



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Thessalonians 1

1986: Aspiration and Hope

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning for our Scripture reading to the first chapter of Paul's first Epistle to the Thessalonians. This is not the beginning of an exposition of this book but rather a message complete in itself I hope in which we take a look at nineteen eighty-six and our lives. The epistle that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians is thought by many to be his earliest epistle. It's my opinion that Galatians really has that honor, but it does represent the apostle's thinking during the earlier of the epistolary literature that he has given to us and it's particularly interesting because of the fact that it was written to a church largely Gentile in nature who had just within the past six weeks been introduced to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through Paul's teaching and so it represents something that he would have written to new believers relatively speaking. It tells us a great deal about the things the apostle felt it proper to speak about in his ministry. He talked to them about things like divine election, talked to them about the anti-Christ, the man of sin and eternal judgment. He talked to them about the person of Christ. He spoke to them about holiness and the Christian life. He spoke particularly about eschatological hopes, the second coming of Christ. So one gains the impression that when the apostle introduced Biblical teaching to a group of individuals, he didn't hesitate to speak about some of the things that some of us in nineteen eighty-five might call rather

heavy. But then Paul was not popular in his day, I don't think he would be very popular in our day as well.

Let's listen to what he has to say to this early church,

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, of God your election (I've made a slight change in the text that I'm reading because the expression of God probably goes with beloved) beloved of God, your election. (And I was not planning on saying anything about that particular fact, but it's evident that the apostle traces divine election to the sovereign eternal love of God, distinguishing in the very fact that it is election, but it comes from the love of God.) For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. (It's interesting that in the Bible, we do have some instances of hyperbole in which a legitimate literary figure, the apostle does not intend for us to think that literally but to understand it as a general spread of the word of God over the known world. And continuing in the 9th verse) 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; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and we bow now for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent introduction to the epistolary literature that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Church. What privilege Lord, we have to read the letters that the apostles wrote to living vital groups of believers such as exist here in this auditorium today. We pray Lord that we may be responsive to Thy word in a way that will honor Thy name. We give the thanks for the day in which we live and for the privilege that we have to give representation for the triune God for our generation. Lord, enable us to be fruitful in the age in which Thou hast placed us.

We thank Thee for the past year and Thy blessing upon us, the sovereign providence that has guided our steps and protected and kept us. We thank Thee for the grace with which Thou has enabled us to pass through critical experiences. We acknowledge that we are indeed blessed to have the Master of the Universe interested in us. We give Thee thanks for the gospel of the Lord Jesus which has come to us and which by the Holy Spirit is brought home to us in a personal way so that we are assured of the forgiveness of sins through the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross. And oh Father, if there are some in this audience who have not yet responded to the gospel of Christ may this be the day that they do.

We pray for our country, we pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ, we especially remember Believers Chapel its elders and deacons and members and friends and the visitors who are here today. Oh God minister to each of these groups and give of Thy riches and grace and love and mercy that we might know Thee better in the days that are ahead.

We pray for those who are sick and who are in difficult times in the trials of life that are very difficult to bear, we pray for them. Encourage them; give healing Lord if it should please Thee, in accordance with Thy will. And may the result of our experiences be that we are enabled to offer to Thee gratitude and thanksgiving that will glorify Thy name. We pray Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we listen to the Scriptures. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] One of the nice things about the exhortation to praise is the fact that praise is an evidence of spiritual health. One can think of simple illustrations of everyday life that reveal that. For example, for you lovers of football, who know some of the fine points of the game and when you see an unusual play, the response that you make to it generally is praise. If for example, you saw Stanley Morgan catch a touchdown pass yesterday afternoon from the quarterback Tony Eason of the New England Patriots, and you saw him break into the clear, the ball fall perfectly into his hands, he juggled it for a few moments went on for a touchdown. If you had been there with football players, you would have turned and given praise. Well that's a sign you understand something about a beautiful play in football, it's a sign of football health that you praise. There are lots of people who could look at something like that and see nothing. And so you say, they don't understand football, or they don't have an appreciation for it. So when we praise the triune God, and when we call upon others to praise him we are in effect, trying to indicate that the proper spiritual health of a Christian results in praise of the triune God. So it's great to praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Holy Spirit, that's spiritual health. To do that in reality, of course to do it in unreality, well that's another matter.

