

Taking New Territory in Troubling Times, Pt. 1

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April 26, 2020

What is God doing, saying at this time?

Importance of slowing down, getting quiet, drawing close, resetting priorities, don't fear, etc.

Also, about — Taking New Territory in Troubling Times — yes even now!

Starting study of 1st Thessalonians today. What we see in the first century Thessalonian church is a perfect role model for what the church needs to be today. This book study is going to give us great vision, inspiration, and education of what our lives can look like for the glory of God, **even in troubling times.**

Continued concern as contemporary Christianity all but departs from the purpose and passion of taking new territory for Jesus.

Barna Group Research¹

- a) average Christian doesn't worship during the week
- b) dies without leading one person to Christ
- c) can't name one person praying will come to Christ
- d) 10% give 10%, average is 3%, they feel sacrificial
- e) watches more TV in one night than serving others in an entire month

Evangelical Christians need to VOTE to run our country on godly principles.

Listen — *I believe...*

the church is the greatest organism on the earth...

has the greatest message...

the greatest mandate...

brings the greatest hope...

it's just we forget how great the church *can and should be...*

I long to see it be all God has called it to be... have seen glimpses and it's awesome...

what if we all committed to its greatness... WOW!

Interesting — the culture when 1st Thessalonians was written is very similar to what we have in America today. **If they were radically impacted by the message of Christ, and then impacted their community and beyond... so can we!** This book **lays out a blueprint for spiritual significance** — it's ours to duplicate.

- a) 2nd missionary journey of Paul... Silas is with him...
- b) Thessalonica background... Greece, Via Egnatia, Mt. Olympus (home of 12 Greek gods), 200k people
- c) prosperous seaport, commercial success, free city, self-ruled though part of Empire
- d) resort area with hot springs... anything goes, Roman debauchery
- e) Greek paganism, Roman materialism, large Jewish population
- f) pagan society raging against God, morals, righteousness
- g) exactly like today, **troubling times for godly people**

¹ Barna Group, *Reviving Evangelism* (Barna Group, 2019)

It was into that atmosphere, after being beaten, imprisoned, and miraculously released from prison in Philippi, Acts 16, that Paul and Silas showed up preaching the same gospel that had almost cost them their lives many times... **taking new territory in troubling times.**

Taking new territory in troubling times

Acts 17:1-9

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 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. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king; Jesus." And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So, when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

- right back preaching in synagogue in Thessalonica after trouble in Philippi
- preaching Jesus as Christ and King
- reputation of turning world upside down/*really right side up*... **more trouble, more territory!**

Point — Paul's holy boldness produced life-changing holy boldness in the Thessalonians. In three short weeks, they went from unbelievers with no church in their midst — to a church with elders, leaders, servants — making a huge difference in their society and beyond.

Observation — *it doesn't have to take 10 years before a convert is capable of becoming a world changer for Christ — just someone who will take God and His calling seriously. As that person steps out in faith, God reaches out with power — and BAM, you have a church **taking new territory in troubling times!***

**Key — not only taking God and His calling seriously
but taking your lead from those who are being used by God
surrounding yourself with them
gaining their knowledge
receiving Spirit's power
and then taking new territory together.**

Time of Reset, Take New Ground in Troubling Times

- increase our commitment to Christ, our families, church family and the world
- being equipped... no more excuses, not even COVID 19
- increase commitment to one another... stay in touch, pray, reach out, don't retreat!
- increase commitment to reaching community, sharing life and love of Jesus

That's what the Thessalonians did, and that's what Paul exhorted and encouraged them to continue growing in — taking and keep taking new territory!

Chapter 1 — no less than 10 incredible attributes mentioned about them after only three short weeks of ministry to them.

1 Thessalonians 2:12

...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you...

1 Thessalonians 4:1

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;

1 Thessalonians 4:10

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing...

Observation — *Paul realized that you can't take new territory in troubling times if you are satisfied with how far you have come, what you have accomplished, or where you are currently — no matter how impressive it might be or sound.*

Paul's own attitude should light the fire in us...

Philippians 3:13-15

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

- forgetting past, not only bad but also successful
- reaching forward — to what's ahead, taking new territory in troubling times!
- pressing toward the goal, for the prize... Jesus, His Kingdom!
- that's mature Christian mind!

Heart to heart — *I am so thankful for so many who have made Grace Chapel as thriving and growing as it is today. Time, talent, treasure have been given sacrificially, and we have had our lives changed — as we've touched others.*

Two things

- **this is no time to rest in our past accomplishments – it is time to take new territory**
- we need to go beyond our walls to step up and love and serve and reach out and take new territory... salt and light, difference maker, disciple, servant, for real, **care enough to be informed, be committed enough to participate.**

Closing... the book of 1st Thessalonians will give us great vision, inspiration and education of what it looks like to **take new territory in troubling times.**

Discussion Questions

1. As you've experienced getting quiet, what does a reset in priorities look like for you?
2. Read the Barna Group Research. In what ways are you an average Christian?
3. What attributes did the church of the Thessalonians have that we should emulate?
4. Discuss Paul's attitude about "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead"?
5. What does it look like personally for you to "take new territory"?

NOTES