

# The Living Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning we gather to worship God together and as we prepare our hearts to sing praise to the Lord, let me read to you this verse from the Psalter. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Let us worship him together.

Singing to his praise from Sing Psalms, Psalm 95, page 126 in our blue psalm books. Psalm 95, page 126. Singing from the beginning to verse 7 to the tune St Daniel.

O come, let us joyfully sing to the Lord, to the rock of salvation that does raise our voice. Let us come before him expressing our thanks. Let us with loud singing praise him and rejoice.

Psalm 95, we'll sing to verse 7 and we'll stand together. O come, let us joyfully sing to the Lord. Pure of salvation, let us praise our voice. Let us come before him expressing our thanks.

[ 1 : 14 ] Let us with loud singing praise him and rejoice. The Lord is the Lord.

The Lord is the great God, King of and of God. The earth, he lets places, he holds in his hand.

The eyes of the mountains belong to the Lord. The oceans and rivers, he holds in his hand.

The oceans and rivers can be formed that I am. Come, let us bow humbly and worship the Lord.

Let us kneel before him, our making of in prayer. For he and his people, and he is our God.

[ 2 : 24 ] He shepherds and leads us in his loving care. We'll bow in prayer together.

Let us pray. Our Lord and our God, this Sunday morning we bow before you and give thanks that this is where we are found. We thank you for the opportunity we have once more to join together, to sing praise to the living God, to bow in prayer, to open our Bibles and explore the good news of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It is in his name that we gather this morning. We bless and thank you, Lord, for the good news that draws us here, for the living, risen, reigning Redeemer, the one who gave himself for us, the one through whom we have peace with God.

We thank you that the New Testament reveals to us the son of your love, the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley, the one who is all together, who is all sufficient, all knowing, through whom and by whom all things were made.

Lord, we bow in adoration, in thanksgiving. We praise your name for the wonder of the gospel, for the finished work of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, for the empty grave that declared to one and to all that his sacrifice in our place was sufficient and acceptable in your sight.

[ 3 : 52 ] And so, Lord, we gather this morning and ask for your blessing on your word and the forgiveness of our sin. And everything we ask is for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, boys and girls, good morning, especially to you.

I know you go out after the next singing for Sunday school. I hope you really enjoy that and that things go well as you explore together the Bible. And when you go off to children's church or Sunday school or Bible class, what you're doing there is exactly what we're doing in here.

We're exploring the Bible to understand more and more about Jesus and who he is. I want to tell you something about Jesus, about something that he noticed.

That's what I want you to think about today. Something Jesus noticed. Now, last week, Aileen and I were over in Aberdeen and the East Coast.

If you've been to Aberdeen, you'll know usually it's freezing cold over there. But for once, it was actually, like today, really warm. And we're outside having a coffee on the Esplanade, the beach. Usually down that way, freezing.

[ 4 : 55 ] But the other day, really nice and warm. Outside having a coffee. Table, four chairs, Aileen and I. And as we're having a coffee, a wee sparrow just came down out of nowhere and landed in the chair right beside me.

And I was quite surprised. Because usually, you know, wild birds, they're quite timid and shy and they stay away from people. But not this wee guy. Straight on there. I could have shaken his wing. He was right there. And he had probably checked out what we were doing. Checked out what we were doing. Having a look around. Any crumbs. Any leftovers. Took off. That was quite amazing. Because usually, they're so timid. They don't come so close. A wee sparrow. Sometimes, they're around and we don't notice them. Because they're so common, aren't they? We see them everywhere. And that really stuck in my mind.

And it made me think about sparrows being mentioned in the Bible. And they are. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus is teaching and encouraging his disciples.

[ 5 : 58 ] Because they were getting a bit sensitive to criticism. Sensitive to opposition. There were people out there who didn't like Jesus. They didn't support Jesus. They didn't want to hear what he had to say.

And they were beginning to really get quite vocal. They were really opposing him. And the disciples, it was showing in them. And Jesus teaches them not to fear.

Not to be afraid. Not to be uncertain. And he says to them at one point in this chapter, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not. Therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. Jesus is telling us today that when we put our trust in him.

When we become Christians. When we ask Jesus into our hearts. We become so precious to him. We are valued. He says, you are of more value than many sparrows.

