

The Majors vs. The Minors

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

Well, tonight we continue our survey of the Scriptures through our Bible reading plan and we find ourselves in 1 Thessalonians. Now just to kind of share with you kind of an overview before we begin, there are some of you here in person as well as those of you online who actually have a headstart tonight. Our men's Bible study the early part of this calendar year was actually a walk through what we know as the book of 1 Thessalonians, so some of tonight may sound very familiar to some of you because of that.

The second thing I want to address is that 1 Thessalonians has a unique place in your Bible because chronologically it is the very first letter that the Lord gives us through the Apostle Paul. This is it. Now the reason that that is strategic tonight is because we're going to address the totality of 1 Thessalonians, kind of one of those 30,000 foot views, and look at what's the very first thing that God gave us.

Now I understand all Scripture is inspired by God. I understand that, that Leviticus is just as inspired as the Gospel of John, but I do think it's important to go back and to look at how the early church was established, how it was being formed, how it was moving, how it was growing, how it was being challenged, and what did the Lord give us first. What were the first series of problems that we had? What were the first misunderstandings? What was emphasized? What was not mentioned? And so tonight, I want to address the minors versus the majors or "The Majors vs. The Minors." What are the things that were deemed most important and what were the things that were not? And so tonight, I want to begin not by being in the text but talking about what's not in 1 Thessalonians. There are three things that you and I spend a lot of time discussing and debating and kind of hammering out in our faith today that are not even mentioned. They're actually what I call the minors, the things that the early church completely understood, didn't have any trouble, they weren't being challenged by and it was not an issue.

The first one of those issues is the issue of baptism. Now you and I are in a Baptist church. We'll talk about that more in just a moment. Does it strike you odd that baptism as critical as it is, as discussed as it is, as debated as it is, how do we baptize, when do we baptize, where do we baptize, that it was never mentioned? In fact, if you do a survey of how the Lord communicated to the early church, sure you have the incident in Acts 8 where Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch, sure you have that account but as far as the

letters of the Apostle Paul, there's not a whole lot there. You know, every now and then he'll say, you know, "Why are you fussing about this? About who baptized you, whether it was Apollos or Paul or whoever?" But generally speaking in Romans 6, which is about toward the end of the Apostle Paul's ministry, that end of what we know as that early stage of the church, that's really the first mention that we have of what we know as baptism. It talks about being baptized under Christ, it doesn't mention the mode of water, it doesn't talk about the age of the person, the time. In other words, the early church had such a complete and proper understanding of baptism that they didn't need regular instruction. Now we'll talk about why we have to do so in just a moment.

The second thing is the issue of speaking in tongues. It's a little controversial nowadays, isn't it? But did you know that in the entirety of the Apostle Paul's letters to the early church, we have one chapter dedicated to the speaking and to the listening to the interpretation of tongues and it's written to the most carnal of all the churches. You would think that based on the discussions we have today that every book of the New Testament would talk about speaking in tongues but it's actually a very rare concept. And guess what? 1 Thessalonians never mentions it. You would think if speaking in tongues was so critical to the faith that the first message God gave us through the Apostle Paul, he would speak about it, right? It's never even mentioned.

And the third thing is the issue of obedience to what we know as the Old Testament law, and today there is a struggle with that and we'll discuss that more in just a moment. But really the only time that comes up in the letters of Paul is in the book of Galatians which we just got through reading in chapter 3 where it talks about that there are those who have crept in, they've added to the message, or remember he said if anybody, even an angel says this, let them be accursed. And there in chapter 3 it was said they're telling you you have to obey the law. If you're not circumcised, you can't be saved, period. And their idea of what we now know as purgatory. And one of the reasons that I'm an ardent supporter not only of the word Baptist but utilizing it in our name is because more people – listen to this – more people have been killed over the doctrine of baptism than any other doctrine. You say, "Well, why is that?" Because remember this thing called the Reformation? Remember Martin Luther, the famous, you know, 95 theses which mainly were about indulgences, paying for sins or forgiveness of sins in advance? When what we know as the Reformation began, people started doing something revolutionary, they started reading the Bible, and they started reading that for what they had been communicating with for a thousand years wasn't true. They discovered that what they had been told about sacramental theology wasn't in the Bible. They discovered that there's nothing about a baby being baptized in the Bible. There's nothing about the sacrament of this or the sacrament of that, and what they discovered is the same thing that Martin Luther discovered, it's by grace alone, through faith alone, through Christ alone, and what they discovered was that in Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch professed his faith in Christ and he was baptized and that's the model that we see all throughout the Scripture, someone comes to a cognitive understanding, "I have a sinful disposition. I can't save myself. Only Jesus can save me and now out of an act of obedience, not as a means of salvation, I need to be baptized." Now you may not think that's a big deal because to us that's first grade

theology, but did you know that in the 1600s in Europe it was punishable by death. The death penalty ensued because people were baptized as an adult.

