

The Life and Witness of the Thessalonians

Affecting Others

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 May 2010

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] Well, before we turn to Scripture, let's just bow in our heads in prayer. O Lord, we bless you that your people have this wonderful privilege of drawing near to you and of saying, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

We thank you for the spirit of adoption. Some of us reflected on his ministry just recently, and we pray that we may know in our own hearts the work of that spirit, enabling us to draw near to you in faith, enabling us to call you our heavenly Father, enabling us to study, to meditate, to pray over the wonderful teaching of your word that assures us that those who are in Christ Jesus have experienced the love of God.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God.

And may it be that you will work in us, that we may know in our hearts, each one, that we have that blessing upon us and the spirit of adoption that leads us ever and always to you, and leads us to know more and more of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We remember how the apostle himself didn't look simply at the things that were past, but strove towards new and deeper experience of you, and a deeper application of the word that he had come to know, and to glorify Christ thereby.

[2 : 06] And our prayer is, O Lord, that you would remember your church in our beloved land. We know that to say it's fallen on hard times is an understatement, and we pray that you would, as the great God of heaven, that through your own dear son, the alone king and head of the church, you would revive your work among us, and that you would break out in great convincing and converting power in our nation, that the people may learn your ways, that they may know the difference between philosophical speculations on the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and the revelation you've given us, that Christ is made to those who receive him, the wisdom and power and righteousness and redemption and sanctification from God himself.

We pray too, O Lord, for those today, known to us, some of them, who are being hit in your providence by the storms of life, and they are suffering in illness, whether it is a mental illness, or the deterioration of the brain in some way, or whether it is some physical disease.

We pray that in the midst of their storms, you would be there, and that they may hear you saying, Lord Jesus Christ, be not afraid, be of good cheer, it is I.

And may it be, O Lord, that you will meet them where they are. Some known to us and unknown to us are in hospital today, and they're worried about themselves, they're afraid that death may come and seize them, and we just pray, O Lord, that there may be a word from you, perhaps they heard it long ago, perhaps they overheard it, or something, or read it.

Touch their lives, may your spirit guide them, to call upon the name of Jesus, and to know his power of forgiveness, and to enter into the joy and peace of believing, that whether they live or die, it is into the Lord.

[4 : 41] We pray too, O Lord, that you would remember all those connected with us, those who are unable to be here because of ill health, those who are not able to be here because they're away, or those who are disinclined to be with us.

O Lord, remember each according to their need, and work in them, we pray, that they may know you, and that they may go on with you, be with us now, and pardon our sins and shortcomings.

Apply to us, we pray, the benefits of the death of Christ, because it is written, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's sin, cleanses from all sin.

So hear us, O Lord, for his sake, and bless us now, in his name. Amen. Well now let's turn to 1 Thessalonians, then chapter 1, and we may just refresh our memories on this, and read from the beginning.

1 Thessalonians chapter 1, at the beginning. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 58] Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing, your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope, in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you, for your sake.

And you became followers of us, or imitators, you remember, and you became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word, in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples, to all in Macedonia, and Achaia, who believe.

For from you, the word of the Lord, has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia, and Achaia, but also in every place, your faith toward God, has gone out, so that we need not, say anything.

Particularly these last, two verses we read, verses seven, and eight, so that you became examples. And we want to think about this, then, in terms of the life and witness, of the Thessalonians, in its effects, on others.

[7 : 45] And in a sense, you see, these verses, if you think about it, these verses, contain high praise, for Christians, who were so effective, in their life and witness.

And I suppose, that if we weren't studying this, in a bit of detail, you'd never stop to think, exactly what's being said here.

That these Thessalonians, of long ago, in that very much pagan, mercantile city, a city that was, full of wealth, and full of, false religion.

In that city, there were people, who were transformed, by the gospel. So much so, that their lives, were a testimony.

Their lives, were a wonderful example, to others. And it's here, in the scriptures, the Holy Spirit, moved the Apostle Paul, to give us this, to give us, these Thessalonians, as an example.

[8 : 54] And high praise, is bestowed upon them here, so that you became, examples, to all in Macedonia, and Achaia, who believe. And so on.

And Paul can say, then in verse 8, from you sounded out, the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia, and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith, God word, has gone forth, so that we do not need, to say anything.

Well that's high praise. And it's high praise, from someone, who was an apostle, of Jesus Christ. And it's high praise, that is allowable.