The subject for this morning is, “Nineteen Eighty-six: Aspiration and Hope.”
Nineteen eighty-six, I never knew that I would make it. Maybe I won't yet, but I'm almost there. What does it hold for us? Or better, what should it hold for us? Perhaps it would

be good to take a brief look at nineteen eighty-five in order to get something of a perspective that will lead us as we think of the future.

When we think of nineteen eighty-five and the world, there are lots of things that come to our minds. Among the military conflicts, USA and Russia constantly looking at one another suspiciously, there is Iran and Iraq still at war now after a number of years, troubles in South Africa, troubles in Nicaragua to the south of our border, trouble stirring in the Philippines, and then the constant struggle between Israel and almost all of the nations of the Near East. Among the ethical struggles of our day, abortion, homosexuality and AIDS, drugs, alcoholism, capital punishment, poverty, pre-marital sex, we could go on and on. Some of the great philosophical concerns are interpretation of our constitution. How shall we interpret our constitution according to the intent of the authors, or should we feel free with our constitution and apply it as we in our particular philosophical, sociological psychological views may wish to interpret it? A very fundamental thing that affects the life of all of us in the United States ultimately, the exclusion of religion from our system of education, surely a surprise to the founding fathers. The free enterprise system itself, one of the saddest things of our day is that the free enterprise system has almost no defenders in our educational institutions the ground of decisions regarding science and religion and even morality. What is right? What is wrong? When we say something is a moral matter, on what is our decision based? What are the grounds of what is right and wrong? Things almost never discussed, but surely most fundamental to everything in our daily life.

When we turn to the Christian church and think about the past years, say the decade or so, it's very disturbing. There is doctrinal apostasy; generally speaking throughout the main line denominations of the Christian church, there is a pervasive denial of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if there is a denial of the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no singing of praise to the Holy Trinity just as we have sung a moment ago. Universalism which negates the preaching of the gospel and also

overthrows the Biblical concept of the being of God is pervasive; it's very very rare for a Christian denomination to speak out today and affirm that there really are individuals who will suffer eternal punishment and eternal judgment for failure to come to Jesus Christ. The atonement itself, the basis for the Christian gospel and Christian doctrine is a subject that is most cloudy in the minds of the leading theologians of mainline denominations, much less the cults and others. As a matter of fact, the church is stagnate, it's like a sluggish stream, it's fetid and times it gives off some very foul odors, but they are by our deodorants not noted by many who ought to be noting them.

A few days ago, I was reading a few anecdotes in a book that I had received from the book of the month club, a book of anecdotes collected by a man by the name of Fuller who often writes in the *Wall Street Journal* reviewing books. And in it there was a little story about a Southern Baptist preacher who was strolling along the battery in Charleston, South Carolina after a church convention, or during that convention. He came upon an elderly black man who was fishing off of one of the piers and he watched him for a considerable period of time and at last he pulled out a fish of repulsive appearance so Mr. Engle said. It seemed to be something between a toad and a bullhead and knowing very little about the worldly practice of fishing, this Southern Baptist preacher said, “What kind of a fish is that?” And the black man said, “It's a Baptist fish.” “A Baptist fish?” “Sure, it's a Baptist fish, they calls 'em that because they spoil so fast after they're taken out of the water.” [Laughter] Well, incidentally, we're having a baptism tonight and we hope that we're not baptizing some Baptist fish tonight, but it illustrates the fact that the Christian church is so filled with that kind of thing that it really is like a stagnate pool today in so many ways.

It's remarkable, I think, to read some of the letters that we get at Believers Chapel from the tape ministry and then from the radio ministry. The ones of you who have been coming on Wednesday night, a minority, you'll pardon me I hope if I just read a couple of these letters at a couple of points that I read to you I think. This is a letter from a young

man who is a student, was a student at one of the leading Christian Bible colleges in the east. He got hold of our tapes, they were free of charge, so he was able to pay for them and so he listened to the tapes and he wrote me just the other day a couple of weeks ago and he said he had been receiving the tapes and he said as a result of reading the tapes he said,

“I’m very excited, where the Lord has brought me in this area; I’ve come from me and my free will to God and his sovereign grace to me.” (Isn’t that an interesting thing, he should go through a Christian evangelical Bible college, fine Bible college, and have to discover something so fundamental as that outside of the institution. He says,) “I’m thankful that these tapes were offered to me at what I could afford, which was nothing. In 1982 I couldn’t afford to pay for tapes, but now God has blessed me and I’m able to help out.”

