

Thankfulness

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[0:00] Knowing what was true, believing my parents when they told me the truth about the gospel, the truth about God, that he existed. So it's difficult for me to pinpoint when that truth became not just something that I knew, but something I trusted in.

There's a great difference between knowing something to be true and actually trusting it. But I do remember one time walking back from church and just it hit me that everything that I knew, it was true, yes, but I needed it.

I needed it to be true for me. I needed this. I needed Christ to have died for me because I knew myself.

I knew that I was sinful. I knew that I was not a good kid. I knew this and I knew that I needed Christ for me.

So that was kind of, I don't know whether that is exactly when I became a believer or more, when a time of commitment, when I really recognized that I, what that meant.

[1:17] What all this truth that I knew meant for me. But then I was growing up, so that was, I don't really know, but I'm guessing about 12, somewhere around there.

And growing up at school, I was kind of half, you know, trying to live for God and then the other half, you know, trying to do everything else as well.

And this kind of carried on for a time until I was actually away with a non-Christian friend, my cousin in fact.

And we were doing things that non-Christians do together. It wasn't a good time for me. But I was reading a book and it was on Ephesians and the armor of God and the armor of faith.

And it just struck me that if this is what I truly believe, if this is my faith, then why would I do anything else? Why would I try and seek anything else?

[2:20] What am I doing? It was basically the conclusion at the end of a holiday. What on earth am I doing? If this is true and I knew from, like I say, 12, that this was what I needed, what else would I do?

So up until about two years ago, I was working for McDonald's and that was a real time of growth for me. So through this period where I'd kind of recognized that I needed to really commit myself to what I believed.

There was a time where I was growing, working at McDonald's, and then I decided to do a course with the SGP, a Saturday one. So I met Nick and I was thinking about going into some kind of ministry and how that might work and what that might look like.

And Nick mentioned that Christchurch had an apprenticeship scheme or ministry trainee role, which, like I say, about a year and a half ago I started.

So that's kind of where I am now. And God is still leading me, still working in me, and I've really benefited over this year and a half.

[3:32] I've really grown, and yeah, it's been a great joy. So I don't know what I'm going to be doing next, which is if you continue to pray for me, pray for that, that I know what next.

But I know whatever I do, I will be better equipped, and yeah, I really have a strong desire to serve God in whatever I do in the future.

Though it will most certainly include youth work, because I love it. Yeah, that's me. Thank you. He feels he came in weakness and with great fear and trembling. And that's kind of unsurprising, because Paul has had not had a good start, but then a frustrating start in his mission.

He's been to four places and been frustrated at each one in Philippi. After a good start, he's arrested, beaten, thrown in prison, and then asked to leave when they find out he's a Roman citizen.

[4:40] And then in Thessalonica, he has a good start, and then the Jews rise up, get a mob together, and have him kicked out of the city.

Berea. Yeah, those, the wise Bereans who accepted Paul's word, the word that Paul brought, but then Jews from Thessalonica come, cause trouble, and again, Paul has to leave.

And then in Athens, as opposed to many who come to know God, there's some of those heard. So Paul arrives in Corinth frustrated about his mission trip, and worried about this new church, this young church in Thessalonica.

We read in 1 Thessalonica 3, verse 5. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I was sent to find out about your faith.

I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you, and our efforts might have been useless. You see, Paul was worried for this church.

[6:06] But he writes this letter once he has the response. And he writes this letter in that joyful response that he has. He has Timothy's report.

He knows how this church is standing, how this church in the whole of Macedonia, their deeds are known.

He's joyfully writing this letter because he knows, chapter 1, verse 1, that this church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

This is the true church. That's who he's writing to. He's writing to the church that has truly come to know God.

He's happy because he's given his all for this church, as it's described in his ministry just before this section. But they are the true church.

[7:12] But how do we know who the true church are? How does Paul sort of distinguish what it is? What is the distinguishing feature of this church?

He prays giving thanks. He is so thankful that this church has accepted God's word. That is what he gives thanks for.

You see, I don't know if you've ever bought anything maybe from a market or as often nowadays online. And when you receive it, you realize that actually it's not real.

It's not genuine. It can happen with many things. It happened to me with a PlayStation 3 controller. Mine broke. I bought a new one. I'm an avid game player.

And mine broke. So I bought a new one online. Bought it from Amazon. Thought it would be okay. It arrives. Looks wonderful. Looks the part. Has everything that you might think it needs.

[8:12] Has some hologram on the back. It looks the part. What makes it genuine? Has this controller really come from Sony? Has it really come from Sony?

Or has it come from somewhere else? You see, it can be the right shape. It can even be well made. It was. It felt fine. It didn't feel funny at all. It can look.

But where has it come from? And that's what Paul points out at first. He says, God speaks and you listened. This is where the word.

I may have brought to you the word with how I brought it. This as loving you as children. That is why I brought it.

Because I loved you as children. As a father, as a mother. That's how I brought it. I didn't bring it with any false motives. That's what Paul says in the previous section. He doesn't do it for personal gain.

[9:14] This is all how he's come. But what he's come to say is from him. It's through him. But it's truly the word of God. And they don't just hear it.

