

Spiritual Influence

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[0:00] Well, this past week, I finally feel like I'm moving into my office, across the hall, office! that Pastor Kenoyer had, and now beginning to put all the books in the right shelf, and my family was kind enough to move those books in there, but trying to find them is another thing altogether.

So there's a system, and certain things go in certain places, and if I know where they are, I can actually use them. There's a shelf for prayer, there's a shelf for theology, there's a commentary section, there's a Christian life section, and I actually have lots of books that focus on church growth.

You wouldn't believe all the thoughts there are about how to make a church effective. And the question is, is the strategy really that difficult?

If we want to be a church that's effective, are there really sophisticated processes to employ in order to be the kind of church that makes a difference?

And as a Christian, as a person who is a follower of Christ, is there a certain formula that we have to put into work in order to be effective in making a difference in the world around us?

[1:29] Does it really matter? Or are there things that are more important? Well, this morning, as we look at the passage, our passage today, in 1 Thessalonians 2, I want us to continue to come to terms with the fact that a spirit-filled life is a power-filled life.

And a spirit-filled life comes because of an affection for the Word of God. The Word of God is making a difference.

It is playing out in certain effects and transformation that God is beginning to work. And we looked at those things a bit last week.

We saw that at the outset, the Holy Spirit is involved in leading us into salvation, illuminating our eyes to help us actually see the truth for what it is.

Now, then drawing us into conviction and helping to bring the gift of repentance and then leading us into salvation and regeneration, the new birth, and then stamping us with the Holy Spirit, that guarantee for salvation for the future.

[2:45] But the Spirit is also working in our life to sanctify us, to bear out spiritual fruit, to make us look more like Jesus, to produce within us the fruit of love and joy and peace, all those things we find in Galatians chapter 5.

He equips us for spiritual ministry. He fits us to be able to intercede and to talk with the Father. He lifts our prayers to the throne.

He enables us in the spiritual life to be obedient and to overcome sin. All the things the Holy Spirit does to make us look more like Jesus.

His power transforming us through His Word in connection with His power to make us a people that show the Spirit.

And you can imagine that when that begins to happen, that there will be a church and a life that begins to have spiritual influence. That's where we are this morning in our passage in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1.

[4:00] And maybe the question for us at the outset is, does God expect me to bear spiritual fruit? Does God intend for my life to be one that is making a difference in the world around me?

I think at the outset we would all say, yes, indeed that is true, but where is the text that we can go to to find this answer and to begin to anchor our heart into this truth and to help us understand its significance?

What is our purpose on this earth? Why has God set me apart and what does He intend for me to do? Well, if you were to look at some of the catechisms, some of the statements of faith, you would see that one of the major statements of faith is the chief purpose of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

And one of the principal ways that we glorify God on this earth is by bearing fruit. We worked through several years through John, the Gospel of John, and fitting within these final words to Jesus in John chapter 15, Jesus communicates this mission statement to His disciples.

He says, I am the vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away.

[5:46] And every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me and I in you, that as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

For apart from me, you can do nothing. By this, my Father is glorified. By this, my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

So what is the purpose of the Christian life? Well, of course, our purpose of the Christian life is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

[7:01] And one of the principal ways that we glorify God on this earth is to emulate the glory of God and the power of God working through us to produce fruit within our hearts and lives.

And it is inevitable. Those that abide in Christ will bear fruit. And Jesus goes so far as to say, you will bear much fruit so that my Father is glorified.

We exist to glorify God by making much fruit. That's why we exist. So the Christian life is a fruitful life because the Christian life is a word-filled life filled up with the Spirit, the power of God, producing fruit in us that then we get to see sometimes showing up as fruit in others.

But principally, fruit in us that bears out in influence in the world around us. God is working in our lives.

He is the one who is producing fruit so that he is the one who gets the glory. With that as background and as introduction, let's look at our text this morning in 1 Thessalonians 1.

[8:25] If you're a guest with us this morning, it's on page 986. 1 Thessalonians 1. I'll begin in verse 6 and work our way to the end of this chapter, to verse 10.