And he sent a little gift with the tapes which isn’t necessary but expressive of his appreciation. It illustrates I think, the fact that there are trials and difficulties in our church itself, the evangelical church. So there is doctrinal apostasy, there’s doctrinal confusion in groups of individuals who are sound in the word of God in the Deity of Christ and of the necessity of an atonement, there still exist a great deal of doctrinal confusion. There is another letter from another man. He says he was raised in a reformed church, he strayed away, at about age seventeen. From seventeen to two, now twenty-one that should be,

“I was a drug dealer on a large scale. Eventually went to jail, was given probation, went back to my old life. At age twenty, due to many drugs in my system I went (he says) insane (he puts that word in quotes) for about five weeks. (He was institutionalized for it.) This occurred while I was on summer break from college. When I came back to my senses, I began to read my Bible somewhat, later on, back at the University of Michigan,

on February the eighteenth, nineteen seventy-eight, (confused the audience this morning, I said eighteen seventy-eight, so I had reported to me, he said) I received Christ as my Savior and my Lord. Today, I'm an ordained minister of the gospel and have served as Assistant Pastor to Greater Faith Christian Center and have now with some others started up a new work in our town of Ann Arbor, Michigan. The name of our fellowship is Word of Life Fellowship. I've had one year of Bible School so far from a charismatic church located in Dallas Texas, however the school left me without any sound foundational doctrine. (I left out the name because you would recognize the name and this will go out over the radio and I don't want to be overly critical of a particular group. But here is an individual who had one year of training in that school and no foundation in the Christian faith. He goes on to say) The teachings of the Bible that I've received from Believers Chapel and in the tape ministry have righted many of the wrong doctrines we were taught in our faith church of G.F.C.C. They are I guess you would say, Arminian in disposition as are many (And he mentioned some others) So I wanted to write and say thank you for the teachings, they are greatly enjoyed by us all. I say us all, for from time to time I've used what you have taught and gotten my outline from them and also added what I know of the topic to them as well.”

I think that's sad that in our Christian schools, we should have individuals teaching others who do not have any sound understanding of Biblical doctrine. That's not to mention the moral degeneration in evangelicalism characteristic of our day. Adultery is not uncommon in evangelicalism; divorce has become very common, even common among the ministers of the gospel of Christ, deceitfulness, worldliness, materialism, materialism evident even in the publications of Christian institutions, but most alarming to my mind is the prevalence of stagnation in our evangelical life. Stagnation, as I look at my Christian experience, I think I've suffered a great deal of that. I think that if I look back over my life honestly, if I were able to look at it objectively, there are great periods

of time in which I stagnated in the Christian life. I really did not make any real progress in spiritual growth; oh I don't think there were very many times when I was not growing in the knowledge of things about the Christian faith, because I've spent about forty-five years or so in rather earnest study of the Scriptures. But when I speak of Christian life and talking about my relationship with the Lord God and what it means to commune with him day by day and grow in the life with God if I may put it that way, dependent upon doctrine, but more than simply understanding truth, there been a number of times in my life when stagnation has characterized my life. I have on my desk right now a little card that I put up a few weeks ago and wrote it out in red, “No stagnation” in order to impress upon me the fact that I must make an effort, enabled by God, helped by him to grow in the knowledge of God even at my advanced age.

