. Thanksgiving is what you do." - Tim Keller

Paul was convinced that God was working in everything and repurposing circumstances. (Romans 8:28). Good times and bad. He's present and can be trusted. We don't thank God for our circumstances but in our circumstances. Find something to be thankful for.

There is a huge body of evidence about the benefits of thanksgiving and its positive impact on improved mental health and wellbeing.

So all these things here are God focussed choices. They turn our face towards heaven. Worship is from us to God.

The next section deals with the work of the Spirit. This is God coming to us. The Holy Spirit is His gift to us.

Paul is training the people to respond well to the presence and working of the Holy Spirit as they gather.

2. Work of the Spirit (v19-22)

Paul assumes that the working of the Spirit in the gathered Church is like a fire that can be quenched. God is sovereign but He still wants our cooperation. The work of the Holy Spirit can be shut down. God doesn't force His way in.

To illustrate his point about responding to the Spirit, Paul talks about prophecy v20. But what is prophecy?

“Human words reporting something that God brings to mind.” - Wayne Grudem

Spirit inspired phrases that bring encouragement, comfort, strengthening. Prophecies mustn't be despised (treated with contempt). Had a bad experience? Easy to despise.

Now prophecy is clearly meant to be part of congregational life together. Otherwise Paul would have simply banned it. Instead he taught the people how to prophesy well. The antidote for any abuse of a gift is proper use of that gift.

- v 21 “Test everything”

The believers then needed to weigh prophecies to discern what was true and what was false. We need to do the same. How do we do that?

1) Does it line up with the Bible?

2) Is it motivated by love and showing the nature of Christ?

3) Look at the character of the person giving the word

4) Does it build up? Does it strengthen and encourage the hearer or build up the church.

- v 21-22 “Hold on to what is good and reject every kind of evil.”

Word ‘good’ was often used in reference to what was genuine, as opposed to counterfeit. The imagery is from banking and testing coins. Spotting fake currency.

How can we respond to the Spirit? We seek to be prepared and Spirit led.

1) Pre-service prayer.

2) In the service - Engagement with site pastors / team.

3) Space to speak out. In our community / small group.

We can sometimes try to control what's happening in us or around us. We need to learn to respond to the Spirit. Take some time to reflect. Create space and pace to think and spend time with God asking what He wants to say to you. The more we wait, the more he works.

3. Word (v25-28)

Greet all people each other (not just your friends - extending the family - it's an instruction)

“Read to everyone” has to do with public instruction - Culture that was less literate. It was expected that letters like this would be read aloud to the gathered church.

We are to be formed and shaped by the Word of God.

Worship

Worship is not just singing, it is thanking God for who he is and what he has done and is lived out through a life of trusting obedience. Discussing this together is an act of worship.

(Small group worship resources can be found at bvc.so/sgworship)

- What are you thankful for this week?
- Where has God been at work in your life?
- When have you taken risks in faith and obedience this week?

If you have a time of singing you can skip the above questions but please do ask this question each week:

- What has God been speaking to you about this week? (*Go around the group quickly don't spend a long time on it*)

Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)

- What does it mean to always rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances?
- What is my biggest challenge which stops me being thankful?
- What does it mean for me to pray continually? How can I develop in this?
- How might I find myself quenching the Spirit?
- What are some of the ways I best hear from God?
- How might I grow in being able to prophesy?

Witness - *How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?*

We want to be investing in authentic relationships with those who don't know Jesus yet and inviting them to anything where they might meet other Christians and Jesus. Pick one of the below each week:

- How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?
- What church events coming up would your friends appreciate an invitation to?
 - Upcoming Events (*go to bvc.so/whats-on for details*)
 - Young Adults Night – 12th Nov
 - BIG CHURCH! – 13th Nov