You say, "Why would that happen?" Well, you need to understand during those days what we know as the religious system, the Roman Catholic Church in those days was married to the political system, and if you pulled out of the church, you were committing treason, you were a traitor to the country, and so by you being baptized as an adult, you then were guilty of treason and what we know as the death penalty, and for hundreds of years, untold numbers of people were actually killed because they were baptized as an adult. The reason that baptism today is such a big deal, how we baptize, when we baptize, who we baptize, is not because we got it wrong at the first, it's because we got it wrong in the middle and we began to teach wrong and believe wrong, and what we're having to do is over-correct the errors and the mistakes of our past. And one of the reasons, I understand that being a Baptist doesn't get you to heaven, but one of the reasons I'm proud to be one is because our forefathers spilled their blood so that the truth of God's word would go forth and that we would not succumb to man's traditions anymore and so that's why baptism has been such a big deal in recent centuries.

What about speaking in tongues? Why speaking in tongues such a big deal now? It really goes back about 120 years. That's all, about 120 years ago there was a revival movement that began over in Europe and it made its way to the United States. Many of you may have known or know of the United States revival, it's called the Azusa Street Revival, and there on the West coast and in Kansas and other places, there was a propensity for what you and I would call the speaking in tongues and it started for better or for worse, the modern Pentecostal movement, and over the last century, one of the doctrines that has been propagated, now this is particularly in the Western world but, trust me, it has seeped over into the Eastern world, is the idea that speaking in tongues is a confirmation or a verification of one's salvation.

Now some of you are looking at me odd this evening because you're going, "Where do they get that in the Bible?" I understand why you're looking at me the way that you are but, again, it follows the same mindset, not what the Scripture says but what man wants to propagate, what man wants to celebrate. And so today the question of speaking in tongues is a big deal not because it was in the early church, it's never even mentioned in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, but because of the last 100 years humanity has made it a big deal and we have to respond appropriately.

What about the living "by the law," this idea that if your hair, your clothes, your this, your that, are not exactly as it should be, don't mix your fibers, don't eat certain kinds of foods, only worship on certain days, whatever it may be, is actually a byproduct of about the last 100 years as well where in all denominations there has been a rise in what we call fundamentalism. Now fundamentalism is not a bad word. Fundamentalism is an attitude. It is an attitude that if you don't have it a certain way, in a certain manner, in a certain style, then there's no way that it can be authentic. Now one of the things I like to share with people all the time, I'm incredibly conservative, I'm just not angry about it, you know? And so that fundamentalist mentality, there's fundamentalist Baptists, there's

fundamentalist Church of Christ, there's fundamentalist Pentecostals, there's fundamentalist Methodists, there's fundamentalist everybody, but what they have done is so concentrated on either A, the way we dress, or what we sing, or what we don't sing, or when we meet, or how we meet, or what we do, and the order of this, the order of that, that it supersedes the Spirit of God in our lives. And again, 1 Thessalonians, there's no mention of it. I find that interesting. The early church didn't have buildings like we have today, they didn't have resources like we do today, they didn't have music like, they didn't have anything, they didn't have the internet like we do today, and yet they may have had less struggles among themselves than we have today.

So what are the majors? What is it in 1 Thessalonians? I mean, this is the very first thing that God gives the early church. Now let me put that in perspective here. What we know as the church of Jesus Christ fully manifested at Pentecost roughly give or take 30-35 AD, we're not going to talk about all the dates tonight, what we know as 1 Thessalonians comes to us about, oh, give or take 25 years later. So for 25 years everything's going well, there are some things that need to be course corrected, there are some things that need to be emphasized, they just don't have anything to do with baptism, tongues or the following of the law.