Now that to me is the one problem, the fundamental problem that we face I believe, in Believers Chapel. As I was thinking about something to say to you on this Sunday before our New Year's Day and 1986 is upon us, my thoughts came to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. A group of Christians, new in the faith, a vital, Pauline church in Thessalonica, in which the apostle calls the Thessalonians to the first principles, and we need to be called to the first principles. They were a doctrinally vibrant church, they knew the deity of Christ, Paul could talk about election to them, and incidentally, he doesn't even define election. It's evident that he had taught them the meaning of that term. And so when he speaks of it, he doesn't find it necessary to define his terms, they know those terms. Those six weeks that he spent with them, three weeks in their company at least, maybe a few days more or less, and in the meantime, four others had been left there were times in which they could become established in the truth of God. He talked about sanctification, he talked a lot about eschatology, he talked about ethical questions, life, love, service, and what is also essential, he talked about church discipline. Because we're never perfect and we always have problems and the apostles set out principles of discipline in the Christian church.

He was there on his second missionary journey, he spent just a few weeks there, he had to leave because of persecutions. The Christians who were left also suffered afflictions, and then I say about six weeks later, he wrote them this wonderful little epistle, following it shortly after with a second.

He begins in the customary epistolary practice of the time of simply saying, “Paul” and associating with Silas and Timothy with him, “Unto the church of the Thessalonians, greetings.” That’s the way they greeted one another on a letter. We say, “Dear so and so” and then we conclude with, sincerely yours, or sincerely, or yours sincerely, or yours very truly or something like that. They had a simple little practice in the Greek world at that time of simply saying, “John to Timothy, Greeting.” That’s the way they began their letters. The apostle begins the letter here as one would expect.

I think about Henry Ward Beecher one time who at Plymouth Church came in the pulpit. On the pulpit there was a letter, he picked it up at the beginning of the service, took a quick look at it and then said to his congregation something like this. He said, “I have a letter here, before me, it’s addressed to me and I’ve opened it up and it has one word in it, fool.” He said, “You know I’ve known many an instance of a man writing a letter and forgetting to sign his name, but this is the only instance I’ve ever seen of someone who signed his name and forgot to write the letter.” [Laughter]

Well, Paul addressed the Thessalonians and he said, “Paul and Silas and Timothy unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” And I want to only mention a couple of things because I want to spend a little more time in the last two verses, I want you to notice simply the expression, “In God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” When he says that the Church of the Thessalonians is in God the Father, he’s speaking in the language of the New Covenant. That is, they by their faith have manifested their divine election and they were included in the arrangement that the eternal Trinity made within themselves before the ages began. They belong to the covenanted people of God. They’re in God the Father and in the Lord

Jesus Christ. What a comfort to a group of Christians who are suffering the greatest kinds of afflictions and persecutions. Now notice too, that he says, “Unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Authorized Version adds the word in before Lord Jesus Christ, but in the original text it’s not there. And there are strong indications from the one preposition to the two nouns to indicate that they belong very closely together. In other words, this is an evidence of the exalted stature of the risen Son of God in the thought of Paul. They’re in God and they’re in the Lord Jesus Christ. And one final thing, he’s comforting them because of their difficulties. When he wrote to the Corinthians, he wrote them in the light of the unholiness that existed in the life of that church. In this persecuted company, he writes them in the light of their persecutions and assures them of their security that they have in the God head.

He gives thanks in verse 2, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” And the substance of his thanksgiving is recorded in verses 3 and 4. He remembers their work of faith that is the work that faith did the labor of love that is the labor that love performed and the patience of hope that is the patience manifested in their hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. “In the Lord Jesus Christ and in the sight of God our Father”, and then he traces it all to their divine election. That’s why for Paul, divine election was so important, because he saw everything else proceeding from God’s choice of his people in ages past, “knowing brethren, the love of God, your election.”

It would be interesting to go back to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 12 and notice the things that the apostle says there are characteristic of those who are elect. Listen, he says in verse 12 of chapter 3,

“Put on therefore as the elect of God holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, fore-bearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you so also do ye.”