[ 7 : 01 ] And not one of them will ever fall to the ground without your father knowing. But you are of more value than many sparrows. And that's amazing. And then there's another chapter, just to finish this morning.

Back in the Old Testament, in Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 11, We get another picture of how God looks after his people. Listen to this. Chapter 40 in Isaiah is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.

The greatness of God. His power. His majesty. That he reigns and is supreme in every way. That's what the chapter is all about. But listen to what it says about how God looks after his people.

Right in the middle of that chapter. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them.

And gently lead those that are with young. A little sparrow. And a baby lamb. Pictures in the Bible. Of how God views his people.

[ 8 : 04 ] And that, children, is not for grown-ups. That's for you. Because Jesus said, unless you become like a child, you won't ever go to heaven. That means we have to just trust with all our heart.

That's an invitation to one and all today. The whole of Stornoway. The whole of Lewis. The whole of Scotland. To come to Jesus. And when we do that, we become precious and so valuable.

Little sparrows and baby lambs. Reminding us of God's love for us. Which we see in Jesus. Well, we'll see together at this point in our service.

The Lord's Prayer. Before singing again to God's praise. Let's pray together. Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.

As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses. As we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil.

[ 9 : 04 ] For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen. I will sing to God's praise from Psalm 84 in this altar. Psalm 84, singing from the beginning.

Page 338 in our blue psalm books. Page 338. How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, to me.

The tabernacles of thy grace, how pleasant, Lord, they be. My thirsty soul longs vehemently. Ye faints thy courts to see. My very heart and flesh cry out, O living God, for thee.

Behold, this sparrow findeth out in house. Who are in to rest, the swallow also for herself hath purchased a nest. We'll sing from the beginning to the end of verse 6.

And we'll stand to sing. Amen. How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, to me.

[ 10 : 09 ] The tabernacles of thy grace, how blessed, Lord, they be. My thirsty soul longs vehemently.

Ye fathom, O Lord of hosts, to me. My very heart and flesh cry out, O living God, for thee.

Behold, this sparrow findeth out, and earth's within to rest.

God's swallow also for herself hath virgin said and nest. In thy new waters, where she say, our young ones forfeited.

O come, O Lord of hosts, who art my Lord and King.

[ 11 : 24 ] Lest are they in thy heart, which I dwell, they ever give thee faith.

Lest is the one who strength thou art, in whose heart are thy ways.

Who passing through, O faith thou'st, in whose heart are thy ways. O soul, the rain that falleth down, thy fools with water fill.

O soul, the rain that falleth down, thy thy way. We'll read from God's Word together this morning from the New Testament. First of all, from the Acts of the Apostles, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, reading in chapter 17.

And then we'll turn forward in our Bibles to read from the second letter to the Thessalonians and the first few verses of that letter. Acts 17 and then 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. In Acts 17 we break into the account of what we today refer to as the second missionary journey where Paul and Silas, Timothy and at some stage Luke begin to bring the gospel around the Mediterranean basin at that time and across of course into Europe. We'll read from chapter 17. When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews and Paul went in as was his custom and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead saying this Jesus who

[ 13 : 24 ] I proclaim to you is the Christ. Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women but the Jews were jealous and taking some wicked men of the rabble they formed a mob set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason seeking to bring them out to the crowd. When they could not find them they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities shouting these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also and Jason has received them and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar saying there is another king Jesus and the people in the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things and when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica they received the word with all eagerness examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed but not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from

Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also they came there too agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens and after receiving a command from Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible they departed. And if we turn forward in our Bibles to the second letter to the Thessalonians we jump forward several months. We're not entirely sure of the timelines but some time has passed since these events in Act 17 and now several months later and several hundred miles away from the city of Corinth Paul writes to these Christians to teach them and encourage them to remind them of who they are and whose they are. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 Paul, Silas and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers as is right because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. Amen. May the Lord bless to our hearts his own word. We'll bow in prayer again together. Let us pray. Our gracious Lord we thank you that this Sunday morning we have once more the opportunity and privilege to gather around your word and we bless and praise you that your word will do your work this day.

We thank you Lord for the truths of scripture for the wonder of the gospel in all its vastness and the scope and its source and that here is the promise of life in Christ Jesus and we hear in his own words the love and summons come to me and I will give you rest.