So what are the major points? And what we're going to do tonight is just kind of skip over the book of 1 Thessalonians and look what are the things that are really important when it comes to our faith. Now it should not surprise you at all that the first thing that is of critical notion is what we know as salvation. If it weren't for salvation, there would be no faith. I want to call your attention to chapter 1, verses 9 and 10. It says,

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;
10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Now that's a good summary of what it means to understand the doctrine of salvation. Notice there at the end, Jesus Christ who raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15 says if Jesus Christ did not raise from the dead, our faith is in vain. But three things I want you to notice about this. The first one is this: they turned to God from their idols. Salvation is not simply a mental assertion of the facts. In fact, in the book of James it says the devils believe. They understand that Jesus Christ lived, that he died and he rose from the grave, but when you turn to God from your idols. Now I know what some of you are thinking, "I never had idols in my house. I didn't burn incense to my ancestors. I didn't do any of that." Let me just identify biblically what an idol is: an idol is anything that gets in the way of you and God. Anything. And no matter what that is, sometimes it's a struggle, sometimes it's an addiction, sometimes it's a temptation, whatever it may be, according to what we just read, you turned to God from that idol. You recognized your sinful condition and you also believed that Jesus Christ is the only solution therein. The doctrine and the message of salvation is so simple that most adults just simply miss it. So what does he say? Salvation. Now is there anything mentioned there about being in

church membership? Anything about baptism? Anything about tongues? No. No. No. You turn from your idols to the living God.

Notice the second thing at the end of verse 9, and you serve the living and the true God. Now I don't want to ever get caught into what we call fruit inspection, in other words, looking at somebody's life and saying, "Well, I don't know if they're really saved or not. I don't see a whole lot there." But it says there that they serve the living and true God, in other words, one of the natural, or shall I say supernatural, byproducts of being saved is that you care about the things of God. You just care about the things of God. Now there are seasons where we care more than others and one of my favorite illustrations is we talk about bearing fruit, is that if you go plant a fruit tree right now, you do understand that fruit tree won't bear fruit for several years, right? It's got to grow and it's got to be nourished, and even when it's full grown there are seasons of great harvest and seasons of, "Ew, that wasn't so good." And so there are seasons of life just like the book of Ecclesiastes 3 teaches us, but I think it's important is that we turn from idols to the living God, we have a desire or there's something, the Holy Spirit's inclination within us to serve the living and true God.

And then verse 10, to wait for his Son. In other words, and this is going to come to the final point tonight when we talk about the Second Coming, you do realize that as a believer in Jesus Christ your job is not to try to identify the antichrist. That's not your job. Your job is not to try to date the return. What does it say? Just simply wait. Now when you think about times that you had to wait, it's never enjoyable, is it? Whether we're waiting for a car to get fixed, waiting for a table to be available, waiting for a letter to come in the mail, whatever it may be, but when you wait for his Son, I want you to hear me clearly, that means you know by waiting that means there's nothing you can do to expedite the process? How many times, and I don't know if you've experienced this but you've had to wait on something where either A, yourself, or somebody encourages you, "See what you can do to speed this up"? You know that when you try to speed it up, what happens right? It just goes slower typically, and so I think it's interesting that even here in the first chapter to the first Christians of the early church, basically it says there's nothing you can do to speed this process up. You just simply wait.

So kind of the first major is the doctrine of salvation. We turn to God from our idols, we serve him and we wait for Jesus to come back. That's pretty simple, is it not? The second concept as we roll into chapter 2 is this, the second major, and we addressed this a little bit with the first one, is now that we're saved, we've been called to serve. We've been called to live for him. We've been called to live a life distinctly for him. I want to call your attention to verses 10 through 12 of chapter 2. It says,

10 Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: 11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, 12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and unto his glory.

Now in just a moment we're going to talk about the whole holy, justly and unblameable when we talk about sanctification, but let's talk about how do we serve. Notice it says here there's really three things that we do: we are to exhort, we're to comfort, and we're to charge, in other words, as we serve the Lord, we are to bring others alongside of us. Now what we know as biblical Christianity is not a Lone Ranger faith. It is not one where we're to isolate ourselves, separate ourselves from everybody else so that we don't interact with anybody. In fact, much the opposite. If we're called to exhort, then you've got to have somebody to exhort. If you are called to comfort, you've got to have somebody to comfort. If you are called to charge, then you've got to have somebody to charge. And what you and I are called to do, to serve, is to interact with one another and simply put that means we're to encourage each other and to hold each other accountable.