And then we'll start with our study this morning. 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, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

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.

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 and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

So this morning as we focus our attention on spiritual influence, Paul wants this church to understand that even though they may not be able to see it immediately, that their life has borne witness to the fact that God is working in them and they can delight in the fact that God is working through them to create spiritual fruit in the world around them.

[10:02] He begins by encouraging them with the scope of their influence and that is our first point this morning. The scope of their influence.

This is really the why. Why should we stay the course? Paul kind of gives them some incentive to understand what are some of the reasons why we need to continue to endure the hardship that you're facing.

Why do you continue to allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify your life and allow his word to grow in your hearts? He keys in on some special things throughout these first couple of verses particularly in verse 7 and 8 to help us see what is the true scope of their influence.

He begins with its breadth. He begins with its breadth in verse 7. You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

Well how? You might ask. How did that happen? Well in verse 6 he says you became imitators of us and of the Lord. Well then in what way were you imitators?

[11:18] Well you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. In other words the word produced fruit in you and the word took root and flourished in your life.

Jesus as he was sharing with the people there in Matthew chapter 13 he is communicating now some parables with them and this whole relationship of the word of God and its distribution in the world in the various ways that the word can be received.

He begins with talking about how the word fell on the path and what happens with the word that falls on the path. Well it's snatched up and taken away by the evil one.

There's no time for it to take root and to grow. And then the second example of the word that lands on the rocky soil it begins to flourish and it begins to grow but once the sun comes up it scorches that word and it no longer is able to bear fruit.

No longer able to grow. The third seed grows up in soil that is thorny it grows to a certain height but then is choked out by the troubles of the world.

[12:39] But the final seed that grows is a seed that not only grows but begins to bear fruit. Jesus uses this as an example of what happens with those who are truly converted.

and he points to the fact that those who grow in the seed that grows in the fertile soil will bear fruit some thirtyfold some sixtyfold and some one hundredfold.

Again pointing to the fact that those who are truly followers of God those who have received the word and it is actually doing a work in their life bearing testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit working within will demonstrate spiritual fruitfulness in their life.

Paul points to this with the church of Thessalonica in verse 5. He says the word came to you in power and in the Holy Spirit. He's taking joy in the fact that this fledgling church who has only existed for about a year or so who is experiencing tremendous adversity and opposition is staying the course and shows true signs of being followers of God.

He's comforted by that. He sees the evidence of the work of the Spirit in their life and it causes him a measure of thanksgiving and gratitude. The telltale sign of the Spirit's power in their life he points to in verse 6.

[14:13] It moved them to endurance and it moved them to joy. Two of the significant works of the Holy Spirit in the life of every true believer.

But the influence of this capital city of Thessalonica in the province of Macedonia was enormous. Philippi and Berea were also churches within this region of Macedonia.

It became the capital city of this province and enjoyed the economic and political benefits that came along with being classified as a free city.

Since it was considered a city of Rome it was free to enjoy and to exercise the benefits of that freedom. A powerful metropolis with easy access to all parts of the region because of the road systems that were created.

Particularly the Via Ignatia would take a person to all parts of the Roman Empire. And so there was access to these places and trade routes that ran through this capital city.

[15:24] There's no wonder why the church of Thessalonica had so much influence in the world around them because of all the travelers in trade that came through this capital city.

But what stands out about this church is the travelers that came through did not just come through unnoticed but somehow they were affected by the influence of this church.

And we'll look at that in a bit further in our study this morning. But in terms of the breadth of ministry it is expansive. Macedonia and Achaia were affected because of the ministry of this church.

The things that were taking place in Thessalonica became the talk of the town in the entire region. Achaia was the Roman province directly south of Macedonia.

In it were the churches of the cities of Athens and Corinth. For several hundred miles these two regions would span. Just to put that in terms of scale Ohio is 210 miles north to south and 230 miles east to west and so the span of Ohio would be encapsulated within this region of Macedonia in Achaia.