We bless you that we meet in the name of a living risen saviour one who was dead and now is alive but we know it was not possible for death to hold him and we know that the victory is ours through

him and so we can say as every Christian ever since has said thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ for the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

[ 17 : 32 ] May the promise of life in the name of our risen saviour resonate in our hearts this morning as we worship and spend this time together gathered around your word. Lord we pray for the young ones who have left the service this morning what a joy and encouragement it is to see it's such a healthy strong youth work.

Lord we thank you for the work that's going on there for the evident blessing and for the fruit of the labour of the Sunday school teachers and others. We pray Lord for the teachers and parents and children everyone involved in the Sunday school this morning.

Lord may the word take root in hearts and lives and may the children come to know the wonder of the risen saviour for themselves. We thank you that around our island this morning there are many Sunday schools meeting and many teachers giving their time and energy to reach out and explain and teach the truths of scripture the love of Christ the wonder and reality of the gospel.

We pray Lord that your work would indeed be blessed today around our nation and in the world. We pray that the cause would prosper through the preaching of the gospel that your people Lord here and elsewhere would indeed be encouraged, nourished, built up in the faith.

That there would be a harvest Lord a harvest of prayer through the preaching of the word a response in repentance and faith toward the one proclaimed who is the centre of all Jesus Christ your son our saviour.

[ 19 : 03 ] Lord when we come to the cross we can scarce take in what we see there the son of God perfect in holiness the redeemer the one who gave so much the one who taught and healed and touched and instructed so many crucified to death in the name of religion.

Lord these things are beyond us at times and yet we know that while deep and mysterious things are revealed to us in the scripture the heart of the gospel is plain Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And may this message Lord resound in our hearts and lives today may we respond in song and wonder may we respond in worship and praise and may we Lord from here go on to witness this week ahead to let the light of the gospel shine in our hearts in how we conduct ourselves what we do and what we don't do what we say and what we don't say may our conduct Lord be worthy of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour.

We pray Lord that there would be a bright shining witness from your people across our island this week to come that edified and encouraged through the word today your people would go into the week ahead strong convinced and through that they would be themselves convincing to others around them for we know Lord many people read the lives of the church read the lives of Christian men and women and boys and girls and we pray that as they do so they be moved to read the Bible for themselves and come to know the God of the word.

We pray Lord today then for your blessing to rest upon us here we pray for the work of the congregation from the youngest the oldest for all the activities all the plans being made all the preparations being made for a busy summer season here in the town we pray Lord for the work that goes on in the hall day by day so well used and also for the welcome being made to the cruise ships on Fridays that Lord there would be a real opportunity there to sow the seed and to encourage visitors as they come to look at the church and spend some time on their holidays we pray Lord whoever you bring that you might bless your word to their hearts bless those involved in all the activities of the congregation at this time be with Calamurdo and Joanne we pray for the elders and deacons we pray Lord for everyone and all the rotas that are so crucial to the functioning of the congregation because without rotas things would very quickly fall apart and we thank you Lord for the servant heartedness of those who are willing to make cups of tea and make themselves available and also to speak about Jesus as and when these opportunities arise so Lord we wait on you this morning we bow in humble adoration we bow Lord in expectation in anticipation as we open our Bibles and turn to the word may the word speak to our hearts may we take Lord on board what you would have us learn from the ancient church in Thessalonica that shining example of steadfastness willingness to be identified with Christ and live for Christ may we take heart from their example and may we go and do likewise this day

[ 22 : 19 ] Lord we commend to you all those known to the congregation here we pray for those who cannot be with us those who are housebound those recovering from illness or surgery those in

hospital we pray Lord for those who have been laid aside and would long to be here but are unable through very may it be old age or ailment and illness Lord be with them and may those Lord who are struggling especially may those who feel the weight of life itself be blessed Lord by understanding anew today that underneath are the everlasting arms be with us this morning accept our worship hear our praise and prayers and draw near to us Lord cleanse us forgive us and renew us in the spirit and everything we ask along with the forgiveness of our sins for Jesus sake Amen I will turn to the first psalm and sing psalms this morning Psalm 1 version A Psalm 1 version A singing this psalm from the beginning to the tune

Bethesda blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk who does not stand in sinners paths or sit with those who mock instead he finds God's holy law his joy and great delight he makes the precepts of the Lord his study day and night we'll sing this whole psalm together we'll stand to sing Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk who does not stand in sinners paths or sin with those to mock instead he finds

God's holy law his joy he makes the precepts of the Lord his study day and night Bum Bumbo Bumbo

I always be, God's own away. If they are mine, the child has flown away.