He's bestowing, honour upon those folks, because honour, is due to them. He's not flattering them. And Paul himself, was very much against flattery.

He resisted, with all his might, flattering anyone. Flattery, of course, is sadly, what human nature, panders to it like.

[9 : 59] It enjoys, to hear a little something. But flattery, is really not honouring, in the strict sense. And Paul is not engaging, himself here, in any insincere, approach, to the Thessalonians.

No, he's talking the truth. And, the same Paul, who knows, that the word of God, condemns flattery, is praising, these Thessalonians, before all the churches, because of the difference, in their life, and witness.

Now, Paul himself, was in Thessalonica, for a wee while. Then he went away. And, what Paul, is saying here is, everywhere I went, and every, apostle, or preacher, that came, into my, orbit, they had this, to say, the Thessalonians, have, been so changed, that everybody's, talking about them.

People were, deeply impressed, by them. And I think, it's good for us, you see, to just, take a wee while, and dwell, on this subject, and look at the, the life and witness, of these Thessalonians, and how it, impacted, both those who believe, and those, who had yet, to believe.

We can take, stop, we can, notice, just, the difference, that was made, in their experience, and learn, from it, as, from the Lord.

[11 : 39] I want to think, about two key points, and then, within that, one or two bits, that arise. First of all, the Thessalonians, pattern, to other believers, others, so that you, became, examples, to all, in Macedonia, and Achaia.

Notice, who, believe. That's the first thing. The Thessalonians, pattern, to other believers. believers. And, what we're doing here, is, that Paul is telling us, that their witness, well, in the first place, the quality of their lives, was such, that, they were making a difference, to other believers.

They were, they were setting a mark. They were a challenge, to them. Now, if you recall it, the last time we looked at this, they, they were so different, because they patterned themselves, on the apostles, or, particularly, on the apostle Paul, and his fellow missionaries, you see there, verse, six.

And you became, imitators, of us, verse six, and of the Lord. So, there are two things there, we looked at before. They, they patterned themselves, upon the apostle, and his fellow missionaries, and, chiefly, upon the Lord himself.

[13 : 11] And, the result of it, was, they became, they became a model, thinking of them, as a church, collectively, they became a model, for all the other believers, in Macedonia, and in Achaia.

I think it's, it's fair to say, that, when he says, in the next verse, that, not only in Macedonia, and Achaia, but also in every place, that we can bring in, some of the other places, where Paul ministered, in Berea, for example, and in Philippi, and in Athens, and in Corinth.

So, in that whole area, that we call nowadays, Greece, and the bit of Macedonia, of course. their, their, life change, was being talked about, under witness.

They became a pattern, for others. The word behind this, is, is, Tupas, a, a, a model, a, a stamp, something, that is to be copied, a working model.

And you see, it is as we consider, the, the life change, they had, and how they became, so exemplary, that, there's something here, for ourselves.

[14 : 31] Such was their, Christ's likeness, they were, worth copying. That's really, what Paul is saying here, in the first place. Such was their, Christ's likeness, that they were, worth copying.

Now think about it. What a beautiful thing, to have said, about, one's Christian witness. So and so, is worth copying.

That's really, what's being said, in the first place. The quality, of their Christian living, was worth copying. And, not only, were people saying it, around and about, in Macedonia, and Achaia, and the other places, we've mentioned.

But Paul himself, was saying it. Paul was allowed, to say it, by the spirit of God. It became part, of scripture. It speaks to us today.

That's why we're not, that's what we said, at the beginning, this is not, exaggeration, it's not flattery. He wasn't being dishonest. He was being, he was being, brutally honest.

[15 : 42] Such was the difference, in them, that they were worth copying. News, as we said already, had come from various quarters, and people, were agreed, that they were, an excellent example, to follow.

So much so, that it gave, it gave weight, to their words, it gave impact, to their words. For from you, sounded out, the word, of the Lord.

Verse, eight, there at the beginning, of verse eight. For from you, sounded out, the word, of the Lord. In other words, the change, that had taken place, in them, was like a, was like a, a trumpet sound, loud, and clear, distinct.

And it was, connected with, you see, the saving message, of the love of God, in Christ. Christ. The glad tidings, had sounded, in their ears, and they believed, the report, and from the change, in them, that, was spread abroad, by way of testimony, the word, continued, to sound forth.

It sounded, and resounded, in all the places. Your faith, toward God, has gone out, in every place, he says. And I think, it's good for us, therefore, to take stock, of this, and to, to, to think about this, in terms of, challenging, our own faith.

