

# A Time To Encourage

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Date: 26 March 2023

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to begin our worship by singing to God's praise. We're going to sing in Psalm 147, the Sing Psalms version, verse 14 to verse 20, in the tune of St. Leonard. Psalm 147, page 193 of the psalm books, at verse 14, the Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land, and fine as wheat will fill your fields from his sustaining hand. We'll sing from verse 14 to 20, to God's praise.

The Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land, and fine as wheat will fill your fields from his sustaining hand.

To all the corners of the earth, the Lord's commands proceed.

For when he speaks, his word goes forth, through all the worlds with speed.

He spreads the snow as whole the frost, like ashes on the land.

[ 1 : 39 ] He hurls forth, I see, hill like stones. Who can such cold withstand?

But when he sends his mighty word, and makes the warm winds blow, the frozen waters start to melt, and once again to flow.

To Jacob God declares his word, and makes his job prints known.

His ordinances he reveals to Israel alone.

He has not dealt in such a way with any other race.

[ 2 : 58 ] To us alone he shows his laws, O praise the Lord of grace.

Amen. Well, we're joined together in a word of prayer. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, as we come to worship you anew this day, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for what we have sung from your word, that it reminds us that your word is powerful, and that you are the God who enables it to be powerful. It is not through our own means, it is not through what we say, but what you are saying to us, that we find the power of your word.

And it's reminded us there of how, when we see snow around us, even as we have in these last few weeks, how we see it sometimes so deep, and so much of it all around us, and we wonder, will it ever go at times?

And yet as the sun comes out, it is able to give the warmth of the sun, to melt it, and to make it flow. And so it is with our hearts, as the psalmist describes. That though our hearts can be cold and hard at times, that your word is able to melt our hearts, to fill us with gladness, to fill us with joy, to fill us with your encouragement.

[ 4 : 24 ] And so we pray today, Lord, that you will indeed encourage us all together. May you bless us and be with us in all that we do, and all that we say this day, and all that we meet this day, as we look forward to a day of worship together, both here and through in the hall, in fellowship with one another this evening, as we will hear from a different preacher as well.

Lord, we pray your blessing on Aviel as he speaks to us, and for those who go down to back, for the youth fellowship as well, and for the round of Yamakritzias, he ministers there today.

We pray your blessing on him and the congregation back, and all the fellowship that they enjoy together. Lord, may we have a day of joy with you this day, and rejoice that you are our Lord, and you are our God.

So may you bless us together, and all our families, our friends, all around us, in school, and in Sunday school today as well. And especially as children look forward to a time of holiday in these coming weeks with Easter holidays, we pray that you'll keep everyone safe and well, and give rest and refreshment to everyone who needs it at this time.

So Lord, continue with us today, guide us and keep us, and pardon us in all our sins. We ask all things for your sake, and for your glory. Amen. It's good to see young ones here today, and well done, first of all, adults as well, remembering to change your clocks last night.

[ 5 : 51 ] So who woke up this morning wondering, wonder what time it is? Is it half past six, half past seven, half past eight? It's all confusing when we have to change the clock sometimes, but then thankfully you can check and find the right place where you know the right time, and are able to come along to church.

So it's good to see everyone here today, and today we're going to be thinking about the word encourage. Encourage. We're going to be looking at a letter in the New Testament that Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, and it's very much a letter that encourages people.

Do you know what the word encourage means? I'm sure many of you know what the word encourage means. It's a good word, and it's a word that we're going to just think about for a wee moment just now.

Now, in his letter to the Thessalonians, in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians, there's a verse there, verse 11, and it says this, therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you have been doing.

And so there we read Paul encouraging the people, saying encourage one another. So it's a good thing. So what do you think it means to encourage? Sometimes it's to say something nice.

[ 7 : 05 ] Sometimes it's to do something nice. Sometimes it's just to look out for someone, to maybe give someone a phone call, to meet someone in the street, to say hello to them, and how are you, and it's nice to see you.

We can encourage each other in so many different ways. And this letter that Paul writes is a letter where he's writing to encourage us. And so think about the ways that we encourage.

As children, do you encourage one another? Do you encourage your brother and your sister? Or do you say nasty things to them? No, we should say nice things, shouldn't we?

Just to encourage them, to help them along the way. What about your friends in school? Do you encourage them? Are you good to your friends around you? Do you look out for your friends around you and try to encourage them?

Maybe there's someone who's feeling lonely, someone who maybe doesn't have many friends. You can come alongside them and encourage them. You can encourage your parents or your grandparents or any other relatives or friends around you, maybe by saying something nice because they've done something for you.

[ 8 : 14 ] Just a little word like thank you now and again is a nice encouragement. So there's different ways. And even as parents and as adults, we need to encourage those around us as well, to encourage our young people.

