

A Model Church

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

INTRODUCTION

- A. Looking for the perfect church, a man supposedly went to a famous British preacher and asked for help.
 - 1. The preacher told him, “My church is not the one you’re looking for, but if you should happen to find such a church, I beg you not to join it, for you would spoil the whole thing.”
 - 2. There’s no such thing as a perfect church.
 - a. Reading through the New Testament, we see that churches are not perfect.
 - b. The Corinthian congregation had a whole host of problems; the Ephesian church was a good congregation, but they had left their first love; the church at Pergamum did not deny their faith in the face of martyrdom, but they did allow false teachers among them.
- B. The church at Thessalonica, while no doubt not perfect, serves as something of a model church.
 - 1. When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonian church, he breaks out in praise for them.
 - a. Notice the opening of this passage: “We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers” (v. 2). Paul says that he thanked God over and over and over for the Thessalonian church.
 - b. Greek epistles often opened with thanksgiving, and Paul nearly always starts his epistles with thanksgiving. In fact, some scholars think that Paul’s thanksgiving in this epistle goes through the entire first three chapters.
 - 2. In the passage we have chosen for this morning, Paul outlines why he could be so thankful for the Thessalonians. As Paul outlines his thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, he describes the model church. Let us examine the Thessalonians that we here might become a model church, too. A model church is:

A WORKING CHURCH, v. 3

- A. Paul remembered “before our God and Father [the Thessalonians’] work of faith and labor of love.”
- B. We have the famous triad of faith, hope, and love that we find in 1 Corinthians 13 and elsewhere in Scripture.
- C. It is not at all clear either from the context or from the establishment of the Thessalonian church in Acts 17 what their work in faith and love was.
 - 1. Yet, we do know that they were a loving and faithful group of people — when Paul was stuck in Athens and sent Timothy to find out what was going on in Thessalonica, Timothy reported of their “faith and love” (3:6).
 - 2. Thus, the Thessalonians were putting their faith, their beliefs, and their love, their care for God and their fellow man, into action.
- D. What about us? Are we a working church? A church working in faith and love?
 - 1. When you look at church growth studies, those churches which grow are those which do what they believe, work of faith, and those which care about others, work of love.
 - 2. Let us commit ourselves this morning to being a church of faith and of love.
 - a. Will we see that those around us who need food and clothing get what they need — not just as a congregation, but as individual Christians?
 - b. Will we see that when a guest comes into our midst that we make him or her feel loved, invited, and welcomed?

- c. Will we see that in our daily lives that we practice Christianity, and that we, as individuals, really live up to what we claim to believe?
- E. Will we be a model church, a church working at faith and love?

A STEADFAST CHURCH, v. 3

- A. The Thessalonians had “steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- B. The Thessalonians were steadfast in the face of some unbelievable odds.
 - 1. When the church was established in Thessalonica, “the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar,” and attacked the home where Paul and his companions were staying (Acts 17:5).
 - 2. “You suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they [the churches of Judea] did from the Jews” (2: 14).
 - 3. But, in spite of all the persecution the Thessalonians endured, they were steadfast, and they weren’t going to move from the truth of the gospel.
- C. How steadfast are we?
 - 1. Are we Christians who will do what is right regardless of what everyone at work thinks, or will we go along with the crowd to be popular?
 - 2. Are we Christians who will stand up against false teaching, or are we Christians who will be enamored by what is new and sounds so good?
 - 3. Are we Christians who will endeavor to remain faithful regardless of what is taking place around us?
- D. Will we be a model church, a steadfast church?

AN IMITATING CHURCH, v. 6

- A. Paul wrote to the church, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction.”
- B. The church imitated Paul, his companions, and the Lord because they received the word along with persecution.
 - 1. You know that Paul and those who traveled with him faced persecution almost constantly — in fact Paul had to leave Thessalonica shortly after establishing the church there because of persecution.
 - 2. Jesus suffered greatly because of persecution that ended in his death.
 - a. In writing to Christians facing persecution, Peter wrote, “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21).
 - b. We often use this text to speak of being imitators of Jesus without ever mentioning the context. What Peter says, in context, is: “You Christians be willing to suffer, even die, for the faith, because Jesus did.”
- C. Even though the context in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Peter refers to following Jesus in suffering, there is an important principle we can learn: We need to follow Jesus.
 - 1. There is a Christian classic entitled *In His Steps*, and the main point of that book has been popularized with the slogan: “What Would Jesus Do?”
 - 2. Although I’ve never personally cared that much for clichés, that one certainly hits the point- we need to live our lives the way Jesus would.
 - 3. Do you live your life the way Jesus would? Do your friends and neighbors see Jesus living in you?
- D. Will we be a model church, an imitating church?