Now this is where I'll take a little bit of a rabbit trail. This is why church is so important. Church is so important because it's encouraging to one another. It's a way that we hold each other accountable. In other words, when we encourage one another, I don't know about you and maybe I'm the only one in the room, but when we gather, whenever we gather, however we gather, I find it encouraging to know I'm not the only one who's crazy. I'm not the only one who thinks this way. I'm not the only one who believes this. You know, that's what got Elijah in trouble, right? Remember Elijah? He defeated the Baal worshipers, this is in 1 Kings 17, he defeats all 450 of them, fire comes down from heaven and life is good. He's on his way back and what has happened? He gets depressed. "Oh, woe is me! There's nobody else." Remember what the Lord told him? "There are 7,000 others who have not bent the knee."

And that's why when we gather together whether it's an informal format or whether it's a formal, it's important for us because it encourages us but it also holds us accountable, and this is where not only being in "what we know as church" but having a relationship with someone who's an accountability partner, or maybe a small group, or a Bible study, whatever it may be, because you know at the end of the day you have to look them in the eye and there are things in your life you may be struggling with they'll hold you accountable with, or maybe things you said you would do, they would hold you accountable. This is why many of y'all have gone through the Bible study what we know as Master Life. It was so impactful in my life at an early age because the person who facilitated Master Life in my life was about 6'3" 300 pounds, and I don't know about you but you don't want to walk in and say, "I'm sorry. I didn't memorize the verse. I'm sorry." It was just not a pleasant experience. Now intimidation was not the means that was utilized but I knew no matter what his size was physically, I didn't want to look him in the eyes and say, "Sorry, I didn't do it. I didn't do the assignment." You see, that's why accountability is so important.

Now I want you to notice the way it's illustrated, as a father. Now that's interesting because many of you may be familiar with this, but years ago James Dobson, Focus on the Family, provided a special ministry to prisons in their vicinity there where their headquarters are. They offered men on Mother's Day there that were incarcerated three Mother's Day cards that they could send to their moms. I mean, thousands of cards went out. They offered the same on Father's Day. Not one card was sent. I know there are

those of you who have a law enforcement background and incarceration background, and you know that there is an absence of fatherhood when it comes to those who find themselves in those positions. And I think sometimes even in our culture today, we struggle with what we call the fatherhood of God when we haven't had a good example in our own lives.

But you take what we know as a biblical example, what does a father do? A father should encourage via firmness, and what I mean by that is, you know, there is a certain charging, there's a certain exhortation, there's a certain aspect where there is an expectation. We joke around but at least in the home that I grew up, my mom used to say, "You know, if you don't get this fixed, wait until your dad gets home." Now that scared me straight in my house because I knew he loved me but I also knew there was going to be some firmness that came along with it. And so the illustration here, as a father exhorts, as a father encourages. I know at least in my own home, it didn't require a whole lot of words. They were usually very strategic, if you know what I mean.

But if you back it up a couple of verses back in verse 7, it says,

7 ... we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

You know, that may be a better example in our culture today because there is such a vacuum of biblical fatherhood in our culture, but there's not a vacuum of nurses particularly as we walk through this global pandemic, and one of the things that you discover if you're ever in a medical environment or if you have somebody that's dear to you in the nursing background, when a nurse operates in their field, your health and your well-being is more important than the risk that they take when they enter the room. In other words, you're more valuable than they are and so when we exhort, when we encourage, as we admonish one another, we should be more interested in others growing than ourselves.

Now let me wrap all that up when we talk about serving. This is where we get real practical here. This is the early church. This is the majors of our life. Do you know that going to Bible study, going to church, going to Sunday school, whatever small group you're in, your attitude shouldn't be what you can get from it but what you can give to it. What can I give to those that are there? How can I encourage those that are there? How can I help those that are there? And one of the problems that we have at least in contemporary Christianity is it's all about what did I get or not get, it didn't meet my whatever it may be. You do realize that whatever standard you put, it will rarely meet your expectations but when you go to give and when you go to serve and when you go to encourage, when you go to be there for others, it's amazing that your sacrifice as a nurse does, you actually get more out of it than if they did the same for you. I know you know the old adage, you actually receive more by giving than you do by receiving.

And so one of the major points here in Thessalonians, at least the first communication to the early church is not only what salvation really looks like but what does it mean to serve, what does it mean to encourage one another, what does it mean to hold each other

accountable. The third thing and this is the end of chapter 2 into chapter 5, is the reality of spiritual warfare. Phew. Now this may take a while here but at the end of chapter 2 in verse 18, I want you to hear what the Apostle Paul says. He says,

18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20 For ye are our glory and joy.

