

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4

SERMON NOTES:

A. Introduction:

1. The series so far:
 - a. Chapter 1 – Paul urges the Thessalonians to continue on in faith, love, and hope.
 - b. Chapter 2 – Paul recalls memories of spending time with them and defends his authenticity.
 - c. Chapter 3 – Paul explains that his attempts to visit have been hindered by Satan but Timothy brings a good report.
 - d. Chapter 4 – Paul gets to the heart of why he's writing—to address some issues Timothy has told him about.
2. The tricky hitchhiker story:
 - a. Pastor Marty's brother picked up a hitchhiker on his way home to Vernon who said he was on his way to a job in Calgary. Brother invited him home for a meal, the night, & offered to buy his bus ticket to Calgary. Next morning h.h. & bro's car were gone.
 - b. The feeling of betrayal and being duped Marty's bro. felt may have been similar to what the Thessalonians felt after believing Paul's message that Christ was returning soon to take them out of persecution & then some started dying. What changed?
3. Thessalonian's issues:
 - a. We can only infer from the letter the exact issues Paul was dealing with because reading his letter is a bit like listening to half of a phone conversation.
 - b. What we read between the lines:
 - i. Timothy reported back that though most were strong in faith, others were reverting to old ways, becoming busybodies, nasty to each other, attacking each other.
 - ii. They were concerned about fellow believers dying. It wasn't supposed to be like this when compared to events described in Acts 1:6-11.
 - iii. They wondered: is Jesus not real? Is He not in heaven? Is He not coming back?

B. A Crisis of Faith:

1. What is it: **Pastor Marty:** *"Crisis of Faith" is a term commonly applied especially in Western culture, to periods of intense doubt and internal conflict about one's preconceived beliefs or life decisions."*
2. Some Bible characters who experienced a crisis of faith.
 - a. Job: a righteous man (Job 1:1-3) who lost everything.
 - b. David: a man after God's own heart who had to run from his own son Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18; Psalm 42:8; 22:1).
 - c. Elijah: a prophet who had to run for his life from Jezebel after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18).
 - d. Joseph: whose every right action led to a seemingly bad result (Genesis 37 and following): Telling his father about brothers' wrongdoing led to brothers' hate; sharing his prophetic dreams led to him being sold as a slave; fleeing Potiphar's wife's advances led to jail time; interpreting a dream in jail led to continuing jail time.

C. Paul's answer to a Crisis of Faith:

Paul realized that even though they had exhibited strong faith, they needed encouragement to keep them from going back to the way things were:

1. **Don't give in to culture** – 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. In Greek culture was common for men to have many dalliances: a wife, a cultured companion, prostitutes, servants. Paul urges them to remain sexually pure.
2. **Don't give in to the devil's schemes** – 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12. In contrast to the love, joy, and sense of community pictured earlier, Paul warned them not to give in to devil's schemes that erode relationships, become busybodies, get into other's issues, nit pick at each other.
3. **Don't lose hope** – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Identify with Jesus in His suffering, death & defeat of death (resurrection):
 - a. Jesus, our ultimate example was persecuted, humiliated. He did everything right (Luke 4:18), brought good news to the poor, set captives free, gave sight to the blind, was sinless.
 - b. Yet He was rejected, abandoned by God, forsaken & died in humiliation.
 - c. But He defeated death. **Pastor Marty:** *"Put your hope in Christ, in a risen Saviour. Our lives aren't only what we see around us. God's plans and purposes are bigger than what we see. They don't span only our lifetimes, but eternity."*
 - d. Pastor Marty ended by reading an excerpt from "A Crisis of Faith" – article here: <http://tinyurl.com/jg2vda2>

MINISTRY:

1. What is a crisis of faith? Job, Elijah, David, and Joseph all experienced crises of faith. What's your story of a crisis of faith? Have you come to the other side, or are you still in the middle of it? What do these Bible examples teach us about such crises?
2. Paul warned the Thessalonians about their tendency to default to the ways of their culture as they dealt with spiritual crises. What were some of those ways for them? What might a defaulting to cultural ways look like in our time?
3. What were some of the devil's schemes Paul told the Thessalonians to resist? What schemes have you observed at play in modern church life? What should we do when we become aware of or are tempted to become involved in these?
4. How was Jesus the ultimate hope for the Thessalonians? How is He that hope for us?

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, thank You for Your plans for our lives, which we see only partially. When we don't understand what's happening, help us to resist the temptation to go back to human ways of coping and get taken in by the devil's schemes. Help us, rather, to keep our eyes fixed on You and our hope for this life and the next anchored in Your victory over suffering and death in the resurrection. Amen.