Those are the signs of divine election. So the apostle speaks of those signs, and here he adds a further sign. He says, everything comes from election, but that election is manifested in a particular way. You might think when Paul looked at this company of people in his mind and said, I know that you are elect, that he was really presuming things. Suppose I were to say to you, “I know that you (speaking of a group of people) are elect.” You might ask me, “How do you know?” I would have to say, “Well, I don’t really know that your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.” The apostle evidently however felt that the evidence of the possession of divine life was so significant in Thessalonica that he could say that he knew that they were elect. Notice what he says, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance. As you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

Did Paul have access to the throne room of God and had he looked on the Lamb’s Book of Life? No, I don’t think so, he just saw the inevitable signs of a person who had received eternal salvation and having received eternal salvation, and knowing that comes only ultimately from divine election, with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit he could speak of them as being the elect of God. You know we sometimes have the idea that if a person preaches significantly enough and powerfully enough and with enough emotion and stirs us enough, that somebody’s bound to be saved. Well, I would only add that if that is what is involved, then that particular individual does not have Biblical salvation. I’ve heard it said that preaching is eloquence touched with fire. No, it’s not, and that’s not the reason men are saved. I’ve heard individuals say that some sermons are clear as

crystal but cold as ice, and what they're seeking to say by that is that it's possible to be plain and clear with no results. Well to my dear Christian friends, results flow from the work of the Holy Spirit, the word of God preached, it is important, it's necessary, absolutely necessary, it's essential, but also the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit is essential. If it were true that correct preaching saves people, then the Lord Jesus never would have been crucified, he would have saved all who heard him preach, or the Apostle Paul. It's obvious; more is required than preaching with fire and emotion. More is required than biblical truth, we are dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit must use the word, and transform those who hear the word through his regenerating power. If not, no one is saved.

So Paul looked out in his mind, saw the Thessalonian church, saw those magnificent changes, the power of God in their meetings, the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the assurance that came to him probably that God was with them and then the change of life when they became followers of the apostle and became examples all over the island of Greece in the north and Macedonia in the south and Achaia. The word concerning what had happened in Thessalonica went out and as a result of that when the apostle went about, he didn't have to tell people what had happened in Thessalonica, the word had so spread like a radio transmitters waves go out. It had so spread that when he came to places, they told him about what had happened when he preached in Thessalonica. That's what the apostle is saying, “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, but in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” They welcomed the word of God, responded powerfully to it, and God confirmed the preaching by the regenerating of those who belonged to the Lord Jesus in Thessalonica.

Now we come to the last two verses and I wanted to spend a moment upon them. Notice the beginning of the 9th verse, this is an explanatory enlargement of what he's just been saying. In fact, someone has called this a classic description of what it meant for a

group of Gentiles to become Christians. Listen to what happened to them, he says, “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.” Notice the turning, turning, to serve. And verse 10, “And to wait for his Son from heaven.” So, instead of telling, they’re told. The word of God has come, the entrance of the evangelist has taken place, the Holy Spirit has worked, an act has taken place, they have turned to the Lord God from the idols, and two purposes have been realized, in what happened.

Let me just for a moment stress the act. How you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. That is what he was taking about above when he said he thanked God for the work of faith, the work that faith wrought. It was their turning to God, produced ultimately by the Holy Spirit. Notice the order also. It’s a turning to God from idols. We also hear preaching as if the way in which a person is saved is by turning from idols first in our own strength and then we turn to the Lord God. Even in Acts chapter 14 in verse 15 where we seem to have something like that said, that’s not the point that is made there. And surely the apostle doesn’t make that point here. He says you turn to God, but in turning to God you turn from idols. That is a necessary consequence of the other. So when he preached the word of God, and they turned to the Lord God because of the things that they heard the apostle preach, they naturally turned from those idols in which they had put their trust before.

There’s an old story about an eastern parable which illustrates something of what is meant here. A sheik one day meeting a woman carrying in her one hand a basin of water while in the other hand there was torch, he eagerly inquired what she meant to do with each. And the woman said, “I’m going to put out the flames of Hell with the water and going to burn up the glories of Heaven with the torch.” And when the sheik asked, “And why are you going to do this?” She replied that men may love God for what he is in himself and not for what they escape or receive. Well, there is a great truth in that, we are separated to God to serve him, to love him to follow him, to obey him and it’s sad but

true that many of us coming to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ never really come to know him in that personal intimate way that God would have us know him through his word and through the experiences of life. So that's the act, that's the work of faith.

We don't preach a give up kind of Christianity, although we know that when an individual comes to the Lord Jesus Christ there's a transformation of life and ultimately there's a distinguishable difference. I may not see it, God sees it, it's there, it's a definitive change that takes place when a man comes to Christ. And we have a right to expect that that transpire. That's not part of the gospel, that's the product of the gospel. We receive Christ through faith. Our salvation is grounded in the merits of the Son of God on the cross. The inevitable issue of that is works that please him, devotion, communion, fruitfulness; these are the things that flow out of life just as surely as noise flows out of a newborn baby.