They will not stand when judgment comes.

[ 26 : 05 ] For with the righteous sin, it is the Lord who sees and knows.

The way that I just know, but those who live, I need the light.

The Lord will overdo. We'll turn together in God's word to the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians we read from earlier.

Second Thessalonians. Maybe if you're able to keep an eye on Acts in chapter 17, because what we read of in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, what's described for us in Acts in chapter 17 is the planting of the church that these letters are written to.

And we can tell from what happened, what's described for us in the Acts of the Apostles, that things were both blessed and encouraging and really quite amazing, but also there was problems and difficulties and opposition.

[ 27 : 36 ] There's real life here. And we've just sung together today in Psalm 1 of what it is the Lord looks for in each one of us. This turning away. What a wonderful way the Bible has to describe what it is to be a Christian.

It's a turning that's involved, a turning from the world, a turning from sin, and turning to Christ. Repentance and faith, and they are joined together.

And at that moment, newness of life breaks forth. And that newness of life is described in Acts chapter 17, where, as Paul preached, we're not told very much about what happened in these few weeks he had, possibly a couple of months at most in Thessalonica.

But we do know that from verse 3 in chapter 17 in Acts, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ. Some were persuaded, and a great many of devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women.

There were conversions. There was repentance and faith as the gospel was preached. And that message was crystal clear. And we know it because even his enemies understood what was being proclaimed.

[ 29 : 03 ] And we see that in how they reacted in the riot that ensued as they tried to extinguish the church and have the apostles brought out and beaten if not executed. And we find that they're described in verse 6.

These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. And Jason has received them. And they're all acting against the decrees of Caesar. Saying what? There is another king, Jesus.

And so we see in these two brief sentences the heart of apostolic preaching. This Jesus is the king. And the Lord blessed that message. And it's what we have in our hearts as hope today. When we too proclaim and share and explain the gospel.

That the Lord will bless that explaining and preaching and declaring. For this is his word. And we are to share it faithfully, honestly, truthfully, patiently, and in love.

[ 30 : 08 ] And because Paul did that in Thessalonians, new life was brought forth and a church planted. And here in the letter, second letter to the Thessalonians, he's writing to them to encourage them, to keep them on track, to build up the faith which he hadn't had long enough with

them.

He'd been forced to leave. And we know from the Acts of the Apostles that Paul left the city under the cover of darkness because of the threat of violence and aggression that was heavy in the air. The Jewish community in this ancient city were absolutely opposed to the gospel. They were determined that Paul would suffer. And that anyone showing signs of interest in Christ would be mocked and humiliated if not thrown in prison.

And they wanted the church destroyed at its very inception in that city. And we know that because we read on in Acts 17 and find that not only did they oppose the church bitterly in Thessalonica, they went about 50 or 60 miles down the road to oppose it in Berea when they heard Paul had gone down there and was preaching.

They were motivated in their opposition. And so it is today. And it shouldn't surprise us that the enemies and opponents of the gospel are motivated people and organisations because they too today share the same example and mindset as the Jewish community these 2,000 years ago in that city at that time.

[ 31 : 34 ] They want the gospel gone. They want Christ removed. They want churches closed. They want Christianity banished. And we see it and sense it and hear about it and feel it today.

So these Christians needed Paul. They needed encouragement. And that's what they received when this letter finally arrived. Verse 3 puts it this way. We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

So Paul is writing to Christians. He's now down the road in Corinth where he's been ministering for around 18 months, a year and a half. But because of the news that's coming down from northern Greece down to the tip of the Isthmus where he was there in Corinth, he writes because he's hearing good things.

And he's hearing good things because we know Timothy went on a one-man mission back up the road, back north to Thessalonica to see how they were fearing. And he came back with good news.

[ 32 : 48 ] He came back to say, Paul, they're standing firm. And that's the setting for 1 Thessalonians. And in chapter 1 and verse 3, we have this wonderful definition that Paul has been told about the nature of this church.

