

Advent 1
November 28, 2021

“Advent Check-in”
(1 Thessalonians 3:9-10)
LSB 331

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this first Sunday of Advent is from our Epistle reading, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10.

“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?”

Here ends our text.

Paul is telling the Christians at Thessalonica that he is so thankful to God for them. He’s literally rejoicing before God night and day, and praying to see them in person again.

By God’s grace and compassion, he had just started the church there a few weeks earlier, at most a couple of months on his second missionary journey. But, Paul’s time with them was abruptly cut short.

In Acts 17, you can read about how Paul went to the synagogue as was his custom and taught there for three sabbaths.

“explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” (Acts 17:3-4)

But then some of the unbelieving Jews became envious and formed a mob. And they went looking for Paul in the house of Jason, where they were Paul was either

lodging or where they were meeting. They didn't find Paul there at the time so they dragged Jason out to the authorities and accused him of inciting unrest against Caesar.

Oh, how the devil used that page out of his playbook before against Jesus, Himself. Jason was forced to pay a bond for his release and the Christians quickly told Paul to leave because his life was in danger. So Paul headed out to Berea and began preaching there. Again, from Acts 17 we learn that God called others to faith there.

“they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.” (Acts 17:11-12)

God uses the persecutions of the devil to spread His word even quicker. But, once again, the unbelieving Jews got word that Paul was preaching in Berea and they went after him so that the people warned Paul to leave to Athens. He did and waited for Silas and Timothy to catch up with him. And, of course, there in Athens, God presented Paul with another opportunity to preach His word to the people who were thoroughly confused worshipping false idols.

But we'll stop for a moment and catch back up with the Thessalonians. For Paul had not forgotten about them. He was very much wanting to know how they were doing in the face of all the persecution that was going on by the Judaizers.

Our epistle reading of chapter three begins by giving us a very personal and close up view of Paul's love for them.

“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

Paul couldn't take it. He needed to know that these very new believers weren't like the seed that fell amongst the thorns or rocks and there fledgling faith was quickly choked out by persecution or dried up by the cares of life and temptations of the devil.

So, he sent Timothy for a check-in. It was a check-in to see how their faith was holding up. We begin this new year, on this first Sunday of Advent with a spiritual check-in as well. How is your faith life doing? How is the faith life doing of people you know that maybe you haven't seen for awhile?

It's so good to see all our friends in Christ from the north who might not have come last year but are making your way down this year to be with us during the winter season.

I got a quick check-in from my longtime friend from Ann Arbor yesterday, who was one of my college roommates. He just sent a quick text "Finally! Go Blue!" Well, I'm glad to hear he's well enough to have watched the Michigan/Ohio State game yesterday.

This Covid pandemic has kept us from seeing people face to face in many cases. Like Paul, we also become anxious to know how other Christians have gotten along throughout these days of testing, sickness and much death. 777,000 have died due to Covid in the United States since this began in March of 2020. It was the leading cause of death for 35-44 year olds in September and 6th leading cause of death among children between the ages of 5-14.

Yesterday, for the first time since this all began, 13 youth at Fishers of Men gathered together as a group to study the Bible, fellowship with each other and have some pizza. We were the first mission trip for Pat Fick's group of 4 last week in over year. Thanks be to God that now close to 60 % of the population, 195 million people are fully vaccinated and have greater protection against the disease.

Once again, though, Paul's check-in with the Thessalonians and our Advent check-in with each other wants to know how one is doing through the physical tribulations, and spiritual persecution of one's day.

Paul wanted know that the Thessalonians hadn't lost hope because of the Judaizers or hadn't given into the sinfulness that was so prevalent in their port city. In this Greek harbor town, sexual purity was a complete novelty, along with much unscrupulous behavior.

Is it any different today? So, Paul was so happy to hear from Timothy that the Thessalonians were staying strong in the faith. So, Paul writes in the verses right before our text:

**“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you— therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”
(1 Thessalonians 3:6-7)**

What good news that was for Paul! What comfort! What thanksgiving Paul gives to God! We hear our text again.

“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?”

We might not have caught up with everyone face to face yet, like Paul, but we too give thanks to God when we hear about how other Christians are getting through tough times with a strong faith in Christ.

I received a Christmas card yesterday with a two page very well-written and heartfelt sharing of how the year has gone. There were hospitalizations, deaths in the family, life changes of uprooting and moving, retirements and caring for those who were weak. But through it all, the letter kept telling of how God kept them strong in the faith. Christ did indeed come into our fallen world to rescue us! He continues to come through His word and will come again! What a beautiful Christmas card check-in of faith! I imagine you too will receive some or even write some of your own, giving all glory to God!

We are no different than Paul or those newly called Thessalonian Christians. We face hardships, temptations and persecutions also. Paul can't wait to see them in person and help them get even stronger in the faith in whatever they are lacking. No one is a finished work yet until one is taken to heaven or Christ comes, including Paul at that time. Paul continues in our epistle to pray for them that God would make them increase and abound even more in love.

“Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

That's our prayer too. That we would grow in greater love for each other and to all!! Yes, all!

Remember how we heard on Thanksgiving that we should pray for the kings and all people. Especially evil leaders need our prayers that God would change their hearts to believe in Jesus so that we would live in peace.

God can and does establish our hearts blameless through the Gospel of Jesus forgiveness so that we are ready for His second coming.

The Thessalonians were going through such tribulations that they thought that they were expecting Jesus to return at any moment. Indeed, that kind of watchfulness is what Christians should have at all times. We don't know when Jesus will return. But we know that He will come unexpectedly as heard from our Gospel.

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” (Luke 21:27-28)

Paul reminded the Thessalonians and all of us also in the very next chapter, chapter 4 that,

“the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

And Paul tells of the coming of the Antichrist in his second letter to them in chapter 2.

“who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

But, Paul reassures them and also us who are living in the days of the lawless one that

“the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:3-4)

So, when we check-in as Paul did with the Thessalonians, we do see the lawlessness and evil of this world. We see that there are anti-Christians also among us as they also opposed Christ. We see that we are indeed living in the end times and that Christ could come at any moment.

And when we check-in we see the bright shining light of the Gospel of Jesus again and again. He is faithful always to us. We have this confidence in the Lord! God establishes us through His word and sacraments. God guards us from the evil one and makes our love and faith grow more and more.

With Paul we give much thanks to God for all the joy we have to hear of God’s great working in all of your lives through Jesus Christ. Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)