A JOYFUL CHURCH, v. 6

- A. “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.”
- B. The Thessalonians had great joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is seen as the agent through which Christians are able to have joy.
 - a. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). Thus, as the Spirit operates in our lives we are able to have joy.
 - b. Notice why Paul says that he was able to rejoice in the face of suffering (Rom. 5:3-5).
 - c. “The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).
 - 2. So, as the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians, he brings unutterable joy, and he has every reason to bring joy into our lives — We have been forgiven of every sin through Jesus, we have a Father who loves us and hears our prayers, we have a home in heaven when this life is no more.
- C. But, are we a joyful people?
 - 1. Are we joyful when we worship?
 - a. When we sing, do we sing with joy in our hearts and a smile on our lips, or do we just sit there and endure it?
 - b. When the word of God is preached in our hearing, do we rejoice to hear all that God has done?
 - c. When we give, are we cheerful givers as God desires?
 - d. A cartoon shows a little boy sitting beside his mom and dad at church. The little boys said to his dad: “Mom wants to cook the dinner, you want to play golf and I want to play football. Why are we here?” Let that attitude never be among us, but let us worship joyfully!
 - 2. When we greet guests to our services, do we do so with a smile and an “I’m-so-glad-you’re-here?” If we aren’t a joyful people, why would anyone else ever want to be a part of us?
 - 3. When we speak of the church at home, at work, at school, do we do so in a way that displays the joy in our heart?
- D. Will we be a model church, a joyful church?

AN EXEMPLARY CHURCH, v. 7

- A. “You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.”
- B. The way the Thessalonians accepted the word joyfully even though they were persecuted caused other churches to take notice.
 - 1. You know how important examples are in Christianity.
 - a. To Timothy Paul wrote, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).
 - b. “Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds” (Tit. 4:7).
 - 2. A little boy’s over-protective mother went with him on the first day of school, and she insisted that she speak with her little boy’s teacher before she left.
 - a. His mother told the teacher that if her son misbehaved the teacher should punish the boy next to him.
 - b. Why? “My little boy learns by example,” she said.
- C. What type of example are we setting?
 - 1. When other congregations look at us, do they see us as a church that is doing what we ought to be doing?
 - 2. When denominational groups look at us, do they see a church which strives to follow Scripture?
 - 3. When the community looks at us, do they see a church dedicated to serving God and our fellow man?

4. What about the personal example you set? Are people able to look at you and to know that you are a Christian?
- D. Will we be a model church, an exemplary church?

AN EVANGELIZING CHURCH, v. 8

- A. “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?”
- B. God’s word had gone out from Thessalonica into Macedonia and Achaia.
1. This was a congregation concerned about the spiritual welfare of their fellow men.
 2. We need to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of our fellow men as well.
 - a. “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20).
 - b. “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
- C. Will we step up to the plate and be an evangelizing church?
1. I know many of you are willing to work as soul winners — so many of you invited someone to come on “Bring-A-Friend” day. So many of you do call and invite others to come with you. And, God sees your work, and God will bless and reward your work.
 2. But, what about all of us? Will we all step up to the plate and do what we can to make this an evangelizing church?
 3. If we want this congregation to grow, it can’t be just a few doing all the work. We all need to labor and work — as we’ve been given talents — to further the cause of Christ.
- D. Will we be a model church, an evangelizing church?

A HOSPITABLE CHURCH, v. 9

- A. “They themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you.”
- B. According to Acts 17, the Thessalonians welcomed Paul and Silas.
1. Paul and Silas were staying at the home of a man named Jason.
 2. When the Jews caused a riot in the city, the church sent Paul and Silas to Berea at night in order that they might not be killed.
- C. The church in Thessalonica knew how to treat guests, and we need to treat guests appropriately.
1. Hospitality is very important.
 - a. One of the qualifications of elders is that they be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2).
 - b. “Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13).
 2. Are we a hospitable people?
 - a. Will we take the time to cultivate friendships with those around us who aren’t Christians in order that we might be able to win them?
 - b. When guests come into our worship services, how hospitable are we?
 - 1) Do we take the time to get to know them, to interact with them, and make them feel welcome?
 - 2) Or, would we rather not have to fool with them and ignore them? How many of us really make an effort toward our guests so that this congregation might be warm and inviting?
- D. Will we be a model church, a hospitable church?

A WAITING CHURCH, v. 10

- A. The Thessalonians were waiting for God’s “Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus

who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

- B. What a wonderful thing to be said about a church that they are waiting for Jesus’ return!
 - 1. They’re not bickering amongst themselves, because they really know what matters is that Jesus is coming back!
 - 2. They’re not too busy to speak a word to a friend about Jesus, because they know what really matters is that their friends be ready when Jesus comes back!
 - 3. They’re willing to step up to the plate in the classroom and teach, because they understand what really matters is that those children be ready when Jesus comes back!
- C. Will we be a model church, a church that is waiting for Jesus to come back? Do you need to come this morning and become a model Christian?