They are a church who are defined by a work of faith, a labour of love and steadfastness of hope. And now here he is a few months later writing to them. And what we find is again another definition or description of the church in Thessalonica, which is much to teach us today and I hope encourage us.

And especially you and your current situation as you work through things, attempting to draw a period of vacancy to a conclusion. That's a testing time.

That can be a challenging time. That can be a time where the world, the flesh and the devil can get in and sow havoc and cause division and argument.

So whenever the word vacancy appears in any church, be careful. Be aware. Be in the word. Be at worship.

[ 33 : 53 ] Be at the means of grace. Feed the spiritual life within you. Be strong in the Lord and the power of his might as you go through this together. And I think because of that reality or that situation that you're facing at the moment as a congregation, there's much for us here in this passage.

Because it tells us two things. If we have time, we'll look at them both. The first is this. What that church had. What that church had. We'll look at a few things to do with what the church had. And if there's time, we'll look at what the church was. What that church had then. We are always to give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters. And that term there, Adolfoi, which was used in the plural in the ancient context, while the ESV is stuck to a rigid translation of brothers or brethren, had the cultural context of referring to both men and women.

So we can say, we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

A couple of things stand out here. The first is Paul is writing to a church that is defined or that's character is revealed to us as they had faith in Christ.

[ 35 : 11 ] They had faith in Christ. Your faith is growing abundantly. This was what Paul was looking for. Timothy, how's the church? How are they faring up there?

They've had a tough time. The opposition in that city is brutal. They are determined to quash the church. How are they doing? Paul, their faith is abundant and growing.

And so Paul gives thanks for this characteristic, this quality that he has been found in them. And it should be no surprise to us to find mention of faith so early on in a letter written by the apostle who went round the then known world, preaching of the requirement and necessity for faith in Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ was the apostolic cry. And you will be saved. Believe and be saved. And so he called people constantly to faith.

And that is wonderfully put forward to us in this snapshot we're given in how he went about things in Thessalonica. He was explaining and proving it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

[ 36 : 30 ] His message was clear. His message was Christ-centered. Christ-focused. And he preached the cross. As he did when he arrived in Corinth. We preach Christ.

And him crucified. And the church that fails to do that fails to be the church of Christ. We abandon the right to refer to ourselves as a branch of the church of Christ on earth.

If everything we do does not have at the front and center the finished work of Jesus Christ. The one who gave himself a ransom for many. Paul couldn't help but give thanks for this reality.

Look where he starts in verse 3. We give thanks to God for you. There's joy here. There's a deep sense of gratitude to God because of the description that's been brought to Paul of this congregation.

Or maybe there was more than one congregation in the city by this stage. Because Timothy and others who came from him was able to say, Listen, they're standing. Their faith is growing abundantly.

[ 37 : 32 ] There's a picture of this kinetic spiritual activity here. There's a sense of overflowing. Growing. Deepening. And we know that faith both goes down and up.

Our roots go down into the scripture. And we look up to our Lord and Savior. And we walk the path of life alongside him. The fundamental of faith was present. And this is the thing.

Which we always clarify every chance we get. We cannot understand the Bible and the claims of Christ. Why he died and rose again without speaking about faith.

There needs to be faith. We must trust in the Lord with all our heart. And lean not on our own understanding. And so we emphasize and look for faith.

There needs to be faith in the church. This is what the church had. And so faith, what is it? It's to emphasize and respond to the gospel of Christ. It is to accept the offer of salvation in Jesus.

[ 38 : 36 ] Come to me and I will give you rest. It is to understand fully and finally that in and of ourselves none of us are good enough. That we need a Savior. And that Savior who was dead, now is alive.

And in his grace and in his mercy and his providential ordering of things in your life today. Once more he is here saying, come to me and I will give you rest.

You'll know perhaps the story of Charlotte Elliott, the prolific hymn writer in the 19th century. Charlotte Elliott, her life story is quite remarkable. She suffered unimaginably in her life.

She was very ill health and deep bouts of depression and anxiety. She had a difficult life at times. And during one of those periods of feeling so helpless and physically unable to do anything for the Lord, at a particularly low point in her life, she wrote one of the greatest hymns that has been penned from that era.

And we all know it as, just as I am. Just as I am. Without one plea. But that thy blood was shed for me. And that thou bidst me come to thee.