Sunday school teachers, they'll encourage you today and every week they encourage you in the Bible and to trust Jesus. They'll give you words of encouragement so you can give a word of encouragement to them, to thank them for all that they do for you.

And today you're going to be meeting and hearing about the work of Muriel as she's preparing to go back to Cambodia. So again, encourage her. Tell her that we'll be remembering her when she goes back.

We'll be praying for the work that she's doing. We'll be praying for her safety as she travels. So there's many different ways that we can encourage one another. And it's a great gift from God to have his word that reminds us to encourage one another and to build one another up.

Just as you are doing, he says, keep doing what you are doing. So it's a reminder to ourselves to be encouragers, to be people who help one another along the way and encourage one another along the way by speaking to people, by saying nice things to people, by doing nice things for people around us.

[ 9 : 35 ] So let's all be encouraged and let's all be encouragers too. So may God bless that word and his word to us today.

We're going to say the Lord's Prayer together now. Let's say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, we chart in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen. I will again sing to God's praise. This time we're singing in Psalm 32.

It's in the Scottish Psalter on page 244. Psalm 32 on page 244.

[ 10 : 35 ] We're going to sing from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm to verse 11 on the tune Spore. Thou art my hiding place, thou shalt. From trouble keep me free.

Thou with songs of deliverance about shalt compass me. I will instruct thee and thee teach the way that thou shalt go. With my eye upon thee set I will direction show.

We'll sing verse 7 down to 11 to God's praise. Thanks. Amen. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thou art my hiding place, thou shalt.

From trouble keep me free. Thy with songs of deliverance apart shall compass me.

I will instruct thee and thee teach the way that thou shalt go.

[ 11 : 54 ] And with mine eye upon thee set I will direction show.

Then be not like the harsh or mule which do not understand whose mouth let's say come near to thee a bright and lost command.

Unto the man that wicked is his sorrow shall abound.

But him that trusteth in the Lord mercy shall compass round.

Yea, righteous him the Lord be glad in him do ye rejoice.

[ 13 : 29 ] All ye that upright are in heart for joy lift up your voice.

Now we turn together to read the Word of God. There's two readings our first is in the book of Acts.

Acts chapter 17. We're going to read from verse one to nine. And then our second reading is in first Thessalonians in chapter one. So our first reading is in Acts chapter 17.

And at the beginning of that chapter. Now 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, and saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

[ 14 : 47 ] And 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.

And 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 that there is another king, Jesus. And the people and 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. And so on. And then we turn to our second reading in 1 Thessalonians 1.

[ 15 : 59 ] 1 Thessalonians 1. So in our first reading in Acts 17, we read of Paul and Silas first arriving in Thessalonica.

And there they stayed for a very short time, about three weeks. But that short time made a great impression on the people there. And the church was formed. And as we turn into his first letter to the Thessalonians, we find Paul, maybe about six months to a year later, writing to them, having heard a good report about what was happening and how they were going on in the faith.

And here he writes to encourage them to keep going. So we read in 1 Thessalonians 1. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

[ 17 : 25 ] You know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. 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.

And so you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Asia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Asia, 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 through God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

May God bless these readings from his word. As again, just join together in a word of prayer. Lord, our God, as we continue in our worship of you, we thank you that you are a God of such great encouragement, that you have encouraged your people down through every generation.

Encouragement has meant giving great joy to them and delight, but it's also meant times of rebuke and chastening as well. As we read through your scriptures, we realize that it is all through your love as our Lord and as our God.

[ 18 : 58 ] For as the Father loves the children, so you rebuke your people in the same way to show that love, but you also encourage and build up. And so we thank you for every way that you speak to us and have spoken to your church down through all the generations.

We thank you for the way your church was established, even in Thessalonica, as we've been reading of, and so many other parts of that region, the church at Corinth and Ephesus and Galatia and all the places that we read of in your word.

And we marvel at the way people were transformed in many ways in the blink of an eye. We think of Thessalonica, and even in the space of three weeks, as Paul and Silas visited there and proclaimed the gospel, how so many people were turned to it, and they turned from idols to the living God, as we have read.

And so we are encouraged in that, that your word was powerful then, and that it worked in such a mighty way. And it encourages us in our hearts today that so it can be in our day and in our age as well, that even in the short space of time, that you can transform a people, that you can transform even ourselves here, when we maybe feel discouraged in different ways, when we feel the many pressures of this world and of this life, when we may be going through many different times of struggles, either individually or collectively as families, or even as we think of many issues going on throughout our town and our islands.

We think of the many challenges that there are around us. But we thank you that your word does give encouragement, that we are to look to you and to trust in you, and that you are the one who is able to send your word out with power, how it is able to melt the hardest of hearts, how it is able to transform us from people who worship idols and the many gods of this world, and that we would see many people turning throughout our land to come and worship the true and the living God.

[ 21 : 09 ] And help us, Lord, that we will endeavor to share the gospel with all around us, to be built up through it ourselves, but then, Lord, love and long to share it with others around us.