[16:44] It had a significant impact in the world around them. How was the message so widespread with such a young church?

Certainly also a small church yet a massive scope of influence. And here's where we can find our encouragement. encouragement. We find our encouragement in the fact that it wasn't a strategy on systems that they had dreamt up but it began with individuals.

Individuals whose lives were changed by the gospel and began to affect one-on-one the world around them. So that Paul can say at the end of verse 8 for from you the word sounded not only in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything.

Now that's that's a massive influence. That's the extent of their influence that Paul would say no matter where I go in all of these regions I'm communicating the gospel but somehow news of you has already gone before me.

It's already created a context for gospel ministry. How did that happen? Well we'll look at that in just a moment. So that is its extent that's its breadth now I want to look at its depth.

[18:22] We can see its depth here in verse 8. Just read that for us. It says for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere.

This word to sound forth is used in a in a sense that's called the perfect passive which talks about past action with continuing results.

The sense would be as if you were to throw a rock into a pond and that past action begins to create ripples into the rest of the lake. That's what we're finding here.

We're finding that this echoing forth, this sounding forth of the gospel that began there in Thessalonica began to find its way into the rest of the regions like ripples on a pond used only here in the New Testament.

It communicates the idea of to blast forth or to trumpet forth this massive resounding theme that's taking place or a roll of thunder.

[19:32] Paul pictured their proclamation as a constant sounding. It was perpetual. It was continual.

And the message wasn't what a humanitarian church or what a devout church or what a peculiar or strange church.

It wasn't what a religious church or what a knowledgeable church. church but it was what a God centered church because it was the message of the Lord sounding forth from you.

The word of the Lord had found its course from this church. The foundation of this new group of believers was clear to everyone. It was the word of the Lord.

That was the reason why they were the people they were that word had produced something tangible invisible. We see something of that happening in Jerusalem don't we?

[20:40] A group of individuals who devoted themselves to the teaching of the word of God and because of the close community that was affected we find in chapter 247 that day by day the Lord added to their number of those who were being saved.

And then a couple of weeks ago when we looked at the church of Antioch we saw again a word centered church where Barnabas shows up and he says the grace of God is upon this group of individuals and continually the Lord adds to their number because of the work of the word that was taking place in their life.

This morning I want us to understand that there is a message that is ringing out from you today. there is a message that is ringing forth it is it the message of the Lord that is coming through? This past week I had the opportunity to sit down with some administration at a school that one of my kids goes to. It was the kind of conversation that they were making some suggestions at how we should put one of our kids in class.

The kind of conversation that you kind of get a little defensive about and you kind of say I think I know a little bit better for my kid than you do.

[22:09] At least that's the initial reaction. And so it is incumbent upon me to say okay how will the word of the Lord sound forth from my life in this meeting?

What will be the posture that I will take in the midst of talking with some administration who has other ideas on how I should instruct my children?

I could be defensive. I could be derogatory. I could say well if you were better teachers then this wouldn't be a problem. I could say well he's my kid so I can do with him what I like.

But if the message of the Lord is going to sound forth from me in that context what do you suppose that's going to begin to look like? The posture of humility the posture of submission to the authorities that God has placed over me the posture of affirming the good things that I know about their intentions however difficult it is for me to hear those intentions to point to the fact that you know what I understand your desire for my child is a good desire and so when I leave that meeting what are they going to be left talking about are they going to be talking about boy what a jerk or are they going to be left talking about the sweetness of the fragrance of Christ the aroma of Christ that marked that conversation you see because the message of something will ring and is ringing out from you what is that message in your interactions with people at work and the way they observe your ethic the way that you maybe posture yourself for or position yourself for that promotion the way that you advocate for your own ideas the way that you criticize the decisions that are made there is a message that is ringing out from you is it the message of the

