



Part 37: A Few Good Men

Word ALIVE



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To present the first we have of Paul's letters (1 and 2 Thessalonians) and some of his latest letters (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon).

AUTHOR: Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

DATE: Thessalonians was written in the early 50's. The pastoral letters were written in the mid to late 60's.

STYLE: The early letters show a mix of Paul's confidence and concern that his preaching may have been in vain to the first of his fickle followers. His later letters are called "pastoral" because they cover episcopal instructions, ecclesial ordinances, and recommendations to a young bishop by a man of experience.



Opening Quotes

📖 "You must learn to make still greater progress." 1 Th 4:1

📖 "Be clear about those who sleep in death; otherwise you might yield to grief like those who have no hope." 1 Th 4:13

📖 "Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Jesus Christ." 1 Th 5:16

📖 "Do not be so easily terrified by oracles or rumors or letters alleged to be ours, into believing that the day of the Lord is here." 1 Th 2:2

📖 "I urge petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving... God wants all men to be saved... There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tm 1-5

📖 "Fight the good fight of faith." 1 Tm 6:12

📖 "Never be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord... bear your share of the hardship which the gospel entails." 2 Tm 1:8

📖 "There is no chaining the word of God!" 2 Tm 2:9

📖 "You have known the sacred Scriptures, the source of the wisdom which through faith in Jesus Christ leads to salvation." 2 Tm 3:15

📖 "Perhaps your slave was separated from you that you might possess him forever no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother." Phm 9:15

📖 the BIG PICTURE		📖 : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		📖 : key covenants in our Father's plan	
	12 Periods ▼	Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		📖 stories in each period ▼
BC	🌐 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104		Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel
1850	🔥 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50			Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek
1250	⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX			Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT		Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth		12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel
1030	🌟 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov		Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple
1000	🏰 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,		Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile
721 587	🌀 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar		Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)
538	🌟 THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs		Cyrus, 2nd temple, 2nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings
163 63	🕯️ THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom		Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)
AD	👤 JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN		Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection
33 70	🕯️ APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv		Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ



The Story of Part 37: A Few Good Men



The Thessalonians were one of the first communities Paul hastily founded as he tried escaping imprisonment. They lived in the hope of the imminent return of Christ, but consequently regarded this world as less than important, some of them neglecting their responsibilities. Paul shared their hope of Christ's return, but not their agitation over it. He commended those who imitated the apostles in following the Gospel, and reminded them that he and the others went out of their way not to impose themselves on them. Apparently Paul never took advantage of their hospitality and provided for himself, even though he had the right to ask for material support as God's minister.

Paul then acknowledged that while the death of someone is truly a grievous occasion, to have the hope of a Christian necessarily means that we do not despair over death, for Christ has prepared for us a place in heaven. After all, on the Day of the Lord, the last day, at the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet, those who have "died with Christ" will rise first. Those still alive with Christ will then be caught up with them into heaven where they will be with the Lord forever. This was a message of consolation to contrast the despair felt by those who live this life as if this was all there was.

As for more details as to when and where this would happen, Paul echoed Christ in telling them that as imminent as the time was, it would be unannounced, like a thief coming in the night. The moral of the story is – be prepared, for you don't know when it will happen. Your eternal destiny is not something to "eventually get around to"!

By the same token, the final coming was not something to be terrified about! He warned them of false prophets, oracles, and even forged letters claiming to be apostolic. The only assurance against the last day is the work of faith in accord with God's gracious gift of Christ. Working out salvation means honest intention and good work, but it begins with a trusting faith in God, not in our own efforts. Paul would enunciate this more clearly (and passionately!) in his other letters. In the meanwhile, Paul told them, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions received, whether by word or by letter.

Turning to his pastoral letters, Paul addresses individuals now, not whole churches. Nevertheless, these letters became reliable guidelines to the budding churches, and remain a testimony to the visible institution which has made possible the reliable transmission of the "deposit of faith," the teachings Christ desired for us, whole and intact.

In his first letter to Timothy, he urges prayers of supplications and intercession, and explains that there is one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. To a non-Catholic, prayers to "dead saints" seem wrong because they seem to bypass Jesus Christ. Properly understood, Paul encourages intercessions, not

interceptions! We ask saints, whether on earth or in heaven, to present our prayers *to Christ*. Calling souls who are very much alive (even if bodily asleep) in Christ "dead saints" is inaccurate. (Revelation will later speak of saints in heaven presenting others' prayers to God.)

In his letter to Timothy Paul particularly encourages prayers for a country's leaders. Even in a democracy, voting is not the most influential thing you can do for your country. Prayer is.

Paul then exhorted Timothy to "fight the good fight of faith," sticking to the everlasting life that our profession of faith called us to. He charged him (and us by extension) to keep God's command in anticipation of the day that the Lord would appear. He then gave Timothy his own example of how God patiently put up with Paul persecuting the Church. Calling himself the worst of sinners, he pointed to God's unfathomable mercy, and the faith in him that leads to eternal life.

