

**SERMON THEME: LIVING TO PLEASE GOD**

**SERMON TITLE: CHRISTIAN MISSION: PASSING IT ON**

**SERMON TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. <sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. <sup>9</sup>For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

### **PROLOGUE**

- Previous sermon laid the foundation and introductory understanding to this sermon series based on Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians.
- In today's sermon, we will discover how to live to please God.
  - It pleases God when we hold on to our Christian identity (what we are to be), and to the Christian mission (what we are to do)– Passing it on.
- From Paul's letters that the Thessalonian church, we understand that they are thriving and flourishing, even though the church has only just formed, and is facing a dangerous time.
  - AD 49~51, the church of Thessalonica had just formed.
    - Members are new converts from Judaism or paganism, with freshly acquired Christian convictions and moral standards, and are tested by persecution.
    - They also faced the warfare and rebellion happening in the region.
  - AD 70 armies of Titus invaded and took over Jerusalem, where the temple was destroyed and Jews were taken captive.
- Structure of today's text:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> half – A portion of thanksgiving (a common Pauline feature), no teaching instructions, no explicit instructions on how to manage the church.
    - We will observe what is being celebrated and why.
    - We will also examine the traits that God desires to see of a flourishing church.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> half – Speaks of how the Thessalonians related to the Gospel
    - We see how the Gospel came to the Thessalonians, how they have received it, and how they then transmit it to other regions.

### **A. TRAITS OF THE FLOURISHING CHURCH**

### 1. Rooted in God (v1)

- Paul's use of the word 'in God' in his greetings could be to differentiate the Thessalonian church.
  - Greek word for 'church' is 'ecclesia' – Which means an assembly, a congregation.
  - Places emphasis that the church of the Thessalonians is a congregation of God, a Christian assembly.
- It could be a statement against the former gods that the Thessalonians used to worship.
- Crux of this inclusion – A reminder that a church, anywhere, will not have existed, let alone flourished, when it strays from God, away from the saving work in Christ.
  - "What stands out of Paul's vision of the church is its God-centeredness." – John Stott.
  - The church exists for God – it is not another non-profit organization to meet the needs of human.
- Overtime, we have shifted from a God-centered, to a human-centered reality/perspective.
  - How worship is confused with entertainment, the equation of being good = feeling good and faithfulness = being successful, the absence of God and His views when we approach contentious modern days disputes.
  - Increasingly, we benchmark our views against the world's standards, instead of adopting God's standards.
- When we grasp what it means to be God-centered, God's standards will become our moral compass, our baselines in action and perception.
  - We will begin to understand that worship is all about glorifying and praising God, the services we render to the church is about serving others, and we will begin to view Sunday services as opportunities to worship God.
  - Then, we will truly be a church in God and Jesus Christ.

### 2. Characterized by love, faith and hope (v3)

- 'Hope' is mentioned last, probably as it refers to the eschatological hope of the Second Coming of Christ, a key theme in 1 Thessalonians.
- This sequence gives us a glimpse of how the Thessalonians lived:
  - The work that they do is a result of their faith – just like how some of us participate in certain ministries as a result of our faith in God.
    - Works ≠ faith, BUT faith produces works.
  - They laboured in love for one another, not seeking repayment.  
(example of endless laundry done out of love for the family)
  - The steadfastness of hope of the Thessalonians who were facing persecution.
    - As we face our personal trials and sufferings, we can also look to the heavenly hope in eternity to keep us going on.

### 3. Loved and chosen by God (v4)

- God's love is the basis for election.
- To be chosen by God suggests that:
  - The election by God did not happen by chance, He has purposeful plans for choosing us.
    - God has specific purpose(s) in choosing people, and to have them be in situations.

- The sequence of events in our lives happen as He planned them, to lead us to where He had wanted us to be.
- o Election by God always comes with a responsibility – to be a witness to the pre-believers around us (evangelism).