The Bible teaches that you know. The first realized purpose they serve, it's the labor of love they talk about in verse 3. James Denny was one of the men who was one of the greatest Scottish theologians, I've often cited Mr. Denny, this is something he said that I don't think I've ever cited before here. He made the point that passion is a necessary prelude to effective work. He said the passion of the New Testament startles us when we chance to feel it, for one man among us who is using up the powers of his soul in barren ecstasies; there are thousands who have never been moved by Christ's love to a single tear or to a single heart throb. Isn't that sad? Thousands of us who have never been moved to a single tear or a single heart throb by the love of Christ found in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the reasons that we don't see a lot of that today, a lot of those tears flowing down the face, and a lot of the kind of throb of heart that comes from one who loves the Lord is that we have stagnated in our Christian faith. And we've reached a certain level of life and we're going to live out the rest of our life at that level, unfortunately. May God help Believers Chapel from doing that. May God deliver us from stagnation. May God deliver us from that fetid pool, a Christian who

having reached a certain level of life is satisfied to persist there through the rest of his life, even if such were possible, may God deliver us from that.

And finally, he says to wait for his Son from Heaven. Now just as that word serve is in the present tense, and reflects a constant serving, the labor of love, so here this verb is in the present tense too, and it expresses a waiting patiently amid afflictions. It's a strange word, it really means literally to wait up, but its usage is simply to wait and generally speaking has the idea to wait amid afflictions. This morning as I was just thinking about looking up again some of the uses of this term I noted one usage in Second Clement chapter nineteen and verse four which I'd forgotten so I went over and got my Apostolic Fathers down and took a look at Second Clement chapter nineteen and verse four and it was talking about a pious man. And the author of that really anonymous epistle speaks about the time of blessedness that awaits the pious man who is in the midst of afflictions. That's the condition of the Thessalonians. They were being persecuted by Jews, by others as well for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul said you've turned, you're serving the Lord, the living and true God and you're waiting for his Son from Heaven.

Douglas MacArthur, we all remember, my generation, a great, one of the greatest of the generals, largely mistreated by the United States Congress and others in my opinion. MacArthur was responsible for a great victory in World War Two, and we never really would have had the problems it seems to me in Korea that we have today if Washington had let MacArthur finish the task that he was just about ready to do. But he was a five star general, field marshal of the Philippines, when the Japanese invaded the Philippines he had to leave; he was forced out, after the struggles in Bataan. As he left, he made his famous pronouncement, “I shall return.” When he reached Australia, after he had managed to escape, he again said, “I came through, I shall return.” Then later, after preparation he made his spectacular landing on Leyte much soon then the experts foresaw, thrust into the very heart of the Philippines. He not only fulfilled his promise,

gained a foothold and finally cut the life lines of the ill gotten Japanese empire and when he landed he declared, “People of the Philippines, I have returned, by the Grace of Almighty God our forces stand again on Philippine soil, rally to me, the guidance of God points the way, follow his name to righteous victory.” Well we admire a great man, but our Lord Jesus made an even greater pronouncement. He said, “I will come again and receive ye to myself.” What a great promise we have, the second coming of Christ. The older you get the more you naturally appreciate it. But from the beginning of our Christian life we should have the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s a test of our affections.

There’s another marvelous story told by the man who led me to the Lord of a young couple who were in love in World War One. And he was a serviceman had an officer’s commission and when the United States entered the war in nineteen seventeen they had a problem because he was called up immediately and they decided that they would go ahead and get married and they did and they lived together for just a short while and he was called to tour of duty. And he was sent to Mexico first. And he sent to presents to her, he sent Navaho lace, he sent pottery, he sent other things that were reflective of his love for her and of the land in which he was. And one day she was in the little house that they had acquired before he left and she was sitting in front of the fire and she had his letters out and these gifts that he’s given her and she was just meditating on what it would mean for him to come back and she heard some footsteps on the porch, the door opened and there he was. And all of these things that were in her lap scattered all over the room as she jumped to her feet and rushed to him and fell into his arms. He was home.

