

‘Back to Basics’

NASA invented a gun to test windshield strength on their various aircraft, including the Space Shuttle. This gun simulates an aircraft encountering air born fowl at high speed. What they do, is, fire a dead chicken at the windshield to see if the glass can withstand the impact.

Well, British Rail heard about the gun and asked NASA if they could borrow it to test the windshields on their new high speed Advanced Passenger Train. NASA agreed and British Rail set up the test. They loaded the gun and fired the chicken at the train.

To their horror, the chicken smashed right through the windshield, straight through the backrest of the driver’s seat and embedded itself into the instrumentation at the rear of the cabin. Perplexed, the design engineers sent the test results direct to NASA and asked for their advice. NASA sent back a one-sentence reply, ‘Defrost the chicken!’

Sometimes you just have to get back to basics and the **Book of 1 Thessalonians** is a get back to basics letter, written by Paul.

You see, when you begin your journey in following Jesus Christ, you are going to hit some turbulence and the people Paul wrote to in **1 Thessalonians** had not even been Christians for a year, they were a whole church of fairly new Christians and they needed to hear some basic doctrine and that’s what **1 Thessalonians** is all about basic doctrine.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 says, “From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church at Thessalonica united with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Good will and peace are yours!”

You can find the story of how the church in Thessalonica was founded in **Acts 17**.

Here’s a brief synopsis. Paul had been in Philippi with Silas. They had been banged up in jail and beaten. When they were released, they went past a couple of small towns, because Paul’s strategy was to plant the church first in large towns, and then that church could plant the church in neighbouring little towns.

In this part of Paul’s ministry, the next big town was called Thessalonica. It was on the Ignatian Way, the main highway of that day and to Rome. It had a large harbour and an estimated population of around 200,000 residents. **Acts 17** tells us that Paul reasoned in the synagogue for three Sabbaths.

That might seem like us to be three weeks. But it was probably longer. Paul probably spent three weeks at the synagogue before getting booted out, but in **chapter 2** it says he took up tent making to support himself. He thanked the Philippians for constantly furnishing him with support, while he preached in Thessalonica. So, it seems likely that he was in Thessalonica for a few months anyway.

But the important thing to remember here is this, Paul had to leave town before he was ready to. The Jews got a mob together, went to Jason’s house, a new Christian, to grab Paul and arrest him. Paul wasn’t there. Like any decent mob, they did the next best thing, they grabbed Jason instead, dragged him off to the town councillors. And said these people have turned the world upside down claiming that there was another king besides Caesar and that His name was Jesus. So, they got Jason to put up bail and promise not to cause any more trouble.

Later that night, when it was dark, Paul and Silas jumped bail and left Thessalonica; and ended up in Berea. Started preaching there, but the Jews came down from Thessalonica and had Paul kicked out of Berea. The next big town Paul went to was Athens and even though he was in Athens, he couldn’t stop thinking about the church in Thessalonica that he had to abandon before he was ready. Because he knew first, they were new in the faith and second, they were experiencing the same kind of opposition that was against Paul.

He shows his heart in **chapter 3:1-5** “We thought it best to remain in Athens by ourselves. But, because we couldn’t wait any longer for news about you. We sent our brother Timothy to you. He serves God by spreading the Good News about Christ. His mission was to strengthen and encourage you in your faith. So that these troubles don’t disturb any of you. You know that we’re destined to suffer persecution. In fact, when we were with you, we told you ahead of time that we were going to suffer persecution. And as you know, that’s what happened. But when I couldn’t wait any longer, I sent Timothy to find out about your faith”.

Literally the word he uses means, **'I orphaned myself'**. He is telling them that he allowed himself to be abandoned so that Timothy could go back and find out how they were doing. Whilst in the interim, Paul moved onto Corinth. Timothy went to Thessalonica, came back to Corinth and found Paul to tell him that he had good news and bad news.

The bad news was that the church in Thessalonica was being persecuted, just like Paul was afraid they would be. But the good news was they were holding onto their faith in Jesus Christ. So, Paul from Corinth, put pen to paper and wrote this letter to encourage that little church to hang on. And what he did was remind them of one of the very basics of Christianity.

He took them back to the basics and **what was the basic Paul took them back to?** Paul was eager to encourage these new Christians with the fact of Jesus return. **1 Thessalonians** is a book about the importance of watching your wait. Every **chapter in 1 Thessalonians** closes with a reminder that Jesus is coming back and that's the theme through which we read this entire letter.

Let's look at that beginning in **1 Thessalonians 1:9+10** **"They talk about how you welcomed us when we arrived. They even report how you turned away from false gods to serve the real, living God and to wait for his Son to come from heaven. His Son is Jesus, whom he brought back to life. Jesus is the one who rescues us from God's coming anger"**. Real conversion means you are waiting for Jesus to come back.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 **"Who is our hope, joy, or prize that we can brag about in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Isn't it you?"**

1 Thessalonians 3:13 **"Then he will strengthen you to be holy. Then you will be blameless in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all God's holy people"**.