Lord that they're hearing or is it the message of the world coming through your mouth as a conduit you see this church understood the significance of the message of the Lord ringing out from them it marked every conversation it marked every interaction it marked their day to day there was consistency wherever they were in the course of their life whether they were at home whether they were worshipping as a people whether they were in the workplace or trading things from day to day the outtake of every conversation with those individuals was this is a people marked by God it was a church that was able to to understand the significance of the kind of people that God had made them to be and so the depth of their ministry was not just talking about how great the church of Thessalonica was but talking about how great their God was yes it had breadth and that was significant but more importantly it had depth the word produced something in their life a group of individuals who had been transformed by the message of the word and by the power of the

[26:04] Holy Spirit their message was consistent with the message of the Lord and it showed the significance the distinctiveness of their faith in God well that was the scope of their influence now we can begin to see what is the source of their influence what is the source of their influence where did it originate where did it come from why did they have such far-reaching influence and fruitfulness we see the answers to those questions there in verses 8 to 10 let me read again just verse 8 and then we'll step one at a time through these next several points the source of their influence verse 8 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 first

I want you to see that that one of the one of the sources of their influence was a result of their faith in God it was a result of their faith in God and their true faith in God actually led to two other activities in their life that we'll get to here in a moment your faith in God has gone forth!

again another perfect active indicative that's used in this passage that helps us understand again the significance of past action that continues to show continual future results the content of what was proclaimed was their faith in God in contrast to their previous faith in idols that we find in verse 9 but it's interesting to begin to see who was the actual messenger of this word we find that it sounded forth initially from the church of Thessalonica but in verse 9 notice it says 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 how did that message begin to find its way out of Thessalonica how did that message begin to sound forth in all these other regions where did it come from who was the mouthpiece of this message well some have suggested that it was the church itself who carried out the message from

Thessalonica and that is that's a it's a very valuable and worthy thought one commentator puts it this way he says the work of faith and labor of love expressed itself in their sharing of the gospel

with others they were both receivers of the word and transmitters of the word certainly that is true and as we look at the book of Acts we can see that this church had a gospel heart a number of people from this church partner with Paul in getting the message out to the region we find Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica in Acts chapter 20 we find Aristarchus also traveling with Paul to Ephesus on the second missionary journey in Acts chapter 19 and he even accompanies him to Rome in Acts chapter 27 and then in Colossians chapter 4 this is a church that has a gospel heart and so they send individuals from their church to partner with Paul in this significant ministry there's no question about the fact that this church was involved in the gospel process but notice this use of words they themselves report there's a sudden shift in language between verses 6 and 7 and 8 and then in verse 9 notice in 6 a you became imitators in 6 b you received the word in 7 a you became an example in 8 a the word sounded forth from you the second part of 8 b your faith has gone out everywhere and now then in verse 9 they themselves report you you you you they the use here is emphatic you or they excuse me they themselves report

I think this is an encouragement to this church who's going through tremendous difficulty Paul in a sense says you may not see it it may not be clear to you but I want you to understand that your suffering and your endurance and your joy is producing fruit it is for a purpose God is using it to accomplish his salvation in the hearts of people all around this region so hang in there continue on this journey continue to trust God to work results through you into the lives of other individuals these could have been believers traveling through Thessalonica those who came to buy and sell and to trade in various ways but I think as we see in verse 8 in the second part

[32:11] Paul says here your faith has gone everywhere so that we need not say anything which would indicate to me that in Paul's conversations with individuals those who are part of the church and those who were not part of the church no matter who he's talking to everywhere he goes the conversation about Thessalonica seems to be at the forefront of their attention God had used the significance of suffering in this church to actually create a context for gospel ministry in the lives of everyone living in Macedonia and Achaia can you begin to appreciate the significance of that Jesus and his name hadn't even been heard in this region there was no Bible there was no scripture there weren't any missionaries Paul's desire was to preach the gospel where

Christ had not been named they hadn't heard about Jesus necessarily but they had heard about this church in Thessalonica and the word of the Lord had sounded forth from them into all these little conversations that were happening from people who went through Thessalonica and they were just blown away by the testimony of the transformation of this church Paul in a sense says you may remain stationary you may never move out of Thessalonica but those who see your faith are sounding out the word for you saved and unsaved alike they're carrying the message remarkable amazing but that's what happens when the word of God begins to make that kind of difference in a life Paul shares the same confidence to Timothy in 2nd