[ 39 : 52 ] O Lamb of God, I come. And there is faith. Pure and simple faith. There's no prerequisite.

There's no work for you to do first. There's no preparation. There's no way to impress God or increase your sense of worthiness or perhaps to attract the smile of God.

We're sinners in need of forgiveness. And that forgiveness is found in Christ. And having preached that message and seen men and women respond in faith, Paul now gives thanks to God, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly.

In this church then, there is faith. It was not misplaced. It was not static. It was not formal or dry or oppressive. It was vigorously growing.

It was growing very much. It's growing, this phrase here from the Greek, growing abundantly, is beyond measure. There's something wonderful going on here that they're growing up into him who is the head.

[ 41 : 01 ] They're developing their understanding. They're deepening their trust. And they're growing in their understanding of the gospel of grace and the personal work of Christ. And it's this trust, it's this faith that makes them members of the church of the Thessalonians because they are in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's what faith affects. That's what, if you like, the consequences of faith. We are brought from death to life. We are brought from darkness to light.

We are brought from being far off. And we are made near in the blood of Christ, through whom we have redemption of our sins.

And so Paul is giving thanks to God for he could say of these people, they have been justified by faith. And they have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And my appeal today would be to you, to ask you this question, if the assessment of this church, if we lift it off and we place it in front of ourselves today.

[ 42 : 11 ] Yourselves as individuals and a congregation. Myself as individuals. Does this characteristic define us? Does it define you? Faith in Christ?

There's another characteristic here. We see it in the same verse. He's giving thanks for the congregation in Thessalonica because their faith is growing abundantly. And notice this. The love of every one of you for one another is also increasing.

This is wonderful. There is a constancy in this growth. If there was a graph, it's going in only one way.

Up. Their love is increasing. So they had love for one another. Their inner bond with Christ showed itself in an open bond between his people. What Christ had worked in was being seen by how they conducted themselves towards one another.

The love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Paul is seeing here the marks of the true church. Faith in Christ. And love among the Lord's people for one another.

[ 43 : 22 ] And what a bastion that is to the world. Faith in Christ. Love for the brothers and sisters. When the enemy is confronted with these bulwarks, there's no easy access point for him, is there?

So what does he do? He begins to tunnel. That's what he does. He's an underminer in every sense. He will try to burrow down to get underneath the faith in Christ.

And underneath the love for one another. In order to sow his lies and deception. And sow disunity. And throw his hand grenades. And break down these bastions. So he can get in and seek and search and destroy the vitality that is a beacon of light in a world of darkness.

That's what the devil wants to do to store in a free church today. He wants to dim the light of the gospel in your lives. So there's even less witness in the town. So there's less commitment in the town.

He wants the prayer meetings to slowly die away. He wants attendance at the means of grace. Just to begin to become a struggle. He wants the Bible closed.

[ 44 : 28 ] And if he achieves any of this, it's to the detriment of the town. Because the witness is being sidelined.

Silenced. Stymied. And so we take on the whole armour of God. And we resist the devil. And we do so by increasing in our faith.

And deepening our love for one another. That the light of the gospel would shine brightly. And how we conduct ourselves in here. Before we go out there.

And so he has this wonderful sense of love. Has united the whole church. His prayer has been answered. In the first letter. In chapter 3 and verse 12. We find him praying for these people in Thessalonica.

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another. Timothy, what's happening up there? How are they getting on? Paul, there's faith in Christ. It's evident. And they love one another.

[ 45 : 29 ] His prayer has been answered. And here is the definition. He gives thanks. He's encouraged. Because of their faith. And because of their love. There's a wonderful chapter in the Confession of Faith.

Which all office bearers in the free church subscribe to. A statement of their faith. That speaks of the communion of saints. Let me just read these few lines to you. Saints by profession. Are bound to maintain a holy fellowship.

And communion in the worship of God. This communion as God offers opportunity. Is to be extended to all those who in every place. Call upon the name.

Of the Lord Jesus. There's a humility there. Count others better than yourselves. Christ's work in our hearts is something that's to be seen.

And here in this ancient congregation it is being seen in the full. Faith in Christ has defined them. Their love for one another is marking them out. And then we also have this in verse 4.