All the little things in which we place so much regard, all those little materialistic with which we in our nineteen eighty-five society are so infected, all of those things, nothing in comparison with the fundamental relationship with the Lord God. How can we be so unfaithful to our Lord and God as to be concerned about those things rather

then the things that are of interest to the Lord God himself, to the Lord Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. Oh we have much sin to confess before the Lord God.

Well, I must sum it up, our time is just about up and Paul's account there three divisions temporally of our lives, the past, the present, the future. The past for the believer is settled when by the Grace of God he's turned to God from idols reflecting upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The future is settled, for he's coming to deliver us. It's the present that's the critical matter, nineteen eighty-six, what does it hold for us? More worldliness continued prayerlessness, continued neglect of the word of God, continued fear before men so that our mouths are clamped shut almost as if they had metal clamps upon them in the testimony to the salvation we have through Jesus Christ? Can it be that we cannot praise God and our Lord before men? Can it be that we are so faithless to our talk of serving him? Listen, I speak with conviction because I suffer that stagnation. What a terrible sin, stagnation in the Christian life.

Forty years I've been around theological students as well as people in the pew. As I look back at my experience, there are so many cases of stagnation it's startling. A young man with the Young Life campaign, with the quintet, used to travel around the country with Louis Sperry Chafer. He played the piano, four men, magnificent quartet, when I came to seminary, they went all over the country and into Canada. He played the piano, I say he was a very good student, today, professor of New Testament in a liberal institution and gives no clear indication that he is a Christian in the evangelical sense today.

Another individual whose often attended Believers Chapel, I could remember in his younger days as a business man when he was so excited about the Christian faith, that he would talk to his customers in his business, a successful business, he was so concerned that he would seek out ministers of the gospel to talk to them about the things of the Lord. I rarely ever see him in a Christian meeting today.

There's another young man, went through Dallas Seminary, graduated one week and when he was turned down for graduate study, at that moment, he went out, got all of his books together, sold them all, renounced the faith and today is out of ministry, as far as I know has continued in his disbelief. Yes it's possible, possible even for people trained in the word of God.

Another young man with Young Life Campaign, a fine young man with lots of personality, in Portland, Oregon today he's selling stocks and bonds. It's a perfectly good occupation, the only thing is, that every time I go to Portland, and I've been going almost every year, I inquire about him, there's no indication what so ever of any interest in spiritual things at all. A graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Moral lapses, time would fail. One of my students, that is one who majored under me in the graduate program, left, taught in one institution, Christian institution, taught in another as professor of New Testament, became involved with his secretary, divorce, one or two divorces, he's now selling insurance in Denver Colorado.

Another young man in this particular area, graduate of Dallas Seminary, became involved in moral problems, one of the churches not too far from here. So involved, he was forced resign, leave the ministry, is still so far as I know still out of ministry, a tremendously gifted young man

There are some good accounts; there was a young man that I knew real well, he was young when I was young. Tremendous gifts as a preacher, I often thought I wish I had his gift as a preacher of the word of God, very gifted in expressing himself, successful pastorate in Canada, two of them, also became involved with another woman, divorced and then drifted for years. I notice now from the alumni directory, he's back in the ministry, as pastor of a Baptist Church out west, and I hope and pray that he's been recovered, it's possible, God is merciful. But oh, my Christian friends in Believers Chapel, may God in 1986 deliver us from stagnation. May he deliver me from it. I hope you will pray for me in that regard, for I am particularly susceptible to it. May God help us in

nineteen eighty-six to make some genuine advances in our personal life with God, as well as in the knowledge of the word of God. May that be God’s gracious work in our behalf.

If you’re here and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus, we remind you he died for sinners, come to him, believe in him, trust in him and his finished work, receive the gift of eternal life. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent expressions of high regard for the Lord Jesus Christ found in the testimony of that Thessalonian assembly. May Lord the lessons that we see in their experience come home to us. Lord help us by Thy grace to shed a tear, to have a few heart throbs over the love of Christ for us. And give us courage, give us boldness, deliver us from cowardice, give us great ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]