

"Living the Resurrection": 1 Thessalonians

Intro

1 Thessalonians 1

4.28.19



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

‘Escha--- what? Are you familiar with term ‘eschatology’? What do you think of when you think of the ‘times of the end’? If you grew up in church, what was your faith’s particular emphasis on the last days?’

“Do you think it’s true (as has been proposed in this week’s teaching) that what we believe about the future effects our present responses? What do you think hinders us from living that way?”

“Can you identify a threshold moment in our life, presently? How did you get here?”

“What do you see from your present vantage point? What do you think God sees?”

“Is it time for a risky, faith-filled step or holy hesitation?”

Discernment is knowing God, knowing our situation, and knowing God in our situation.

Teaching Notes...

We often make the mistake of taking the incidental moments of our lives and attempting to ‘fit them into’ the story, when stories are meant to provide the means by which we interpret the circumstances.

If we are ‘constructing’ our stories circumstantially, then life gets reduced to this random and often chaotic series of events.

I end up, as my son Austin, did, with this big, blue tub of random Lego-pieces with no instructions or image to imitate. It leaves us to our own imaginations, but with no sense that any of this fits in some cohesive way.

Our vision of the future always determines our present response. In a sense, we are learning to live life "backwards": from the vantage point of God's restored world and with a view toward the ways in which our lives--- right here and right now--- demonstrate such hope.

Rough sketch:

1 Thessalonians is, as far as can be established, the earliest of the NT writings in the wake of the "Jesus Event" (50 A.D.) The NT is **not** presented to us in 'chronological order'.

It is a letter written to a group of Christ-followers in the city of Thessalonica. It was a thriving sea-port in northern Greece. Paul, formerly "Saul", has had his own encounter of the formerly dead Jesus (Acts 9) which has radically altered his life. Persecution from both the Jewish religious leaders and the prevailing empire (Rome) caused the early followers of "The Way" to disperse.

Paul, along with his traveling companion, Silas, leaves the area and begins his travels to share the gospel outside the epicenter of their faith: Judea/Jerusalem.

Acts 17 records the birth of this fledging church. Paul is there only for a few weeks before he is driven out of town for his subversive message, but while the message hasn't landed well on those more familiar with the Story, it was being embraced by lots of folks who were unfamiliar: who didn't "*grow up in church*".

"God-fearing Greeks", as they are identified. "Spiritual" people. Thoughtful about God. Convinced in the reality of the "other", but unable to distinguish the Jewish God in the context of all the other local and regional deities who were the focus of worship.

He continues his travels south to Corinth, from where, without the conveniences of Twitter and Snapchat, he writes a letter to be delivered for all to read and consider.

The Christian faith has always been solidly rooted in history and in forming a faithful presence, but it is also decidedly a 'future faith'.

The resurrection of Jesus was interpreted to be the long-awaited signal that God's kingdom had arrived and that he would soon return to establish his lovingly-restorative rule over the world he had created. It would be the great reversal. Everything would change.

Paul's first letter is offered as an encouragement for people to live faith-fully in light of Christ's return. To live "now" as if the future has "already arrived".

"Eschatology" is the study of the last things.

If this is "all there is", I suppose you will attempt to squeeze every ounce of pleasure out of every-one and every-thing, ensuring some momentary satisfaction.

If you, like me, believe that this IS, but this IS NOT ALL THERE IS, you will live not only with a sense of your own well-being, but how your pursuits are causing you to ignore or embrace the 'other'.

Paul was writing to many for whom the gospel had failed. They remained, in many ways, a marginalized people. Jesus had not returned. The world was not 'right'. Which raised questions:

“What went wrong?” Are there assumptions that I'm being challenged to confront?

“What is God up to in the world?” How is our present approach and understanding actually confining God?

“What does it mean to be his people in this culture and context?” What if we are the “stranger in need of welcome”? What if we were to courageously enter the vulnerable spaces where shalom has been shattered and where people are losing hope?

The journey of faith often begins with what the ancients called a “threshold” moment.

The Japanese change from shoes to slippers when arriving home to transition from the public space to personal space. The monastics pause before entering the chapel to shed any burdens or distractions which might prevent them from being most fully present to God.

A **“threshold”** moment...

... is the “space between” what is happening and what happens next.

... is, at times, involuntary (e.g. death of a family member or friend, loss of a job or relationship, confrontation with an unresolved emotional or spiritual issue, etc.) and, at others, the space we “create”.

... creates tension between what has been known and trusted (even if it has failed) and what is unfamiliar and unproven. We are finally able to consider something else; something new.

Threshold moments usually come at the end of a long and exhausting journey. We're “exhausted” and we have “exhausted” all our resources.

... involves bouts of paralyzing fear, as well as baffling hopefulness. You stand on the cusp of everything you have trusted--- everything you have hoped for--- and you are filled with both disappointment and anticipation.

... is a space in which we typically fail to linger. We're usually hurried in our movements in anticipation of what else lies ahead of us.

Albert Ellis is one of the leading thinkers in **CBT: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**. Here are the **ABC's**:

ACTIVATING EVENT (something happens)

CREATES BELIEFS (you tell yourself a story)

CREATES CONSEQUENCES IN BEHAVIOR (your story informs your response)

The “Jesus Event” provides a new activating story. If you live into this story and live out of this story, you will be motivated by the realization that you are the beloved, the cared-for-ones, the ones who are now ‘alive’. Those beliefs lead you to a broadening vision for your life and a more promising way of being in God’s world.

You’ve not really been “here” before.

This is the radical message of grace: Wherever “here” is, it’s not the same “here” you experienced previously. Your present failure will not be counted against you. This moment is packed with new possibilities.

There’s really no “going back”.

Now it’s filled with even more regret and disillusionment over another opportunity forfeited.

I think it’s helpful to remember that the only Jesus you can know now experience is the resurrected one. We keep returning to the “**cross Jesus**” in some distorted and unhealthy need to continue to punish ourselves to ensure that we will not fail him the next time. Condemnation and fear and regret can never interrupt old-life-patterns and give you life. They simply keeps us tethered to our broken and dysfunctional past.

The tension of the threshold moment is only resolved by our movement.

Even choosing to stay in the moment is contentment with the status-quo. It begins the slow-decay of the soul.

Refuse to adopt a “manageable” vision for your life.

Our vision will always be comparable with our sense of longing and desperation: the deeper our pain and frustration, the larger our vision of restoration.

If your vision is being formed around your own strategies and what you can achieve, apart from faith, it’s too small. It’s not “*pleasing to God*” (Hebrews 11:6). What pleases him is that you trust that he is good and his intentions are bigger than your imagination.