Fast forward down to verse 3 of chapter 3.

3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

And so when we talk about spiritual warfare, notice what the Apostle Paul says: he had a desire to do something but Satan hindered him. Now let's talk about a little balance here. I think one of the problems that we have even in our body of believers, and I mean that generally not just specifically here, is that we typically have two camps that people fall into. There is one camp that there is a demon under every doorknob. Everything that goes wrong, I mean everything. I'll never forget Tracy and I were a part of a church. This is years, this is in the BC era, before children, and we had gone to Wednesday night prayer meeting and they split us up into groups and that was fine. First time we'd ever been in the church. First time that we'd ever met anybody. I mean, we didn't know, I mean, it was first time guests. They pair us with this sweet couple and we get together to pray and the very first thing this woman prays is against the demon of cancer, and don't get me wrong, there may be one but at the same time, sometimes you're just sick. You know, you could say, "We've got the demon of this and the demon of that," and there are some people that there is a demon under every doorknob and there are some of those but my bigger concern isn't those folks, my bigger concern are the ones who don't think the devil does anything, that somehow there's an absence of him, there's a voidness of him, that he's so far off that he doesn't impact.

What does Paul say? "Satan hindered us." Every single passage in the New Testament about spiritual warfare is addressed to Christians. That's why Ephesians 6 talks about we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the wiles of the devil, principalities, powers, rulers of darkness. The very first communication the Lord gives us, he says, "Satan hindered us."

How does he do it? Notice what it says in chapter 3, by afflictions and by hindrances and tribulation. In other words, the devil knows that most of us aren't nearly as strong as we think we are. Now there's an old adage, I'm sure you've heard it before that a Christian is a lot like a teabag, you don't know how strong you are until you get in the hot water. And I don't know about you, but sometimes when that hot water comes, it shows we're not as strong as we hoped we were, correct?

What does it says here? It says you suffered afflictions. You know, we talk about the afflictions of life, there's really two approaches we can take: it's either an obstacle to trip us up or it's an opportunity to grow stronger. And I'm going to be honest, I don't like afflictions. I like a nice easy path. I like to just tiptoe through the tulips, but usually I'm dodging things, usually I'm having to jump over chasms, I'm having to duck under things. Typically life doesn't go the way that I had hoped and/or planned and that's usually the path the Lord uses so that we'll grow, these afflictions, and notice what it says in verse 4, tribulation. Now we're going to talk about the Second Coming in just a moment. Don't think Great Tribulation, don't think Second Coming, don't think end times, just the fact that life rarely goes the way we hoped it would go. And some of us, you know, or I guess most of us probably, when you've gone on the other side of whatever the affliction or the tribulation is, don't you often look back and you can rejoice in what you had to walk through because it helped you to trust more, it helped you to grow more, it helped you to believe more? You know, most people who are "weak" in their faith rarely had to walk through difficult times.

Now when I was a child growing up in my home, there were times that I would play typically it was sport's related, where I was on a team or I was experiencing something that wasn't going the way I had hoped, and my parents had a very nice way of exhorting me. They would say, "Well, you're just building character." Do you know what I used to say? "I've got enough of that. I'm tired of it. I'm tired of building character. Enough!" But when we think about it, it is the afflictions of life, it's the tribulation of life.

So let me ask you a little litmus question here: when do you pray more, when things are good or when they're tough? When do you give more, when things are good or when things are tough? In other words, I think we all recognize we hit our knees more when life's not going the way we hope to than when it is, because typically when it's going the way we hope, we put it on cruise control and say, "Thanks, God, got it." But when things are tough, what do you do? You hit your knees.

And so I find that interesting here when it talks about spiritual warfare in chapters 2 and 3 that the afflictions and the tribulations that the enemy brings, it's just like Genesis 50. Remember what Joseph said to his brothers? "What you meant for evil God meant for good." And so in other words, the Lord can take those afflictions, he can take those tribulations, and he can turn them to make us according to 1 Peter, more like him. And so spiritual warfare, the reality is that there is a battle that is raging that may not be able to be seen with our eyes or even felt with our hands, the Lord addressed it in what we know as the very first communication.

Now the fourth thing, this is at the end of chapter 3 and all the way through about halfway of chapter 4, is what we call sanctification. I know that's one of those big Bible words but it basically means a separated life, a distinct life. Now I want to be very clear, the Lord, and I know you know this, the Lord did not save us so that we would look the same as before we were saved. The Lord saved us to be distinct and to be different and to be separate.

