

40 Days of Gratitude

SESSION 3: 12/11/2022

THANKFUL FOR THE THESSALONIANS

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

MAIN POINT

Today's topic from the pulpit will be the expression of gratitude. However, this lesson is lightly different. This lesson will cover: Those called by grace are changed by Him and strengthened by Him to become like Him.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one habit or part of your daily routine that you would never change?

Why do you practice that habit and what are its benefits in your daily life?

What is one spiritual habit that has become an invaluable part of your life?

Frisco First Baptist Church is giving away 40 days of gratitude journals. We are hoping the practice of expressing daily gratitude will impact our relationship with Jesus and one another. Please take a journal, spend a few minutes daily reflecting on at least one thing you are grateful for, and write it in the journal.

Have you picked up your journal yet? If so, what are some of the reflections you have written? Is this daily remembrance of gratitude making a difference?

Many of the habits that become a part of daily life are important, but none more so than the spiritual habits we adopt. From his New Testament letters, the apostle Paul shows his habit of praying for the churches he ministered to. Through these prayers, we learn what Paul considered important in a believer's life and what he valued about his relationships.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-4.

What characteristics of Paul's prayer in verses 1-4 stand out to you?

How do these characteristics of Paul's prayer contrast with the ways many Christians pray today (weak, occasional, mechanical, inattentive, and so forth)?

Immediately after his salutation in most of his letters, Paul thanked God for the people to whom he was writing. This pattern is evident here. When Paul prayed, he constantly and intentionally included these new believers. In verse 3, Paul stated the basis for his thanksgiving: the evidence of salvation they demonstrated. Paul remembered their visible deeds in the face of difficulty. Such endurance or persistence arose because of the rock-solid object they placed their hope in: our Lord Jesus Christ.

What evidence of work produced by faith and labor produced by love will others find if they examine your life?

How recently have you thanked God for these traits in the lives of others?

We may not have people writing us letters to tell us they thank God for the evidence of His work in our lives. But like the Thessalonians, we are to be people who demonstrate authentic Christianity. Good works and endurance never go out of style for Christians. Neither do faith, hope, and love. We are to seek to be the kind of people for whom others, whenever they think of us, want to thank God.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1:5-6.

In verse 5, what do we learn about the pattern of Paul's gospel ministry in Thessalonica?

How did the Thessalonians first become imitators of, and then models for, the faith?

What does this tell you about their growth in Christ?

An oral gospel witness will be more compelling when accompanied by a lifestyle witness. This was Paul's approach to ministry, the gospel message fused with a lifestyle of gospel living. The Thessalonians had recognized Paul as a positive role model whom they intentionally imitated. They also had set about imitating the Lord, whom Paul himself sought to be like (1 Cor. 11:1).

The Thessalonians could see that what Paul, Silas, and Timothy were preaching was true because these men lived it. Does your life confirm or contradict what you say you believe?

The Thessalonians grew in their faith through persecution and were even able to delight in what the Holy Spirit was doing (v. 6). What are some practical ways we can express joy and gratitude for the Spirit's work in our lives?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1:7-10.

Think about the influence our church and its members have had in the last year. Could we say that people twenty miles away are talking about our Christian example? Ten miles? One mile?

What does this say about the example of our church compared to that of the Thessalonians?

The story of the Thessalonians' life-changing encounter now had come full circle. First, the message had gone out from them to "every place"(v. 8). Second, believers from these places had brought a report to Paul, now in Corinth, about the kind of reception Paul had received in Thessalonica. Third, Paul then wrote back to the Thessalonians about the good things others had been saying about them. No doubt he meant this to provide them with encouragement to continue steadfastly in their faith

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of the qualities of the Thessalonians do you most wish to see developed in your life now? How can the group help?

What roles does the church play in our society? How does our church function as an imitation model? A reputation model?

For what do you thank God as you pray for our church?

For whom are you a model of Jesus Christ? What kind of model are they seeing?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, ask God to give you the determination to follow Him in a close and intimate relationship. Ask Him to keep us from looking for quick formulas and give us the courage to follow the promptings of His Spirit. Pray that He will keep our hearts and minds open to change and will help us to value His will as revealed in the Bible, so that we respond in holiness to all of life.

COMMENTARY

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1–10

1:1. First Thessalonians reads like many of Paul's letters, but authorship of the book is attributed equally to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The reason, most likely, is that all three men were well known to the Thessalonian Christians. Paul and Silas having started the church (Acts 17:1–9), and Timothy later being sent back to instruct and encourage the new believers (it was his report which inspired the letter). Paul was the recognized leader, but the respect and enormous help given by Silas and Timothy prompted the co-authorship; the three men spoke with a single voice. Their letter was addressed to a gathering of people in a particular city, Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, and Timothy undoubtedly recalled names and faces as they wrote the letter. But, by adding the descriptive phrase "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," the authors made more precise identity of this group and emphasized its spiritual nature. They wanted the believers to realize that the local church has a spiritual location just as real and even more important than Thessalonica.

Paul's standard greeting, "grace and peace to you," was loaded with reminders that our best health and riches are the personal, relational gifts from God Himself. To this

greeting, some early manuscripts add the phrase “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. *Grace* and *peace* are gifts bestowed from the throne room of heaven. Grace is the unmerited favor of God upon which we are so dependent. Peace is a judicial statement related to our daily fellowship with God as well as our eternal standing. The conflict created through sin has been resolved through Jesus Christ, restoring the broken relationship between humankind and God, thereby granting peace and harmony. Shalom is the Hebrew counterpart of ‘peace,’ meaning wholeness. Peace is a condition of completeness, a work totally finished through Christ, yet progressively realized.