[17 : 24] Paul himself, of course, we, when we look at Paul, we think, well, he's in another league, he's in the Premier League, he's a way out there. He was, such an exceptional, character.

And we might find, a wee bit, a wee bit, dented, when we look at Paul, and we look at ourselves. He was, he was impelled, forward, the love of Christ, constrains me, for me to live, he says.

And he said it, in a prison, when he wrote, to the Philippians. Yes, for me to live, he said, is Christ.

And even though, I'm here, in these chains, I know, that it's for the gospel's sake, it's for the furtherance, of the gospel. Okay, I agree, Paul's in a different league, he's exceptional. But let's not leave it there, that same Paul, said of the Thessalonians, the quality of your Christian living, is being, sounded forth everywhere.

And therefore, that comes back, to you and me. And it says to us, well, we need to look at this, and we need to look at, where we are.

[18 : 35] And it seems to me, one of the biggest, practical hindrances, to us developing on, in Christian life. And it doesn't matter, in a way, you see, how restricted we are, whether, whether, we're confined, to the wheelchair, or we're confined, by, by our advancing years.

That's not the point. We do what we can, from the position we're in. It's as our days. And one of the practical, hindrances, to this, what I might call, Thessalonian, Christian type living, is the love of ease.

It's just, going along, in such an easy, ose, contented way, with just being, in the kingdom. Settling for the least, possible, achievable, progress.

Just, be content, to scrape along. I remember, years ago, when we were in Edinburgh, listening to, Alistair Ross, preach a sermon, on Caleb, the son of Jephunneh.

Caleb, you remember, was, shoulder to shoulder, with Joshua. These were two, champions of the faith. And, the great comment, on Caleb, is that he followed, the Lord, fully.

[20 : 10] Now, some of you may remember, sometime ago, I mentioned, the name, Caleb, is, really, Kolev. and, Kolev, means, Kolev, is all, and, Lev, is heart, all hearted.

His whole heart, was in it. He served the Lord, and his very name, bespoke that point. He followed the Lord, with all his heart. God. And, therefore, you see, what we do here is, we look at ourselves, and we, we, we have to, to say, well, perhaps I am, just a little bit, too much into, the easy option, easy OC, going along.

Just content, to amble along, hoping that, well, we'll just scrape in. Jesus knows, Jesus understands, he's a wonderful savior, so he is, but he doesn't, encourage us, to be easy OC, in the faith, scraping along.

No, no. He tells us, don't be slothful, in spirit, but be diligent, be fervent, in spirit, serving the Lord.

Paul himself, talks about, pressing on, towards the mark. Not that I have, already apprehended, but forgetting, the things, that are behind, even the experiences, of Christ, that are behind, I press on.

[21 : 47] Let's be like that. As are days, so shall our strength be, to be fervent, in spirit, serving the Lord.

And my dear friends, you can believe it, the spirit of God, never encourages, laziness, laziness, in the Christian life. He never, encourages us, to be slothful, but fervent, in spirit, and giving ourselves, to the, to the work of the Lord, whether it is, a ministry of prayer, we have, or, or hospitality, or whatever it is, we do that, wholeheartedly, be like Caleb, wholehearted, in our service.

that's the way, the Thessalonians were, that's why Paul, commends, what he heard, from all the earth, and parts, that their, their, their, their, quality of life, in Christ, made such, an impression, on others.

I remember, in the course of, our family readings, over the years, particularly, in the, in the past, I'm sure we've read, the book of Proverbs, many times, and, it always struck me, that there, in the book of Proverbs, you find these little gems, tucked away, and, when the Lord, is encouraging us, to be, diligent, in serving him, he says, go to the ant, the little ant, go to the bee, the busy little bee, go to the ant, and see how, apparently, they're all running, hither and thither, they're not organized, aha, they don't appear, to be organized, but they're very organized, each, one, has its own role, and, each one, is busy, in that, go to the ant, go to the busy bee, and, see how it, it busies itself, in being productive, and, and, clearly, that's what Paul, has in mind here, so that you became, examples, he says, to all in Macedonia, and Achaia, who believe, not only in Macedonia, and Achaia, he says, but also, in every place, let's, let's think about that, as it applies, to ourselves, and then, secondly, we want to think, about the Thessalonian, witness, as a powerful witness, to all, verse 8, your faith, toward God, has gone out, so that we do not need, to say, anything, your faith, toward God, has gone out, into every place, now, it's worth, reminding ourselves, that Thessalonica, was a strategic city, it, the, the Romans, had built, a highway, called the Ignatian Highway, and it passed, through,