And **chapters 4 and 5** are just filled with teaching about the Second Coming.

1 Thessalonians 4:16+17 **"The Lord will come from heaven with a command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the dead who believed in Christ will come back to life. Then, together with them, we who are still alive will be taken in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. In this way, we will always be with the Lord"**.

Then notice Paul's closing thought in **1 Thessalonians 5:23** **"May the God who gives peace make you holy in every way. May he keep your whole being--spirit, soul, and body--blameless when our Lord Jesus Christ comes."**

Have you ever wondered how much the New Testament refers to the coming back of Jesus? Is it a secondary doctrine, or is it one of the most basic doctrines of the Christian faith? Do you realise that out of the **260 chapters in the New Testament**, Jesus return is mentioned **318 times**? And how many churches today even talk about the Second Coming?

Especially to new Christians. And when we do talk about his return, **is it to encourage them or threaten them with a hell-fire-and brimstone lesson to get them to toe the line?**

Paul, believe that the coming back of Jesus was one of the most uplifting things you could say to a new Christian and so he says in **1 Thessalonians 4:18** **"So then, comfort each other with these words!"**

And again in **1 Thessalonians 5:11** **"Therefore, encourage each other and strengthen one another as you are doing."**

Paul said, the way to encourage new Christians who are going through a tough stage, you tell them: **'Jesus is coming back!'**

In **Titus 2:13** it says, **"At the same time we can expect what we hope for--the appearance of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ"**. Our blessed hope is not just a doctrine to be discussed, No! It's a truth to be lived. Paul is going to show is that Christians are supposed to live in the future tense. To Paul, being a Christian means being a person who lives like Jesus could come back at any moment.

Is that how we are living?

We sing the song: 'Jesus is Lord' and part of that song reads: 'Lord come quickly, hallelujah!' The point is, do we sing it like that? With the anticipation and the eagerness that it deserves?

Not long after John F. Kennedy was elected the first Roman Catholic president of the USA, he was speaking with a preacher. He asked the preacher if he believed in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The preacher affirmed that he really did believe in the Second Coming. Kennedy asked the preacher if the Catholic Church believed in it.

The preacher told him that it was in the Creeds of the Catholic Church. To which Kennedy replied, 'Well, they never talk about it.' So, for the next few moments they had together, the preacher told Kennedy what he believed about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Kennedy was very impressed and told the preacher he would like to hear more about the topic. A couple of years later, the two men met up again.

Kennedy asked the preacher that he would like to talk some more. The preacher begged to be excused as he was coming down with a virus. Kennedy excused him and said they would talk later. There never was a later. A few months down the line, Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas. To this day, that preacher regrets that unrecoverable opportunity to share with someone, that, Jesus is surely coming back.

Here are 5 things that will help us to become ready for the return of Christ.

Readiness means 1. Respecting the Word's power.

Why would anyone be excited about the appearance of the Living Word, when you're not excited about the written and proclaimed Word right now?

Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6 "Brothers and sisters, we never forget this because we know that God loves you and has chosen you. We know this because the Good News we brought came to you not only with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with complete certainty. In the same way, you know what kind of people we were while we were with you and the good things we did for you. You imitated us and the Lord. In spite of a lot of suffering, you welcomed God's word with the kind of joy that the Holy Spirit gives".

Notice for Paul that it is never the Word or the Spirit. It is always the Word AND the Spirit. Both go hand-in-hand. Anyone can talk up the Holy Spirit. But if you don't preach the Word; if you don't hold up the scriptures; if you don't read the Bible. Scripture says the Word is the Spirit's sword.

So, if you have the Holy Spirit and never open your Bible. You are leaving the Spirit weapon-less. But even though you read the Bible every day. If you're quenching the Holy Spirit in some way, then you've rendered the Word powerless! Because it's the Spirit working with the Word.

You see the Gospel doesn't just tell us about power. The Gospel releases power, when it is preached and when it is received in the Holy Spirit. Look at 1 Thessalonians 2:13 "Here is another reason why we never stop thanking God: When you received God's word from us, you realised it wasn't the word of humans. Instead, you accepted it for what it really is--the word of God. This word is at work in you believers".

Paul says, you know what? The Word is changing you. Let me tell you something, if the Word is changing us now, to be more like Jesus, how excited are we going to be at the thought that some day, the full manifestation of the Living Word, is going to be in view and we're going to be changed like Him?

And so, you see if you are living, ready for the Coming of the Living Word, then your life is getting changed right now, by the preaching and the written Word. That's what readiness means!