[ 46 : 40 ] We ourselves boast about you. In the churches of God. For your steadfastness and faith. In all your persecutions and the afflictions you are enduring. There's the reality check.

Faith in Christ. Love for one another. Oh that's a free ride then. Things go easy. Things are cushy. Things are comfortable. And straightforward. And easy day by day.

It's the opposite. As anyone here who's been on the road. Will testify. The road of faith that is. As we increase or progress in our pilgrimage.

We come to understand more and more the opposition of the world that's out there. Our own failings. The sensitivity that we develop to sin. The tender conscience that the gospel implants. And we understand we're sinners. In need of a saviour. And that's who we have in Christ. And so we put our hand into his. And we follow him.

[ 47 : 40 ] And walk with him. And take his promises. I am with you always. It's the promise of the Lord Jesus. And so just as faith attracted Paul's delight.

And just as love gave him great encouragement. So these characteristics attracted the world's hatred. Persecution had broken out. And so we have already a reference to persecution and afflictions.

And the need to endure. And as you go through the rest of just chapter one. You'll find several more references to suffering and affliction. These Christians knew what it was to be marked out.

And what marked them out? Their faith in Christ. Their love for one another. And thirdly here. Their patience in hardship. They were enduring.

They were enduring the hard pathway. That the world was trying to pull them from. The king's highway. And look in chapter 21.

[ 48 : 42 ] Jesus prepares us for times like this. You will be hated for my name's sake. But in your patience possess your souls. Or gain your lives. Let patience have its perfect work.

They were paying a heavy price. But they were paying that price patiently. This is the character of Christ's church. Faith in the Lord. Love for the Lord's people.

Patience and enduring hardship. And I wonder friends today. If you've taken your place in this church. If you have come from darkness to light.

If you've responded in repentance and faith to the gospel of your Lord and Saviour. If you have cried out, Lord be merciful to me a sinner. That prayer of utter dejection and acknowledgement of your need to be forgiven.

But friends don't we know that it's not popular to share that message today. Today, the world does not want to hear about the need of a Saviour. The need to be cleansed.

[ 49 : 43 ] The need to be forgiven. The world doesn't want to hear that it's not okay to be outwith of Christ. The world around us don't want to know about the returning Saviour who will judge the world in righteousness.

And as for the reality of sin and the awfulness of hell. Well, don't go there. Talk about Easter. Talk about Christmas. Well, you can talk about the cross. But don't talk about why he died.

Don't talk about the awfulness of sin. Don't talk about the need for atonement. Don't give us that. The world today would dilute and delete vast swathes of the Bible in a heartbeat.

And we can't stand for that. We must take our stand and endure the hardship of a marked out for Christ if indeed you are in Christ. And I hope and pray today that as he looks upon each one of us and looks into your heart that he sees their faith and love and patience.

Just to close this morning, having thought a little bit about what this church had. And it does overlap and we've probably covered it already. But what this church was emerges from what this church had.

[ 50 : 51 ] Faith, love and patience. They had these things. And so because of that, we notice what Paul said. We ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith.

That word there, steadfastness, is a very rich word and has a root meaning of to endure or persevere with patience and hope. What is our hope today?

Our hope today is that there is another king, Jesus, who is on the throne of this universe, reigning and ruling and calling sinners to himself.

And so Paul is here, this wonderful language. We boast about you in the churches of God. It's just not the sin of pride. No. What he's talking about here are two things. They were an example to other churches.

And they were also a witness to the world. These things combined, don't they? And we've probably covered them enough. But just to close today by keeping our mind on what this church was because of what this church had.

[ 51 : 53 ] They were an example to other churches. They were constant in their time of testing and challenge and conflict. And Paul is saying, you think you've got it tough?

Let me tell you about the church in Thessalonica. The opposition they face is so brutal, so organized, so committed, that they have been persecuted for months.

Picked out. Harangued. Harassed. Isolated. Threatened with jail. All sorts of what's going on in this ancient city. And yet Paul could boast about them for their steadfastness and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions they were enduring.

Maybe that's because some were sitting back saying, oh, if Christians shouldn't be suffering these things, surely it's not right to go through difficult times, hard times. What? None of us are exempt. The realities of life. Illness. Bereavement. Unemployment. Pressure. Stress. Depression. Addiction. And these things that are the things of life, often they come in and they can leave us feeling so low, so weak, so vulnerable, so isolated at times.

