

1 Thessalonians

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, August 11, 2024
PASSAGES	Luke 8; Matthew 7; Acts 17; 1 Thessalonians 1–5
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:25:20 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The church at Thessalonica was good soil — and not because trouble passed it by. Trouble found it immediately and never really left. What made it good soil was what it did with the word of God once the trouble arrived: it received the word and held on. A problem-free life is not the sign of spiritual health. Holding fast is.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ In the parable of the soils, the good soil is not the ground nothing bad happened to. Every soil got seed, and in Matthew 7 both houses got the same storm. The difference was underneath, not overhead.
- ◆ “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” is not what Jesus taught. Hardship can weaken a person terribly. What decides the outcome is the response to the word of God.
- ◆ Pleasure chokes the word just as effectively as trouble does. It is no more spiritual to have pleasure and no problems than to have problems and no pleasure.
- ◆ Paul was smuggled out of Thessalonica within weeks of planting the church, possibly before a single elder was ordained. He had every reason to assume the plant was dead.
- ◆ Timothy came back with the opposite report, and Paul’s relief runs through the whole letter: “now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.”
- ◆ Paul describes the word as the active agent — at work in the believers. The Thessalonians’ part was to receive it as what it really is and cling to it.

- ◆ Wanting to please God is not how a person gets reconciled to God. It is a free-will offering made from a place of favor already secured — and Paul's first item under it is sexual purity.
- ◆ “Like a thief in the night” means surprise, full stop. Walking in the light does not let you calculate the date; it makes the date stop mattering.

► 1:25:20

Matt introduced the morning's text as “a tiny text, and I commend it to you.” If 1 Thessalonians is one of those letters you can never quite remember the content of, his hope was that by the end you would at least think: *yeah, it's that one.*

1. Four soils, one difference

► 1:25:48

He framed the whole letter with a parable. Seed falls on a path and is trampled and eaten, on rock where it withers for lack of moisture, among thorns that choke it, and on good soil where it yields a hundredfold ([Luke 8:5–8](#)). Jesus supplies the key himself: the seed is the word of God, the devil takes it from the path, the rocky ground believes for a while and falls away in testing, and the thorns are “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” ([Luke 8:11–15](#)).

“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

LUKE 8:15 ↗

► 1:27:53

Which is where Matt pressed. You might assume the good soil is the soil nothing bad ever happened to. That reading is not fair to the text. The good soil is the soil that held fast — not the soil that had smooth sailing. He put the same observation next to the two builders: the house on the rock and the house on the sand both take the rain, the floods and the wind ([Matthew 7:24–27](#)). Neither one is spared the storm. And do we really imagine that only some people get tempted by the pleasures of life? “I think I made my point,” he said, and moved on.

2. A church planted and abandoned in a hurry

► 1:29:54

For context he went to Acts. Paul reasoned with them from the scriptures for three Sabbath days, “explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (Acts 17:2–3). Some were persuaded. Then a mob formed, dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, and shouted that “these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” — the charge being subversion of the empire, since these people serve another king (Acts 17:5–7).

The brothers sent Paul and Silas away that night. Picture it, Matt said: a brand-new church plant, possibly without a single ordained elder yet, severed from its founders overnight under hostile conditions. Paul then worries and prays at a distance, and eventually sends Timothy to find out whether anything is left.

3. Timothy’s report

► 1:31:39

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction... And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”

1 THESSALONIANS 1:4–6 ↗

Matt was careful with that line. The joy of the Holy Spirit is not joy *because of* the affliction — we do not spiritualize problems. It describes how they received the word in spite of it.

Paul keeps circling the same relief. “Our coming to you was not in vain,” he insists, though he clearly feared it might have been; and he reminds them that the boldness to preach came “in the midst of much conflict,” not from flattery or greed or a hunger for glory (1 Thessalonians 2:1–5). He was “like a father with his children,” charging them to walk in a manner worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12) — and there, Matt noted, is the taste of why enduring is possible at all. A foretaste of the coming kingdom puts present troubles in a category that does not compare.

4. The word that is at work in you

► 1:34:30

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13 /

Paul is using “word of God” here for the message of Jesus — his person and his work — and he describes it as though it has a life of its own. If the word is the active agent, what exactly did the Thessalonians contribute? They received it and held on to it. They are not thriving because life got easy. They are thriving because of how they took the gospel and clung to it.

The affection in the letter is unguarded: torn away from them “for a short time, in person not in heart,” Paul asks what his hope and joy and crown of boasting will be at the coming of Jesus, and answers, *you* (1 Thessalonians 2:17–20). He sends Timothy so that no one would be “moved by these afflictions,” adding the striking aside that “we are destined for this” (1 Thessalonians 3:2–3). When the report finally comes back, the release is audible: “now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 3:6–8). Matt read it as a coach’s line — *attaboy. This is health.*

5. Trouble does not make you strong, and neither does ease

► 1:37:26

This was the sharpest turn of the message. From Jesus’ parables, Matt argued, it does not appear that problems make us stronger, whatever our culture says. Whatever doesn’t kill you might make you stronger — or it might weaken you badly, the way the thorns did. It depends entirely on the response.