Seth Thessalonica, it was being, I suppose, it would be the equivalent, of a motorway, in those days, that we have today, it was, it was a most useful, strategic road, it was a trade road, and, it came into Thessalonica, and went out, and went, to the east, to the east, because, Thessalonica, was a trading port, it was an important, city, in that way, ships, from all over the place, came in, the whole known world, came into Thessalonica, and, the, the, the city, was a, abuzz, of industry, in that sense, of commerce, but you see, because it was strategic, because it was a strategic, city, a port, and it was on the, Ignatian highway, a trading route, you can see, how it was, that, that the message, about the change, that happened, in Thessalonica, that Christ made, went, all the more quickly, into every place, by land, and sea, and the report, about the witness, of these Christians, in Thessalonica, traveled far, and wide, we already, noted, the reference, to the word, of the Lord, sounding, forth, but here, in verse 8, it is their, faith,

[26 : 35] God word, now it seems, to me, that we shouldn't, we shouldn't fail, to notice, a connection, here, between the words, far from you, the word, of the Lord, sounded, forth, and your, faith, God word, has gone out, because, the word, of the Lord, doesn't mean, a word, from the Lord, it means, the message, about the Lord, Jesus, and the result, of the message, of the Lord, Jesus, who is the divine, Redeemer, brought about, this change, their faith, was God word, the God, of the Bible, that's what's being said, here, the God, who is the living, and true God, and the Thessalonians, you see, got to grips, with this, and believed, the report, and the Lord, the Lord, the Lord,

Jesus Christ, became, to them, precious, and sufficient, and they wanted others, to know, that this is the true, this is the true God, and eternal life, so to speak, the word of the Lord, the word about the Lord, Jesus, and their faith, God word, they wanted other people, to have that, and to know that, and I can say this to you, without, without a flinch, it is a, it is a very, good indicator, as to our own, spiritual temperature, that we have a concern, for those, who are not in the faith, beginning at home, we ought, to see it as something, that is, root, heart, certain, that we have a, a love for the Lord, when we have a love for others, and we want them, to know the Savior, for themselves, the apostles, are a good example, they called their Jewish people, men, and brethren, they said, you'll read the book of Acts, men, and brethren, the God, of our fathers, that's how they speak, that's what their preaching is, men, and brethren, the God of our fathers, chose us, to hear this word, and they had a care, that they would know it, they wanted them, to know, about the Lord Jesus, whom they had, ignorantly, and causelessly, slain, by wicked hands, they wanted them, to know that, this same Jesus, that they put to death, through the Romans,

God had made Messiah, and Savior, and Lord, and they wanted them, to understand that, whatever was done, against him, was done, in the purpose of God, to give a Savior, from sin, and death, and hell, and they preached, the resurrection, they told them, God raised him, from the dead, and we're calling you, to repent, and to turn to him, but you see, it didn't stop there, it wasn't just, for their men, and brethren, in Israel, the Jewish people, it was for the Gentiles too, and this was, what Paul himself, gloried in, the Thessalonians, for the most part, were Gentiles, and they had, the door open, to them, and the salvation, of God, came to them, God granted them, repentance, and faith, and the gift, of the Spirit, we were studying that, before, in verses, five and six, the word came to them, in the Holy Spirit, and you see,

Paul is saying here, the witness, of these Thessalonians, was all about, the Lord, Godward, and about faith, and repentance, Godward, and one of the glories, and one of the things, that Paul certainly, gloried in, was that he, who was a Jew, of the Jews, a true blue, he was allowed, of God, to be the apostle, to the Gentiles, and he had seen, and he had seen, such, a change in them, and had heard, more from others, about it, that he simply, by the Spirit, had to say, your faith, toward God, has gone out, so that, that we do not, need to say anything, now that doesn't mean, we don't need to preach, the gospel, what it means is, we don't need to tell, anybody about it, because they know, they've heard, they've heard, the difference, the message has made, to you, and I want us now, just in finishing then, to think about, how this applies, to us a bit more, to think about, how it refers, to ourselves, what we can learn, from it, what we can learn, about the life change, the quality change, that Christ brought, and the witness, that was evident, in every place, the first practical thing, we want to do, is we want to, take, some encouragement, out of this, we want to, think about ways, to help one another, express our faith, we want to help each other, to talk, about our love for Christ, so not to be afraid, in case, we'll say the silly thing, and somebody will say, this or that, in other words, we're to encourage each other, to talk about Jesus,