[ 53 : 06 ] So Paul is saying here, he gives thanks to God for the example they are to others to also persevere, to deepen their faith, to oppose the world, the flesh, the devil, and the enemy.

He would write later to the church in Corinth, these wonderful words. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

Struck down, but not destroyed. We do not lose heart. And we don't lose heart if we keep our focus. If we remember the way of the cross will at times be hard because the way of the cross is always in conflict with the way of the world.

Yet, the fact remains, it is the way of the cross that Jesus calls us to. And so I would urge you today, friends, to come to him.

Take your place with him. Rejoice in the salvation you experience and find in him. Take your place in the church here. Contribute to the work.

[ 54 : 21 ] Do your bit. Do your utmost for his highest, as Oswald Chambers so famously said. Put Christ first. Make him a forethought, not an afterthought.

Give him the very best of your time, your energy, your resources, your finances. Do what you can in your way for the cause of Christ here in the congregation.

That you would take your place among the Lord's people and with them give evidence of faith in Christ. Love for one another and patience in endurance.

And then you too, by default, without trying anything else, will become an example to other churches. And a witness to the world.

You see, Christ calls us and yet leaves us in the world, doesn't he? And so we don't build walls. We build bridges. Bridges out there into the community where people don't want to hear these things.

[ 55 : 23 ] And perhaps are confused about these things. And uncertain about faith and love and endurance. And uncertain about the finished work of Christ. And I'm not entirely sure if heaven, if we all just go there anyway.

Isn't that such a default setting in minds around us? That's what God does, isn't it? And we have to say with all gentleness and humility and love, no, it's not.

You see, the wages of sin is death. And death is separation from God. Eternal banishment. And if you have time today. I encourage you to look at 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and the next several verses.

We never read them this morning. And Paul is immediately there drawn to speak of the judgment of God. And there in solemnity and humility and clarity.

He calls us all to see that there will be a day where the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels and flaming fire. Inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God.

[ 56 : 34 ] And so there's the question. Do you today know God? Have you put your trust and faith in him? Have you called out to his son, the son of righteousness?

Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. I pray so. So that in that day, you'll have no reason to fear. But to rejoice. For every eye will see him.

For every eye will see him. For every eye will see him. For every eye will see him. And may he bless to us his word today. Let's pray for a moment together. Lord our God, be with us this day. We thank you that when we open the Bible, we read of these churches that were planted in the midst of persecution and stood the test. They persevered.

Their faith grew. Their love increased. Lord, what an example it is to us today. May we take the encouragement that is for us in these words, in this pattern that's revealed to us in the ancient days.

[ 57 : 38 ] That these Christians, these men and women, these families gathered just as we have today. Seeking the truths of scripture and the blessing of God Almighty in the gospel.

Lord, we ask that you would be with us this morning. That you would go before us into the week ahead. That we would take to heart these things. The things of grace. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Well, we'll close our service this morning. We'll turn to the Psalter.

Psalms 43. Psalm 43. We'll sing from verse 3 to verse 5 to the tune. Invocation.

Psalms 43. Singing from verse 3 to verse 5. I will send your light forth and your truth. Let them...

Sorry, I'm reading from the wrong one, Ali. Sorry. My apologies.

[ 58 : 34 ] 43 verses 3 to 5 in the Psalter. Page 264. Well, send thy light forth and thy truth. Let them be guides to me. And bring me to thine holy hill.

Even where thy dwellings be. If you would give me a moment after we stand to sing. To get to the door this morning. That would be appreciated. Let's stand and sing to the end of the psalm. Amen. Oh, send thy light forth and thy truth.

Let them be guides to me. And bring me to thy holy hill.

Even where thy dwellings be. And will I turn to God's altar.

To pour my chiefest joy. Take God, my God, thy name to praise.

[ 59 : 43 ] My heart, my heart, my heart. I will employ.

I will employ. Why art thou then cast down my soul?

For truth is God it thee. And why with exiling thoughts are bound.

This quiet it in me. Still trust in God for him to praise.

Truth was I yet shall have. He is my God. He is my God.

[ 60 : 44 ] And sister help. My God. My God.

My God. That doth me save. That doth me save. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.