2. Satan loves to feast on new believers and Paul knew it.

He says in 1 Thessalonians 2:17+18 "Brothers and sisters, we have been separated from you for a little while. Although we may not be able to see you, you're always in our thoughts. We have made every possible effort to fulfil our desire to see you. We wanted to visit you. I, Paul, wanted to visit you twice already, but Satan made that impossible".

Paul said, "I know it's not the Jews; I know it's not the Romans are my real problem. I know my real problem is Satan".

Paul knew that in his absence, Satan would try to take advantage and discourage these new Christians. He says in 1 Thessalonians 3:5 “But when I couldn't wait any longer, I sent Timothy to find out about your faith. I wanted to see whether the tempter had in some way tempted you, making our work meaningless.”

Let me tell you, if anybody preaches you a gospel that does not include tribulation, they have preached you a fake Gospel. Believing and following Jesus Christ is going to receive opposition from a world that does not believe Him and mocks the idea He might be coming back. But timothy brought Paul some good news.

“Yes, they're getting persecuted; yes, they're being mocked; but you know what? Despite all that, they're hanging on in there!” He says in 1 Thessalonians 3:7+8 “So brothers and sisters, your faith has encouraged us in all our distress and trouble. Now we can go on living as long as you keep your relationship with the Lord firm.”

You see Satan doesn't want us to stand firm and so one thing he does is, he tries to convince you that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is a nice doctrine to believe, but is no way going to happen anytime soon. Think about it! If you were absolutely convinced that Jesus would come before this year was over, [would it affect some of your current decisions?](#) It probably would.

So, Satan wants you to believe that the doctrine of the Coming of Jesus is just some peripheral thought that couldn't possibly affect what is going on right now. Satan wants you to lower your guard, so that you will lower your standards. That's why the Bible says in James 5:8 “You, too, must be patient. Don't give up hope. The Lord will soon be here.” Readiness means that you are always aware of Satan's attempt to get you to fall asleep!

3. Readiness means reflecting the Spirit's influence.

Imagine you are going to meet someone you think is really important. Someone you have the greatest respect for or someone you know that a first impression is going to make a lasting one. [What would you wear? You're dirtiest clothes?](#)

Look at 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 “Now then, brothers and sisters, because of the Lord Jesus we ask and encourage you to excel in living a God-pleasing life even more than you already do. Do this the way we taught you. You know what orders we gave you through the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you keep away from sexual sin as a mark of your devotion to him. Each of you should know that finding a husband or wife for yourself is to be done in a holy and honourable way, not in the passionate, lustful way of people who don't know God. No one should take advantage of or exploit other believers that way. The Lord is the one who punishes people for all these things. We've already told you and warned you about this. God didn't call us to be sexually immoral but to be holy. Therefore, whoever rejects this order, is not rejecting human authority but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit”.

People eager for Jesus to come back need to dress like it. Readiness means I'm letting the Holy Spirit help me clean up my act. If your religion is not changing your life – Then you need to change your religion, because something's wrong. Readiness means the Holy Spirit's influence is evident in my life, as He is changing my behaviour; changing my values and changing my decisions. The Holy Spirit is making me a, new me.

All through the New Testament, the return of Jesus is constantly attached to the believers' new ethic. We live differently because of what we believe and so for example in 2 Peter 3:11+12 “All these things will be destroyed in this way. So, think of the kind of holy and godly lives you must live. As you look forward to the day of God and eagerly wait for it to come. When that day comes, heaven will be on fire and will be destroyed. Everything that makes up the universe will burn and melt.”

Or as you can read in 1 John 3:2-4 “Dear friends, now we are God's children. What we will be isn't completely clear yet. We do know that when Christ appears we will be like him because we will see him as he is. So, all people who have this confidence in Christ keep themselves pure, as Christ is pure. Those who live sinful lives are disobeying God. Sin is disobedience”.

See what John is saying is “if you really do believe Jesus is coming soon and you are hoping to see Him, you are going to want to look nice.” [Now do you see why Satan doesn't want us to talk about the Second Coming?](#) It's so that we'll get complacent, instead of being in a state of readiness.

4. Readiness means expecting the Saviour's Coming.

Jesus did not tell us how long He would be gone. He told us He would come back. **Do you know anyone with a telephone answering machine? What does the message say? 'I'm sorry we can't speak to you right now, but if you leave your name and number, we will get back to you.'**

And most folks usually do, they get right back to you. Sometimes it's the same day, other times when it's more convenient. The point is, when we leave that message, we usually get a reply. We don't know when the reply will come. But when it's left with someone we trust and know well, we are confident they will get back to us. And for security reasons people don't say on their answer machines how long they will be away for, so you just wait until they get back to you.

That's what Jesus is going to do. He didn't tell us how long He would be gone for. He said, **'you just stay in touch. I'm coming back.'** So, **how do you live?** You live with hope and your hope is proof that you believe Jesus was telling the truth.