Now at the end of chapter 3, beginning in verse 11 it says,

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. 12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: 13 To the end he may stablish your hearts [listen to this] unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: 4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and in honour;

So when we talk about sanctification, one of the first things that we're to major on as a believer is that our life ought to be different. We ought to give ourselves a daily litmus test. If we look like the world, we sound like the world, and we think like the world, we're headed the wrong direction.

What does it say in verse 13 of chapter 3? Unblameable. Now I like that word. You say, "Why do you like that word?" Because what it essentially means is that people don't like what you're doing but they've got nothing against you. In other words, they're saying, "I don't like their position, I don't like their stance, I don't like their belief, I don't like their perspective, I don't like their conviction, but their life so matches it I've got nothing on them." That's what it means to be unblameable and one of the problems that we have, at least in contemporary Christianity, is we've got a lot of people who are shouting about issues whose lives are just as dirty as those that they're shouting against. In fact, it has been said that what a person, and when I say a person don't think necessarily a pastor, what a person preaches about the most is what they oftentimes struggle with the most.

Unblameable. Holy. You know, today we live in a society where we talk a lot about happiness but not a whole lot about holiness. Holiness is a distinction, a difference, that there is a clear difference between what you do, what you say, how you act, what you think than the world at large. I cannot tell you, I have lost count how many times I've had this rhetorical conversation with my children. We'll be sitting around the house, it may be a Friday evening that's not during football season, maybe a Saturday that's not during football season, it may be at some point where we're not playing ball, and I'll just look at them and I'll say, "Are you guys bored?" They'll say, "Dad, I'm bored." I say, "Good." And they say, "What do you mean? Why is that good that we're bored?" I say, "Because there's a lot of people who aren't bored right now that are gonna have some consequences to what they're doing." In other words, holy living means sometimes that we just sit and

hear the things and the voice of God. Some things or sometimes, we're not always out carousing and doing and whatever it may be.

Holiness means we don't do, we don't say, we don't think, we're not a part of those things and we've got a culture today and I'm an A+ personality, don't get me wrong, that says, "If you're not going at 110%, then you must not be doing it right." There are times where, you know, there's nothing available [unintelligible]. I'll be honest, we have a lot of bored moments in our house. There's a lot of movies we don't watch, shows we don't watch, music we don't listen to, and things we don't go to, and a lot of times that means there's no other options, we sit around and look at each other, but at least it's not unholy. You see, that's one of the struggles that we have and you move on in chapter 4 and it uses this word "sanctification." It just means the process by which we're more sincere about our holiness today than we were yesterday.

But I love in verse 1 where it talks about to walk, that we walk in our faith. Now I understand the Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy at the end that he finished his race, he finished his course, but you know, I think one of the misnomers there is it doesn't say that he ran it, he walked it. You say, "Well, why is that important?" Well, I know it's a nonbiblical story but you do know that the tortoise wins the race everyday, right? Every time you read the book, the tortoise wins the race. When you walk, you simply just put one foot in front of the other, and I think one of the great challenges of Christianity is we think that we've got to do the long jump every day, we've just got to have to jump all these incredible leaps, incredible leaps. One of the things I've learned about walking is if you'll just keep taking steps, you'll eventually get to where you're headed. It says just to walk and that's a day by day, hour by hour, week by week, month by month, and you look back and realize that because of an absence of worldliness, because of an absence of experiences that the world champions, you'll end up being somewhere with God you never dreamed you would be just because you simply walked.

Last but not least, the Second Coming. Now this is where it gets fun for me. When we talk about what are the majors of our faith, what are the things that the Lord communicated first to the early believers, what salvation was, what it meant to serve, what it meant to experience spiritual warfare, the afflictions of life, what does sanctification look like, what does holiness look like, but last but not least what we know as the Second Coming and let me tell you why this is important. If you were to take all of the verses of what we know in 1 Thessalonians, I mean this is the first thing the Lord gave the church through the Apostle Paul, at least 25% of it is about the Second Coming. There's not just a little verse here or a little verse there, there is a whole lot of verses and beginning in verse 13 of chapter 4, there is this incredible discourse on what you and I would call Second Coming activities.