As my testimony kind of says. You know, there's a difference between hearing something and actually listening and obeying. And they didn't just hear it.

But the word, they accepted. They really took it to themselves. They welcomed this message. This word from God. They didn't just add it to a nice bunch of ideas.

They welcomed it. It wasn't a take it or leave it for them. I'm pretty bored with the whole Trump situation in America by now.

It's going to carry on for many years to come. And it's just going to get dull. But I'm going to bore you with it this morning, I'm afraid. Because, you know, there are some things about Trump and his politics that you kind of go, OK, that's not so bad.

[10:22] You know, signing in that the federal government won't be able to supply money to foreign. It's quite convoluted. But for supply information for abortions, you might go, OK, that's good.

But then on the other side, I'd rather leave some of his more objectionable comments and character. You know, I take some things that he might do, but I very much leave a lot of other things that he says and does.

And who he is. But we can do that with people and politics. We have to do that here. We have to vote. How do you choose which party you vote for? It's difficult.

You need to choose one. And you take some and you leave some. But that's not the truth with the word of God. See, these Thessalonian Christians, they took and accepted the word of God.

And that's what marks them out as the true church. They have accepted God's word. And what is this word? It is the gospel.

[11:33] In chapter 1, verse 5, Our gospel came to you, not simply with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

That is the word that came to them. That is the word they received, the gospel, the truth about Jesus Christ. And they accepted it.

They accepted all of what Paul had to say about Jesus. So the question this morning is, is that you? Do you accept some or the things that you like about the word, about God's word, about the Bible? Or do you accept it because it is God's word, because it is true and genuine? But then Paul goes on to show that not only is God speaking, but if God is working in the church.

So, so verse 13, the end of 13, which is at work in you who believe.

[12:57] This word is at work in you who believe. It isn't just some theory. It isn't just going to a nice lecture on dark matter and being persuaded that it exists and you can see that it exists in the universe.

It's not theory. It's not being persuaded that something is true and then going off and having no real effect on your daily life at all.

God's word has legs. It acts. It does things in people. And that's what Paul points to. He says, you've accepted God's word.

I can see that. Timothy saw that. That's why I'm so happy because it's at work in you. I can see that it is in work in you. In chapter one, again, he talks of how they turned away from idols.

That is the kind of work that is done in their lives, that they've turned away from idols because of the Holy Spirit's power in their life.

[14:01] You see, they've accepted this word and because the evidence for them accepting it, the evidence for them really knowing the truth of the word, is their changed lives.

So, have we both accepted it fully and then is there evidence of that in a changed life?

That's why Paul is so happy when he receives this report because there is. And there's still evidence. You know, the evidence earlier was from his visit.

Now he's ecstatic that it's still the case. They're still living changed lives. They're still growing as Christians. They're turning from idolatry.

Is that the case for you? There aren't the kind of, so many of the idols that Paul would have been confronted with in Thessalonica.

[15:08] But there are plenty in our society. The idols of self, wealth, comfort and respect. We do love those things.

Do we seek them and seek after them more than we seek after God? Whereas the spirit of work in us, and let me be clear, this isn't leaving those things behind so that we can believe.

This is because, this is because the word has come. This is because we know Jesus is the only savior. That changes us. So, God's true church accepts his word.

But Paul, Paul then goes on to, to really, want to point out one particular area where this work, where God's work in their lives has really shown itself.

and, that is the area of suffering from opposition for his word. See, Paul points out in verse 14, you brothers have become imitators of God's churches in Judea which are in Christ Jesus.

[16:34] And, how have they become imitators? They suffer from their own countrymen, the same things those churches suffered from the Jews. You see, this church, this church is imitating the church in Judea.

That church that, that kind of everything grew out of, that mother church that everything exploded from, the church where the gospel started and has moved out into the whole world as Jesus promised it would.

You know, starting in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, it started in Judea. And this church, he's pointing, this is the same thing.

This church that is in Christ, just as you are in Christ, this same church, this true church, well, they have accepted Christ and they suffer for it.

And, at this time, the suffering, though there was definitely martyrdoms, we have in Judea, Simon, and you have other cases of martyrdoms.

[17:49] The tendency wasn't for that. There would be a greater expression of that in later times from the Romans. But there was much more opposition to the word of God.

It would, in trade, in society, you'd be excluded. Many of the temples would be linked to trade guilds.

if you didn't believe what the world around you believed, if you stood against it, then you'd be excluded from society. And, I think the church in every age, to a greater or lesser extent, but it's always true, it has to face opposition to the truth.

But, this opposition, it isn't failure. You see, this opposition that this church in Thessalonica faces, it reveals that they trust God.

It isn't, it isn't failure on their part or on God's part. This is showing who they are. That they are the ones who trust God's word for themselves.

[19:15] So, they suffer the same things. But also, opposition isn't new. You see, opposition is always, like I said, always accompanies God's people.

You have from the curse, that there would be enmity between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. You have Cain and Abel, the first children, and there's enmity between them already.