1:2. Do not miss the example of love and appreciation expressed for the believers in Thessalonica: “We always thank God for all of you.” Paul was known for his keen awareness of the goodness and graciousness of God. Thankfulness was his constant response. And, as he explained in verse 3, his great joy was the changed lives of people who trusted and followed Jesus Christ. These believers kindled his continual praise of thanksgiving. Paul not only thanked God for these brothers and sisters in the faith, he also was not afraid to tell them personally how much he appreciated them.

1:3. Paul often made parallel statements, reemphasizing particular feelings or thoughts. So when he wrote that We continually remember, he was underscoring the fact that Paul, Silas, and Timothy constantly prayed for the Thessalonians. They were a source of delight. In this section the authors listed what they found so admirable in these believers. The people’s work produced by faith was commended first. Faith always leads to works. Second, their labor was prompted by love. Labor involves cost, fatigue, and exhaustion. Love here is the Greek word *agape*, meaning unselfish, sacrificial living for others. Love, along with faith, drives us in our faith. The third commendation given to the Thessalonians was for their endurance inspired by hope. This is not passive endurance, but heroic constancy, no matter what the obstacles. Hope always looks forward, beyond now, to a future. For the Thessalonians, as for all believers, hope rests in God’s promised eternity. And this assured future makes faith, work, suffering, and love possible. Hope looks to something that is sure, but just not here yet. It is coming. All of this is clearly connected with our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith, love, and hope are eternal qualities that find their source in God.

1:4. The credit and gratitude for belonging eternally to God should be given to God. His mercy and love come to us not because of who we are but because of the kind of person He is. Love and election always go together. He rescues those who will respond to His initiations of love and revelation (Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13).

1:5. The gospel is “the power of God for . . . salvation” (Rom. 1:16). It comes from embracing Jesus, the centerpiece of the gospel. One evidence that salvation is entirely God’s work is the way in which it enters our lives. It comes not simply with words, but also with power. The word power means the ability to do something. The gospel always comes with inherent power (Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 1:18), but its effect depends upon the hearer. There are those for whom the gospel is ‘simply words,’ interesting, perhaps even disturbing, but that is all. The power of the gospel explodes, however, when the hearer allows its truth to penetrate the heart. The Holy Spirit empowers the message so that it comes alive; it stirs the soul within; it brings conviction and change. God wants us to be His children. The church is challenged to announce and model the good news for everyone. The rest of the paragraph shows that the Thessalonians were doing this.

1:6. Jesus showed Paul how to live, and even personally instructed him (Gal. 1:12). Paul lived, led, and taught by the example he had received from Christ. In the same manner, the people Paul taught along the way, those in the churches he planted, got their signals from him. He became the model to others, just as Christ was the model to him. In their letter to the Thessalonians Paul, Silas, and Timothy appealed to the Thessalonians

memory, drawing them back to the lifestyle of the three men when they lived in Thessalonica: You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord. This pattern forms a great circle of discipleship and leadership which still applies today. Leaders and teachers in the church are to follow Christ; those in the leader's care follow after his example; they, in turn, become models of Christlikeness to people outside the church. It was the manner of Christ in Paul, Silas, and Timothy that helped inspire the Thessalonians to follow Christ.

Furthermore, the Thessalonians followed Paul and Christ with determination, in spite of severe suffering. Paul and Silas's stay in Thessalonica was shorter than planned due to a riot the Jews staged (Acts 17:5-10). Friends were arrested, the community shouted accusations, government officials became uneasy, and Paul and Silas escaped to the neighboring town of Berea under cover of darkness. With this background, the church in Thessalonica undoubtedly suffered under suspicion and community unrest. But the Holy Spirit gave them the joy and ability to receive the full message of Christ and to follow Him. Suffering and joy are almost always linked. It is the confirmation of John 15:18-21, that those who follow Christ will suffer as Christ did. As Paul later wrote in his letter to the Philippians, there is fellowship in suffering for Christ, a fellowship with Christ himself (Phil. 3:10). This brings a joy sustained by the Holy Spirit.

1:7. In the first century, the word model referred to the mark left by a hammer or die as in the making of a coin, leaving an impression like the original. Thus, the Thessalonian church became a model of believers banded together, a prototype of what a church should be. After commending the local gathering and the way it was living and responding in a hostile culture, Paul, Silas, and Timothy opened the eyes of the Thessalonians to the influence they were having beyond their city. They were connected to a great network of God's kingdom. Their adherence to the faith had become an encouragement and example to other churches. The authors knew that understanding their place in the broader context of God's church would encourage the Thessalonians to continue in faithfulness.

1:8. The northern and southern provinces (Macedonia and Achaia) heard about the changes brought about by God in the hearts and actions of the believers in Thessalonica. Reports about their faith were being heard, often carried by unbelievers. As a result the Lord's message rang out, was trumpeted throughout the region.

1:9-10. By simple observation of the Thessalonian believers, the authors brought out some of the main components of the gospel message as given and activated by our Lord. We see at least these themes: Conversion. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Future. We wait for His Son from heaven. Basis. The Son whom He raised from the dead, and His work for us. Judgment. There is a coming wrath to be avoided. Those who want to avoid the wrath to come should consider that nothing in Paul's succinct rehearsal of the Thessalonians' conversion makes much sense without the reality of judgment. Why turn from idols to the Lord? Why the need for heaven if there is no hell? Why did Christ die and need to be raised? Why? Because God wanted to save us from the wrath ahead, a wrath exercised in holy justice against a rebellion that lies at the center of our sins. The only way to avoid the coming wrath is by believing that only God is true and rules with authority. Through Jesus Christ the judgment for our sins has been satisfied, and our future belongs with Christ.