## **B. THESSALONIAN CHURCH IN RELATION TO THE GOSPEL**

### **1. The Gospel came to the church (v5)**

- The Gospel came to the Thessalonians in 3 expressions – in word, in power and Holy Spirit, and in full conviction.
  - o The Gospel is Word.
    - Our personal integrity and character alone do no bring people to Christ.
    - Our role in the salvation story, is one of active participation through the careful crafting and spontaneous sharing of the Word, and of our personal Gospel experience. (Romans 10:14)
  - o The Gospel came in power and Holy Spirit.
    - When the Word is spoken in power and with the presence of the Holy Spirit, it will not just inform the mind, it will transform and convict the heart.
    - “The Spirit without the Word is weaponless; the Word without the Spirit is powerless.” – John Stott.
    - Word + Power + Spirit = Full conviction, as we see in the Thessalonians.
  - o The Gospel came in full conviction.
    - ‘Conviction’ here refers to the state of the preacher – Paul was not just confident and powerful in his presentation, he was sure of the message and its truth, the relevance of the message to the Thessalonians, and thus was bold in proclaiming the message.
    - Inadequacy in presentation ≠ Lack of conviction.
    - Conviction is the wholehearted belief in the Gospel and the salvation it brings.
    - How convicted are we, of the Word and its truth and relevance to us?

### **2. The church received the Gospel (v6-7)**

- The Thessalonians received the Gospel despite the suffering they faced.
  - o The reception of Gospel never comes without suffering; it often comes with testing of faith through persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).
  - o Churches often grow with parallel intensity to the amount of persecution they faced.
- They also received the Gospel with immense joy, given by the Holy Spirit.
- They imitated Paul, as Paul imitated Jesus, and became just like Paul is, just like Jesus (v8).
  - o “God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be... just like Jesus” – Max Lucado
  - o It is important for us to identify who are our spiritual leaders, and to imitate them as they imitate Jesus (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Corinthians 11:1).
  - o The presence of spiritual leaders in a church is important, so that the young Christians can have a sound spiritual model to emulate.

### 3. The Gospel transmitted from the church (v8-10)

- Definition of:
  - 'sounded forth' – To sound the trumpet, sending forth the good news of salvation.
  - 'you' – A plural form, referring to the entirety of the Thessalonian church.
  - 'wait' – To wait for someone with confidence, and expectantly.
- The Thessalonians had done such a remarkable work in their walk in faith and emulation of Jesus, that everywhere Paul went, the local church would testify to him of the Thessalonians.
- In current day Singapore, there has been an increasing number of performing artists who have openly shared their faith.
  - Through their sharing, we can see that the framework of their messages, is highly similar to the message that was transmitted from the Thessalonians.
  - It is a framework that we can adopt in the crafting of our own salvation stories for evangelical sharing:
    - How they (we) turn away from idols.
    - How they (we) serve the living and true God.
    - How they (we) have hope in Jesus' Second Coming.

### C. Application for the church and Gospel today

- Some reflection questions to ponder over:
  - Are we a church rooted in God and characterized by faith, love and hope?
  - Have we received the gospel, embodied it and transmitted it?
  - Are we experiencing the joy of the gospel?
  - Do we imitate Jesus in the way we live or are we even convinced of our faith?
  - Have we turned away from our idols, serving the living and true God and do we possess the hope of eternity?
  - Do we bear witness to the Gospel? Have we shared the gospel to someone before?
- If some of the answers are no, then we need to consider why 'no'?
- Two fundamental principles from today's sermon:
  - The Church must embody the Gospel.
    - "No church can spread the Gospel with any degree of integrity, let alone credibility, unless it has been visibly changed by the gospel it preaches." – John Stott.
    - We are not capable of transmitting the truth when we are not in the truth, and are not convicted in it.
    - It pleases God that when we receive the word, we live it out and transmit it.
  - The Church must pass it (the Gospel) on in both words and deeds.
    - Evangelizing encompasses the way we live out the Gospel in our lives, AND in our sharing of the Gospel.
- The Gospel must be at the core of the church.
  - The Christian Mission is not limited to just a ministry or a department in the church, it is the very nature of the church.
  - "God does not have a mission for His Church; He has a Church for His mission." – Christopher Wright.

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- The true meaning behind 'lifestyle evangelism':
    - Not that people will come to know Jesus by observing our lifestyle.
    - It means that we fit evangelism into our lives – We live, eat, breathe and preach the Gospel.
  - It takes just a spark, to start a bond fire going. Similarly, it takes a sharing to start the salvation story.
    - Will you be that spark, to culminate a wave of salvation?

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Amongst the many observations of the Thessalonian church, what is one aspect of their faith and example that inspired/stood out for you? Can you imitate that in your life/church?
2. Do you think we are a church that embodies the gospel and have done well in transmitting the gospel? Elaborate.
3. At an individual level, has it been challenging in sharing the gospel? If so, what are some of the things hindering the mission?