Timothy chapter 2 he says to him remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead the offspring of David as preached in my gospel for which I am suffering bound with chains as a criminal but the word of God is not bound I'm stuck here in prison but my dependence isn't upon my ability to carry that message to the people that God wants to save my dependence is upon the word itself and the ability of the word to accomplish its work in the hearts of people you can have that same confidence oh church of Thessalonica in the midst of your suffering you can believe that God will use it to change the lives of those who look at your witness and to see your transformation their faith had gone out not just the word of the

Lord but their faith in Christ had gone out to that entire region but notice here also in verse 9 not only their faith in God but also their love for God their love for God he explains it in a little different terms he says this here in verse 9 for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God we find as a result of their faith there were two evidences two again words in the Greek they're infinitives that kind of set themselves apart here in this passage we find the first at the end of verse 9 and the second at the beginning of verse 10 the first is to serve and the second is to wait this first is to point to the love that this church had for

God and the second is to point to their hope that they had in God taking them one at a time first their love for God Paul uses this word to turn it implies a change in attitude but also in action this is true repentance that's taking place in their life there's a recognition of their old state in a turning to the Lord a new posture of heart that has led them to turn away from the idolatry that they had and to turn to devotion and worship to God himself and the word used here for service is the word *doulos* or the word slavery to be a bond slave this was the most demanding form of servitude Paul recognizes the significance of this kind of devotion and he points it out for this church he wants them to understand

[37:22] I see it and God appreciates and expects this kind of devotion to him Jesus points to this kind of service in Luke chapter 16 verse 13 when he says no one can serve two masters the same word is used there for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other Jesus creates a correlation for us in that verse that helps us understand that those who are true servants or slaves of God demonstrate their true love their true affection their true orientation you will either serve God and demonstrate your love and affection to him or you will serve something else and demonstrate your affection to it but you can't have it both ways it's either serve God or serve something else it was clear in the in the lives of the church of Thessalonica and to anyone who was observing them that their true loyalty was now changed their true loyalty was with God the Father in serving and loving him the transition was dramatic impossible to hide they could say

I exist for him all that I have belongs to him my focus my energy my resources my circumstances my message my struggles exist to make much of Jesus in every way but what helped to anchor them in their love for God was their hope for him it was also a result of their hope in God that we find here in verse 10 and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come because of their commitment and confidence in Jesus is coming it anchored their heart their soul positioned them for endurance gave them the fortitude to be able to move through their suffering and to look forward to something better that was to come it helped them to not to set their eyes on things on earth but to set their eyes on things above where Christ was it gave them a sense of urgency for the moment it helped them to understand that their life and existence is lived in light of the imminent return of Christ it created a sense of urgency in life a sense of consistency in their obedience a sense of pleading for those around them who didn't know who Jesus was their potency as a church was contingent upon their future hope in Christ's return their success in overcoming obstacles and temptation and struggle and sin and suffering and disappointment rested on the future hope the expectation that Jesus was coming and it helped them to wait not in the kind of waiting that we would say not the inactive kind of waiting but in the expectant hope filled taking action kind of waiting that was true of their life the Christian life sprung to action for them because of the confidence that they had in the future hope that Jesus was returning this morning what is your hope what are the things that you're looking forward to you're looking forward to

Thanksgiving break for those of you who are students looking forward to Christmas I had one of my kids the other day say I can't wait for Christmas are we looking forward to that year end bonus are you looking forward to that house project being over with is that what marks your life or is there a vivid present expectation in the hope that Jesus is returning and is that shaping everything orienting everything in how you live providing perspective providing balance providing a sense of urgency for life that's what marked this church and these things are what helped them to be a church of great influence and as individuals who were marked by the power of God coming together shining the light of Christ into the world

God used their testimony as an anthem into the world to make a difference in Macedonia and Achaia and everywhere that Paul went may that be true of us let's pray