In his second letter to Timothy Paul told him to bear the hardship that comes with his office. Paul had ordained Timothy by the laying on of hands, and he commissioned Timothy to guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit. Referring to his imprisonment, Paul told Timothy that there was simply no chaining the gospel! The Scriptures, Paul told him, were nothing short of the wisdom which would lead to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It was useful for teaching, reproofing, and training in holiness, but always with patience!

Paul's own life was near the end. He had fought the good fight and finished the race. A merited crown awaited him, and he eagerly longed the appearance of the Lord, imitating him in forgiving those who imprisoned him. "May it not be held against them!"

Paul's letter to Philemon is the shortest letter in the Bible. In it, he returns a runaway slave whom he had baptized, asking his master to realize that in God's eyes there was no longer any distinction between slave and master. Sadly, the Bible has been used to defend slavery, since Paul never outright condemned it. But two things need to be kept in mind. Firstly, Roman slavery resembled an indentured servitude more humane than the gross aberration that led to the Civil War. Secondly, as is the case with the failed crusades and infamous (and grossly exaggerated) inquisitions, it has taken centuries for us to know how to apply the gospel to ever changing social conditions. An honest reading of the shortest letter in the Bible should make it clear that God only allowed the respectful servitude which is nothing like the slavery we think of today. The only proper slavery is what the Bible calls slavery to Christ, a slavery which becomes transformed into the freedom of God's children. 📖



Defending the Faith: Organized Religion

“Jesus wasn’t about Church or religion. He came to teach us about a personal relationship with God.”

It is true that we must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, this phrase has been at times set against the idea of an organized Church. But when the Church is seen as the Body of Christ, it should be obvious that to cut Church out of ones life, is to cut that personal relationship with Christ. When people criticize Eucharistic adoration or daily Rosary, for instance, and call them “human traditions” which impede our personal relationship with Christ, they fail to see that the opposite can be said. We eat his body every week and talk to his mother every day – it don’t get no more personal than that! Obviously, these devotions would be empty and meaningless without personal, private prayer, but together they nourish the faith and can truly make the relationship more personal.

This phrase “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your *personal* Lord and Savior?” also needs clarification. If by “personal” we mean that we have that intimate relationship with Christ, then yes, absolutely. But Jesus is not a personal Savior in the sense of a personal bodyguard who is mine and only mine. He is also the Savior we have in common. God founded a *people* in the Old Testament, a people fulfilled and being realized in the Church in the New Testament. It is curious when someone says they have a personal relationship with Christ and therefore don’t need Church, when Christ himself founded a Church (Mt 16:18)!

Perhaps some are turned off by the less-than-holy feeling that can permeate any human institution. But we must remember that because Jesus founded the Church, it is at the same time a divine institution whose

perfection comes from Christ. On earth we are still saints *in the making*, in communion with the saints made perfect in heaven. When we have true faith, God foresees our perfection, overlooking our defects like a loving Father whose child can do no wrong.

To say that holiness has nothing to do with Church, is often an excuse to not go, or reveals a discomfort in hanging with the type of sinners Jesus precisely came to save. See if you recognize the common excuses for not going to Church by considering the analogy “*10 Reasons Why I Never Wash*”:

1. Washing may be good for you, but not for me.
2. I was forced to wash as a child. I’m a grown up now.
3. People who wash are a bunch of hypocrites who think they are cleaner than everyone else.
4. There are so many different kinds of soap, I could never decide which one was right.
5. I used to wash, but it got boring, so I stopped.
6. Hey, at least I wash on special occasions, like Easter and Christmas.
7. None of my friends wash.
8. I’m still young. When I’m older and have gotten a bit dirtier, maybe I’ll start washing.
9. I really don’t have time to wash.
10. People who make soap are only after your money.

Do we acknowledge the Lord, but then refuse to give him his Day?



Expressing the Faith: Light of the World

The musical *Godspell* reminds us that our personal relationship with Christ is also public by his design.

*You are the light of the world!
 You are the light of the world!
 But if that light is under a bushel,
 Brrr, it's lost something kind of crucial
 You got to stay bright to be the light of the world.
 You are the salt of the earth
 You are the salt of the earth
 But if that salt has lost it's flavor
 It ain't got much in its favor
 You can't have that fault and be the salt of the earth!*

***So let your light so shine before men
 Let your light so shine
 So that they might know some kindness again
 We all need help to feel fine (let's have some wine!)***

*You are the city of God
 You are the city of God
 But if that city's on a hill
 It's kinda hard to hide it well
 You've got to stay pretty
 in the city of God
 (chorus)*

*You are the light of the world
 You are the light of the world
 But the tallest candlestick
 Ain't much good without a wick
 You've got to live right
 to be the light of the world!*

↗ **Next time: “Still Chosen”** ↖