Notice how it starts in verse 13. I love that word, "But." In other words, this is what it means to be saved, this is what it means to serve, this is what it means to go through afflictions and tribulations and how that impacts your life, this is what it means to be holy and set aside and to be sanctified, and then we get to verse 13, "But,

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore [listen to verse 18] comfort one another with these words.

You see, one of the struggles that the early church was experiencing is the same struggle that you and I have today, our loved ones perish, our loved ones die, our loved ones come to the end of their struggle with disease and whatever it may be, and they were actually burying those that believed in Jesus. You say, "Well, why was that a struggle?" It really goes back to John 11. John 11 is when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. There's this famous conversation with Mary and Martha, the sisters, and he asked them, "Do you believe your brother will live again?" And she says, "Well, of course, I believe at the last day." And Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life." Here's what he says, "though a man die, yet he shall live and if man lives, he shall never die." Now one of the struggles that the early believers were having is they thought, "Well, if that's the case, then either A., Jesus is going to come back really quick, or B., we're just going to keep on living until he gets here." But what did they experience? The same thing we experience. In fact, I would say that at a graveside service not just for those that I have no relationship with but for those who I have the greatest of relationships with, this is a passage that I read every single time. Why? Because this is our comfort according to verse 18, that those who are dead in Christ and those who are alive in Christ will one day meet the Lord in the air.

Now notice that phrase in verse 17, we shall be caught up with him. That's where we get this concept some of you I'm sure are familiar with the idea of a rapture. That term, by the way, people say, "Well, that word 'rapture' is not even in the Bible." You're absolutely right, it's not as far as the English word is concerned, but to be caught up is where we get that word. And the best picture that we have for it is actually back in Acts 8 when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, after he baptized him it says he was caught up and he was taken from location A to location B supernaturally, instantaneously.

So what does that mean? That means one day the graves are going to open up and one day those of us who are still alive will be transformed and there's going to be a great family reunion in the air. Now there's a lot of people who like to get in a lot of discussion about things that have to happen and timeframes and this and that and all these end time things. Let me ask you an honest question: did we read anything here that talked about the antichrist? No. Did we read anything about the Great Tribulation? No. Did we read anything about the one world government? No. Did we read anything about the seals

being broken? No. In fact, there's no what we call Second Coming context at all, it's just we're just walking in faith and all of a sudden, according to 1 Thessalonians 4, that the Lord will shout and those who are dead in Christ, those who are alive in Christ will meet him together in the air.

This is where our comfort comes from and that's actually kind of the first half of the Second Coming because then you get to chapter 5, notice the first word, "But." In other words, "Okay, now that you understand that there's a day coming where those who are dead in Christ and alive in Christ will meet together in the air with the Lord,

1 But of the times and the seasons [ah, that's when we get into the Great Tribulation, that's when we get to the antichrist, all that stuff], brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord [that's that final consummation] that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. 11 Wherefore [guess what?] comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

What does that mean? You don't have to go stock up on dry canned foods, that's what that means. You don't have to worry about piling up the ammunition for the battle of Armageddon. You don't have to worry about all that mess that we read about at the end. And by the way, I think we should be understanding of it because I think when we grasp the whole Second Coming aspect, it makes us more desirous to live the faith today in the present. But what that is saying is, "Guys, you don't have to worry about that mess. You don't have to worry about who is the antichrist, who isn't the antichrist. You don't have to worry was that the first seal? Was that the second seal?" We don't have to struggle with that and yet that's what I'm seeing today. I'm seeing this just incredible verbiage where people are questioning, "Is this person? Is that idea? Is this treaty that has been signed?" Do you know how many peace treaties the Middle East has signed over the last 30 years? But every time they sign one, "Oh, is this the covenant in the book of Daniel?" Everybody gets interested in those things, right? "Is this person?" You do understand that people thought in the '80s that Gorbachev was the antichrist because he had a red mark on his head. I mean, we go through this all the time.

What does he say? "But of the times and seasons I have no need to write unto you. You know perfectly the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night and you are children of the day." Now I know I have a propensity for studying the book of Revelation and end times events and I'm not studying them so I'll navigate them, do you know why I study them? To warn others to get saved. It's the same reason I buy life insurance. You know when you buy life insurance it's not to be used on yourself, right? In other words, you buy it in the event thereof but have you ever noticed that buying life insurance can prevent your death? I don't know how that works but it does. The reason I study the book of Revelation and those events is not because I think I'm going to have to go through it but I want to warn others that they don't have to, that they can be a part of that end of chapter 4, that they can be caught up together with the Lord.