I remember years ago, that the best way, to help people, who are a bit afraid, to talk about their faith, is to get them to talk, to people who are in the faith, you'll find it incredibly difficult, to share your faith, in Christ, with other people, if you've never shared it, with those who are in the faith, and the best starting point, is to talk to one another, then if you get it wrong, you're among friends, and from that, it's true too, that we encourage each other, in our Christian life, in the quality of our life, we're in this together, we help each other, grow, and develop, it is a wrong thing, to be looking at one another's faith, and criticizing, nothing comes easier, even to renewed human nature, nothing comes easier, it's not the way, it's not the Bible's way, we're not to rubbish, rubbish each other, to fault find, the enemy, will do that for us, he will give us, he will give us, grist for the mill, to discourage us, he will supply, more than enough, to confirm, how poor we are, in the faith, what poor Christians, what, what, what faulty, questionable,

[34 : 24] Christians we are, he'll do that for us, he doesn't need, you and me, to help him, do you remember, when we did that sermon, on Joshua, the high priest, in Zechariah 3, there was poor old Joshua, representing the people, in his filthy garments, he was standing, before the Lord, the second person, the messenger, and Satan, was standing, at his shoulder, do you remember, to accuse him, to oppose him, let's not play, into the hands, of the enemy, let's be encouragers, of one another, let's be there, to help each other, know what we believe, about Christ, know what we believe, concerning, the things of, eternal life, and so on, and help each other, onward, in the way, we need to remind, ourselves, you see, as to how, the great change, came about, we're to talk, about it, that wonderful passage, in, in, in the prophet,

Malachi, in chapter 3, says that, the hypocrites, all around, were, were saying, it was, futile, to, to worship God, and to go about, solemnly, what's the point, of it, and then, on the other side, it says, but those who, those who feared, the Lord, they talked often, the one to the other, and the Lord, heard it, and it pleased, the Lord, for those, who talked together, and who, called upon his name, who spoke about it, it pleased him, it pleases him, and doubtless, in God's purpose, that's why, the Thessalonian story, is here, it pleased the Lord, and the Lord, wanted generations, of Christians, to know, what can be done, for them, as regards, their life of faith, and we're to talk, about the, the great changes, that the spirit of Christ, makes, in the life, how he enlivens us, and how he empowers us, how he enables us, how he changes us, and how we're to be willing, to be changed, you see, professing Christians, are not to be, outrightly critical, of one another, they're to be constructive, if they've got a criticism, at all, they're rather, to be pulling together, to make the difference, not, in a better than now attitude, but rather, seeking to serve together, from you, sounded forth, the word of the Lord, the word concerning Jesus, in Macedonia, and Achaia, and in every place, your faith, toward God, and notice,

I probably never emphasize, this enough, he's saying, you, and you, he's thinking about them, it's plural, but he's thinking about them, collectively, he's thinking about them, you Thessalonians, you as a body, we're in it together, and as we think about, this wonderful testimony, concerning the Thessalonians, let's ponder it, prayerfully, how it can be, with ourselves, what areas, there are, to improve in, and for those, who are older Christians, among us, by reason of advancing years, you're, you're limited, you're limited, you're hindered, but you can ask, Christ, to let his light, shine from you, to let his presence, be manifest, in such a way, that there'll be, a lovely, spiritual fragrance, when you're, in the company, of others, you can make a difference, in that way, and we need, to talk, and be prepared, to talk, together, to witness, to the truth, that's in us, and for the rest, of us, surely, we're to lay to heart, that Jesus, bids us, be like this,

I love those, words, I learned, when I was a boy, Jesus, bids us shine, with a small, pure light, like a little candle, burning in the night, that's how he would have us, shine for him, and that's what happened, with the Thessalonians, you see, they shone for him, they witnessed, to the great things, concerning him, and may it be therefore, said of us, in a measure at least, so that you became, examples, to all, to those, in our circle, to those, in the wider community, and I say, what the prophet, said long ago, to the people Israel, arise and shine, for your light is come, and the glory, of the Lord, is risen upon you, and it's my prayer, that that may be true, and you'll know it, to be true, to be true, amen.