And the inverse is equally false. Being problem-free is not proof that God’s favor rests on you. The sign of health is not the absence of trouble, and it is not the absence of pleasure either. It is whether you cling to the word of God with joy and hope and love, or walk away from it the moment something hard, or something pleasant, comes along.

6. Pleasing God — and why purity is first on the list

► 1:39:49

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more... For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-3 ↗

Preachers rightly say that the work of Christ satisfies God, Matt granted — but that is a statement about your salvation, and there is a separate category of life beyond the question of whether you are reconciled to God. In that category you can genuinely desire to please him, as a free-will offering, from a place of favor already secured rather than in an attempt to earn it.

▶ 1:42:08

He made three observations about what heads the list. Paul had only weeks with this church and still found time for solemn warnings on sexual purity, which tells you how large it loomed for him. He warns that the Lord avenges wrong done to a brother in this matter, and that disregarding it disregards God, “who gives his Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thessalonians 4:6-8) — because God’s desire is that his bride walk in health. And the church, Matt said, is often falsely accused of obsessing over sexual morality as though it were our peculiar fixation. It is in the scriptures a great deal. We are largely just reporting it.

7. Love one another, and the day that comes like a thief

▶ 1:43:21

On brotherly love Paul says they need no instruction, since they have been “taught by God” and are already doing it throughout Macedonia — so do it more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Survival in hostile conditions and love for one another turn out to be the same story.

▶ 1:44:18

Then the letter turns to the return of Jesus, and Matt took a swing at a familiar move: the modern preacher who reasons that whenever the Lord decides to come back he will let his prophets know — and it is always *this* prophet. Paul says the day of the Lord comes “like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). That image means surprise. If you knew when the thief was coming you would be waiting at the door.

“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:4-5 ↗

The contrast is not that righteous people can work out the timetable. It is that living in the light leaves you ready whenever it happens — sober, wearing “the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation,” destined not for wrath but for salvation through Jesus, “so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (1 Thessalonians 5:8–10). The closing run of commands belongs to the same posture: repay no one evil for evil, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies, test everything, hold fast what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:15–22).

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23–24 ↗

Matt lingered on the pronoun. The “it” points back to God himself: *he* will do the sanctifying, and he is faithful.

8. So how do you till the soil of your heart?

► 1:48:13

Paul could not make the Thessalonians hold fast. That part was theirs, and all he could do at a distance was pray and worry. The same is true of us, which raises the practical question. It is not done by avoiding trouble — “if you figure out how to avoid trouble, let me know.” It is not done by arranging a carefree life. It is done by treating the word of God as more important than the cares, the comforts and the recurring problems.

► 1:49:38

So Matt ended with a challenge rather than a summary: what can Hope Chapel as a congregation, and each person in it, do to obey the Lord regardless of circumstances — in a deliberate, premeditated way, whether the circumstance is trouble or pleasure or both at once. He tied it to listening, since we believe God speaks: ask him directly what area of your life needs to grow in obedience, and expect a specific answer. It may land on an open nerve. It may also be something you have wanted permission to do for years. Either way, troubles are coming and pleasures will tempt regardless, so we may as well lean on his strength — which in the long view is not constraint at all but more freedom, more glory, more health and liberty. He then stopped the service and gave the room silence to ask.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Luke 8:5–8](#)
- [Luke 8:11–15](#)
- [Luke 8:15](#)
- [Matthew 7:24–27](#)
- [Acts 17:2–3](#)
- [Acts 17:5–7](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 1:4–6](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 2:1–5](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 2:11–12](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 2:17–20](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 3:2–3](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 3:6–8](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 4:1–3](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 4:6–8](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 4:9–10](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 5:1–2](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 5:4–5](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 5:8–10](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 5:15–22](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 5:23–24](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Have you ever quietly read a hard season as evidence that God was displeased with you, or an easy one as evidence that he was pleased? Where did that assumption come from?
2. Matt said pleasure chokes the word as effectively as trouble does. Which of the two is currently doing more to crowd out the word in your life?
3. Paul left Thessalonica with the church barely started and could only pray from a distance. Who are you carrying that way right now, and what does that praying actually look like?
4. Paul lists sexual purity first among the ways to please God. Why do you think that lands so uncomfortably in our setting, and what would taking it seriously look like without shame running the conversation?
5. Matt asked everyone to ask God for one specific area to grow in obedience. What came to mind, and what is the first premeditated step you will take this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCKnWC9pS8&t=5120s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.