You know, it's interesting there's a lot of teaching on the Second Coming, there's a lot of books on the Second Coming, there are seminars on the Second Coming, and Lord knows there's a ton of YouTube videos that are out there, but if you just read what we did, it makes it pretty simple, doesn't it? It says there's coming a day as we're walking in faith the Lord is going to shout, those who have died in Christ, those who are alive in Christ are going to meet him together in the air, and then it's all going to break loose. But you don't have to worry about it because you're children of the day, not children of the night. Don't worry about who the antichrist may or may not be. Don't worry about if this is that seal or that seal because that's not for you. You're a child of the day. If we spent as much time trying to live holy lives as we did trying to figure out who the antichrist was, we might make a difference in this old world but we're obsessed with that stuff but according to what we just read, it's not one of the majors.

Now what does all this mean? What this means is you and I have a propensity to get caught up majoring on the minors and minoring on the majors, do we not? We tend to advocate for the truth, and don't get me wrong, it's truth of baptism and tongues and the law and where they, and a lot of that is just because we're having to battle against erroneous teachings, but what are the majors? You're saved through Christ alone and you should bear fruit and serve him. There's a warfare you're going to have to battle that'll make you stronger. You're to live a holy life. And there's a day coming when the Lord is going to descend and he's going to shout and those who are dead in Christ, those alive in Christ, are going to meet together in the air. Then all that mess happens but we don't have to worry about it.

You know why I find such great comfort in 1 Thessalonians? Because most of the stuff that you and I struggle with and battle with every day wasn't what they were battling, most of what we struggle with are means of our own devices. We've branched out, we've started thinking too much, we've over-thought, we've over-calculated, we've fallen into the traditions of mankind. So let me challenge you tonight particularly 1 Thessalonians, it's a part of our Bible reading plan, it's one of the books of the Bible that you can read in one sitting if you want to. I know we break it out into certain sections for the plan, it won't take you that long. If you read it in its entirety, I want you to think about how its contents either verify or challenge the main "message" that we hear today about our faith, the books that are sold, the seminars that are taught, the whatever it may be. You see, one

of the sad aspects is really the faith was designed to be pretty simple and we've made it incredibly complicated.

I'll close tonight. I was in a conversation yesterday with an individual in the midst of my many football games. This individual was saying, "You know, you've been at football all day long, are you ready for tomorrow?" I said, "Well, of course I am." They said, "Well, don't you have all this kind of studying to do?" I said, "Well, I study all week long, all the time. That's not the issue." And they said, "Well, aren't you nervous?" And I said, "Friend, it's a simple message." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "The message is pretty simple." I said, "Now we need to be creative how we present it and we need to walk through the Scriptures but it's not that complicated." And he kind of looked at me strange and I said, "Friend, you do understand we're sinners, Jesus saves, live for him. That's it." He said, "I never thought about it that simple." I said, "It's that simple." He said, "Then why do we keep having to do Bible studies?" I said, "Because we try to make it complex." And I said, "When we gather every time we meet, it reminds us to not get caught up in the weeds, to keep the faith simple." So let me challenge you from 1 Thessalonians to keep it simple.

Tonight as we often do on Sunday evenings, let me remind you that we don't have a musical step-out, come down invitation but we do have phone numbers that are available. I'm a big fan of text messaging or maybe you're that person whether online or in person who says, "You know, I really need to talk something out with somebody. I need to pray with somebody." The easiest number to reach us is 334-231-2313. If you'll text that number and just say, "Hey, I need to talk to somebody. I need to pray with somebody." We'll be glad to respond back. There's also if you're one of those who says, "I just like to hear a person's voice." 334-364-2761. And I can promise you that I know the individuals who are on the other side of those lines and they're available right now, so if you'll send a message or if you'll make a phone call saying, "Hey, I need to talk with somebody," we would love the privilege and y'all might be surprised as we walk through this pandemic how many people are using those numbers, how many people are just reaching out because one of the things that we struggle with is, "Well, when I was at church, I should have." Well, sometimes the Holy Spirit gets us while we're at work, sometimes the Holy Spirit gets us in the middle of the night, sometimes the Holy Spirit gets us early in the morning, and so if you'll just reach out, for those of you online if you'll just utilize the stream at the bottom of social media whatever you're using, we would love the privilege of having that conversation with you. But as we close our study tonight, can we challenge each other, hold each other accountable just to keep it simple.