1 Thessalonians 4:13+14 "Brothers and sisters, we don't want you to be ignorant about those who have died. We don't want you to grieve like other people who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and came back to life. We also believe that, through Jesus, God will bring back those who have died. They will come back with Jesus."

My destiny is not in the hands of the undertaker. My destiny is in the hands of the Uppertaker! Because whether I'm dead or alive, when He comes back, I'm going up! Christians live like people who know where history is headed. We are in a new millennium, we have heard a lot of rubbish about where this next millennium is going. **What's going to happen to the world? Will it end? What's the future like?**

We don't live in ignorance, Christians know exactly what the world is headed to. We know exactly how history is going to end and we know what our destiny is. Let's not live like ignorant people. Let's live like people that know what's in the future.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-9 "But, brothers and sisters, you don't live in the dark. That day won't take you by surprise as a thief would. You belong to the day and the light not to the night and the dark. Therefore, we must not fall asleep like other people, but we must stay awake and be sober. People who sleep, sleep at night; people who get drunk, get drunk at night. Since we belong to the day, we must be sober. We must put on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. It was not God's intention that we experience his anger but that we obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

God made an appointment and when God makes an appointment, God keeps it. God has appointed me to salvation, not to wrath. When the Lord Jesus returns, God will keep his appointment.

5. Readiness means protecting the Lord's body.

Paul closes his letter with a long passage on how we are to treat each other and we are to take care of the church. Let's look at **1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 "Brothers and sisters, we ask you to show your appreciation for those leaders who work among you and instruct you. We ask you to love them and think very highly of them because of the work they are doing. Live in peace with each other. We encourage you, brothers and sisters, to instruct those who are not living right, cheer up those who are discouraged, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. Make sure that no one ever pays back one wrong with another wrong. Instead, always try to do what is good for each other and everyone else"**.

Why does Paul talk so much about love and unity in all his letters? This is why, Paul knows this basic principle. A groom cares about how you treat His bride, while he is gone. And you will be held accountable and you will have to give an answer, whether or not you took care of the bride; loved the bride; cherished the bride; honoured the bride or whether or not you bullied and mistreated the bride while He was gone.

The way you treat your brothers and sisters shows whether you take the doctrine of the Second Coming seriously.

Look at **1 Thessalonians 3:12 "We also pray that the Lord will greatly increase your love for each other and for everyone else, just as we love you"**. So, in that verse he says, **"God's going to give you the power to love"** and in **1 Thessalonians 4:9** he says, **"You don't need anyone to write to you about the way Christians should love each other. God has taught you to love each other"**.

So, in 1 Thessalonians 3, he says, “God’s got to give you the power”, but in 1 Thessalonians 4 he says, “you’ve got to want to”. That’s how it works. There’s a co-operation there. God can empower you to love the church, but you have to have the desire to want to love it more. That’s why if you think Jesus is coming back you need to get together a lot and tell each other.

Hebrews 10:25 “We should not stop gathering together with other believers, as some of you are doing. Instead, we must continue to encourage each other even more as we see the day of the Lord coming”. Every time you come to church you need to find someone who needs to be encouraged by the fact that Jesus is coming back.

When someone is ill; when someone is struggling; when someone is caught up on a sin: folks need to be encouraged and made aware that Jesus is coming back. When new Christians come into the body they need to know that when they hit a spiritual low, they need to hang on in there, because Jesus is coming back. That’s why we get together, so that we can encourage each other, to watch our wait.

We need to pray, ‘Lord, we’re ready when you are.’ And, Jesus is ready. Remember, Jesus is eager to come and bring His bride home. In New Testament times, when a bride and groom were betrothed, the groom went away to prepared the marital home. And while he was gone, the bride stayed with her friends.

She didn’t know how long the groom would be gone for, but she knew he was coming back, she just had to wait. But when he did come back, the minute he put one foot into town, the entire population would erupt with joy. They would all come out onto the street and cheer him on, shouting: ‘the bridegroom’s coming! The bridegroom’s coming!’ And it was an exciting time for both, because the bridegroom had come to take his bride home with him.

Jesus said before He died, ‘I go to prepare a place for you. But I will come back again to get you to be with me and we’ll be together forever.’ It should help us to live in the present, when we know what the future is.

If you ever get to Berlin, you will see a white line painted on the road, where the infamous wall used to stand. There’s a pole with a picture of a NATO soldier on one side and an East German soldier on the other, to remind people of the point where democracy ended and tyranny started, when you crossed into East Germany. When you see that pole and those two pictures; and you see a unified Berlin, it makes a difference how you view a conflict when you see how the end turned out.

That’s why we have to talk about the coming of Jesus because we to are in a conflict, which is tough and hard, but we can see the end. We know who wins. Keep your eyes on the end, because, ready or not, Jesus is coming back.