The righteous Abel with the unrighteous Cain. You have Isaac and Ishmael, you have Jacob and Esau. There is always opposition to God's people.

You have David, as we were looking earlier, in the children's talk, that there is opposition to the people of God. And there's always opposition. Because people reject God's word.

But, this opposition to God's word, this opposition to the gospel, people, when we stand against it, when we say what we believe, knowing that it is going to cost us and cost us dearly, when we do that, we show who we belong to.

[20:32] We show that we truly are the people of God, God's true church. But, opposition is primarily against God's word.

You see, in verse 15, so they suffer the same things from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus, the prophets, and also drove us out.

You see, the people are opposing Christ at the centre. The Lord Jesus is the one who is rejected by his people, but by the world at large.

And it is the word that is rejected. It is the truth about Jesus and all that that means. It's the truth that the prophets tell. It's the truth expressed in the epistles by the apostles and it is the truth that he's really opposed.

And that's why we suffer. They suffer because people reject Jesus, reject God. It's that Psalm 2 thing where people rally against God, rail against God.

[21:58] They're angry with God because he is king. And they I'll just read a few verses. Why do the nations conspire and people plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one. Let's break their chains they say and throw off their fetters.

that is the world. It is in rebellion against God his word. It calls what God calls good bad. It says what is good is bad and what is bad is good.

They stand in judgment over God over his word over what he says is good over how he says that he can be known. They stand in judgment over the very character of God.

They call God himself bad. And in some cases say that even if God exists they don't want anything to do with him. Thinking that their will can somehow outmatch God's.

[23:09] The one who's by his will created everything. So it's against the word and they call what is good bad. But we read in verse 15 they displease God and are hostile to all men in their efforts to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

You see the word is good. It is good and it's good for all humanity.

All peoples everywhere need to hear this word. And though the world may say that it is bad and harmful even hateful it is for people's good and to withhold it, to stop it, is for the harm of people.

It is against God, it's displeasing to God and harmful for humanity. Can you see that God's word is good for people?

And because it's good for people, people need to hear it. And because it is good, we can suffer for it. you see, my PS3 controller that looked the part, when I tested it out, it didn't work properly.

[24:53] It didn't show that it was real. It showed me, not in how it looked, but how it worked, that it was real and genuine, or in this case, not genuine.

It showed it where it came from. It didn't come from Sony. And the church that suffers for God's word, that is willing to stand because of what it believes, because of who Christ is and what he has done, that church, Paul gives thanks for.

That church, Paul is encouraged by, and joyfully writes this letter to that church that stands for God's word.

This church, this true church, this church that holds on to the word of God will be vindicated. I'm going to leave my PlayStation illustration now, but I'm not going to go far.

there's a company called ZeniMax and there's a company called Facebook, I'm sure you've heard of that one. ZeniMax sued Facebook recently because of virtual reality and they won.

[26:15] Facebook basically stole some technology. But it's all, how do we kind of know this? They won \$500 million in this settlement, but how do we know?

Well, they had a court date. They had to go to court to decide who was right, whose technology it really was, who stole what. Otherwise, if there is no court date, if it isn't settled, if nobody's declared to be right and nobody's declared to be wrong, then you'll never know.

See, there is a court date set for all of humanity. And that the judgment is required for the church to be shown to be right.

God needs to judge so that people will see what is right and true and good and see that God is right and true and good. And though we face opposition now and suffering now, it is limited.

You see, verse 16, halfway through, in the same way they always heap up their sins, that is by stopping the gospel to the limit.

[27:48] There is a limit to this, opposition. I think this is both temporal, if you look at Luke chapter 11 and verse 49 and 50.

So, in 1 Thessalonians, the opposition is against Jesus, the prophets and the apostles. And then in Luke chapter 11, verse 49 and 50, Jesus says this, because of this, God in his wisdom said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill, others they will persecute.

Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all those prophets that have been shed since the beginning of the world. I think there is a limit in time.

You know, sometimes persecution is severe. If we look through just church history, Soviet Russia, but that is no more. in Cambodia, but the Pol Potty is no more.

The Roman Empire, but that is no more. There is a limitation in time, but most importantly, there is a limitation eternally.

[29:27] God has set a date for this court to meet. God has set a date for when he will judge the world. There is an eternal limit.

And that means all the opposition, all the suffering, all the strife that we face now, there is a limit. It isn't out of God's hand.

He has set a date and he is in control. We can trust that God, who is good, whose word is good, is being good to us even in the midst of opposition.

He has set limits to encourage his people. But like I say, he also, judgment leads to vindication.

There is only one good judge. And though people at the moment are judging God and saying what he says is bad, they say that God is bad.

[30:50] That is the current state of thing, that there will be a day when the only good judge, that is God, will judge. impartially and rightly.

And he will show what is right to all. What is it that distinguishes those who will be saved at this judgment?

What is it that really is the core, the center of this whole passage, the heart of Paul's joy for these Thessalonians and the joy for us now if we also hold to God's word.

And his word most supremely seen in Jesus. That is what separates. There is two humanities, those who oppose God and those who trust him, those who take him at his word.

We're going to sing our last song, O Church Arise.