

## **Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions**

### **First Sunday of Advent**

**Sermon Title: A Season of Anticipation – 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

**Sunday, Dec. 2, 2018**

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1 and 2 Thessalonians is written with the main theme of the second coming of Christ. Paul had quite a relationship with the churches he founded. He was writing a letter to them to check in on them. He sent Timothy to the church at Thessalonica. Timothy reports back. Paul is happy they are doing well and growing in their faith. The churches were going through a season of crisis and persecution. He longed to see them. In the meantime, Paul encourages the church.

Jesus is worth waiting for. The season of anticipation is for our good. It is not to wear us out. It is to prepare us. We ought to be preparing for Jesus' return for His church. We need to be patient and wait—enjoy the process of anticipation. We have to push against our need for instant connection. There are some things that require us to wait patiently.

#### Sermon in a Sentence:

In a season of anticipation we should experience maturing faith, growing love for one another and strengthened hearts.

#### **Key Points:**

1. **As Christians, we ought to be maturing in our faith. (V. 9-11)**
  - a. Your tests are not meant to hurt you, but to help you. Abraham had been tested many times before he was on the mountain with Isaac. First, God sent him to a strange land. There was a famine and he failed the test. Another test was God's promise that he and Sarah would have a son. In this case, he and Sarah tried to help God out with their own plan. The result: Ishmael was born. Later on, Abraham passed his most important test when God told him to sacrifice his own son, Isaac. Key Point: Faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted.
  - b. If God allowed a test, the intent is to develop your faith and not destroy you.
2. **Maturing faith leads to a growing love for others. (v.12).**
  - a. God commands us to love each other. Galatians 5:14
  - b. God has taken the initiative in showing love. See I John 4:11 and I John 3:16.
  - c. God's people are known by their love – See John 13:35
  - d. A maturing love for God has an impact on how we treat one another. As I grow stronger in the Lord, I know that I am a reflection of God's love.
  - e. I put my feelings behind my faith and not in front of it. People will see my faith walk before they see my feelings. We are worried about what people think of us rather than what God is thinking about us.
  - f. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God completely. Love ourselves correctly and love others compassionately. If we are struggling with love of ourselves, ask God for help so we can eventually love others.

3. **Maturing faith and growing love for others will lead to strengthened hearts. (V.13)**
  - a. Maturing faith will come out in our character and conduct.
  - b. The heart and mind is the core of who we really are. Paul says, "I am praying you will find joy in who you are in Christ. Encourage yourself and let your love increase."
  - c. As Christians, we are to be a light in dark places. As you mature in faith, you will be able to love your brothers and sisters, Christ and all people.
  - d. This is a time of anticipation when our connection with one another is informed by our faith and not our fear. When we operate out of fear, we are operating out of insecurity. A maturing faith leads to a strengthened heart.
  - e. Many times it is our heart that needs the real change.
  - f. Be ready when the Lord comes. To have the joy of the Lord when he comes, you will need to hear. A hardened heart cannot love. It is the heart God sees.
  - g. You will need to be strengthened to be a Christian in a non-Christian culture—on your job, at social gatherings, etc.
  - h. An established heart is holy and set apart. Jesus is coming back. Are we anticipating his coming? He is preparing you for that day to come.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is your first reaction to the thought that Christ is coming back? What are you doing to prepare for the Lord's return? If you are not preparing, why not?
2. What are the benefits of a maturing faith? What are the costs if we are not maturing in the faith?
3. As we enter this season of Advent, is your heart softened toward the Lord? If not, what actions are you willing to take to change the condition of your heart?
4. Give specific examples of a person or group of people you know who are maturing in their love for each other or other people?