We pray to be your witnesses here, to be salt and light in this town and to all around us, so that even people would speak of us in that way, as they spoke of the church of Thessalonica, that they would speak of us as people who so obviously and clearly love the Lord and serve him with all our hearts.

So we pray that you will build us up, O Lord, that you will encourage us, and that your people will be encouraged far and wide today, that as your word goes out, it will go out with power, whether it's services in our own islands here or our nation, or to all the ends of the earth.

We thank you for every language in which your word is preached and proclaimed, for every people, every tribe, every nation that hears your gospel today. So many different people in many different places, in some ways so very different to ourselves, but yet all coming to seek that one true and living God.

And we thank you that in that way we are reminded that we have brothers and sisters far and wide, that you have your people to all ends of the earth. We thank you for the ministry to your people, the Jewish people.

[ 22 : 38 ] And as we look forward this evening to hearing of the work going on amongst them through the ministry of Aviel, we pray for him as he visits our islands in these days and as he continues to work among those people and for that organisation, we pray, Lord, for your people, the Jews, that they will come to realise, even as Paul said, that this is the Christ, that they would see that Christ has come, that the Messiah is here, and that we are to worship him.

We pray, Lord, for all your people who serve you throughout the lands of this world, for the many missionaries you send out to all ends of the earth, those who are in very difficult situations, those who are maybe even in fear at times for their lives.

We pray for them, Lord. We pray, Lord, your blessing on the work as it goes on. We are thankful for everyone you send, and even from our own midst, how you call people to different work in different parts of the world.

Lord, we pray for Muriel as she speaks to the young ones even just now, and as she prepares to go back to Cambodia. We remember her and commit her to your care and to your keeping.

Bless her, Lord, we pray, and the ministry of your word in that place. So we do thank you for every encouragement we have in Christ, and we pray, Lord, that you will come in your power, that you will revive us, that you will quicken us, Lord, that you will bring us to see and know more of your glory in ourselves and in those around us and in our lands.

[ 24 : 13 ] May you come, O Lord. We remember those who are mourning in our midst at this time as well. We think of in funerals that have taken place this week and in these past days.

We pray for the family of Louise MacLeod. We pray for her husband, John, and all the family, Lord. May you bless them and be with them. We pray for the family of Janice Smith as well.

Remembering Nan and Roddy and the brothers and sister as well, and all the family and friends. Remember the family of Isabella Nicholson too. His funeral was yesterday. And Lord, we pray for others in our midst who have experienced loss in these past days and weeks as well.

We ask, O Lord, for your comfort, your blessing, your grace to be with us. O Lord, that you will help in times of need, of grief, of illness, of trials in this life.

We pray that we will see and know Jesus with us, the one who is faithful, the one who is there for us as we call upon him. So, Lord, continue with us, we pray.

[ 25 : 17 ] Go before us in the rest of this day and bless us in your word now as we turn to it and in the singing of your praise. Uphold us in all that we do and may it be to your glory.

And pardon us for all our sins as we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise this time in Psalm 4.

And we'll sing Psalm's version on page 4 of the Psalm books. Psalm 4 on page 4. We'll sing from verse 3 down to the end of the Psalm.

Know that the Lord has set apart the godly as his own. The Lord will hear me when I call and my request make known.

We'll sing from verse 3 to the end of the Psalm and the tune is Eric Steyn. Know that the Lord has set apart the godly as his own.

[ 26 : 28 ] The Lord will hear me when I call and my requests make known.

In anchor do not break God's law consider and be still present a righteous sacrifice and wait upon his will.

O who can show us any good I hear so many say O Lord shine on us with your light show us your face I pray you filled my heart with greater joy than others may and have upon us they rejoice and and and wine abide

I will I die my heart will rest secure for you alone O gracious Lord safe and sure we can turn back to a reading in first Thessalonians chapter one read at verse two and three there first Thessalonians chapter one at verse two we give thanks to God always for all of you constantly mentioning you in our prayers remembering you remembering you before our God and Father your work of faith your labor of love and your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ as I mentioned here's a letter that Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica and he was writing to encourage them in their faith to encourage them to go on in the strength of the Lord and in the love for the Lord.

And so as we think of that word encourage and encouragement are you someone who encourages others in the gospel? Are you someone who feels encouraged in the gospel? Do you think as a congregation this is an encouraging place to be and that we are an encouragement to others around us?

[ 30 : 09 ] That's the kind of that's the kind of questions that Paul was asking of the church of the Thessalonians. Are they encouraging others in the gospel? Are they feeling encouraged in the gospel? Is their congregation a place of encouragement and are they encouragement to others? So we ask the same questions of ourselves. Are we encouraged and are we encouragers?

roaming us. And as you read here of the church of Thessalonica will have left us or is it made us into and 300?

In a very short space of time when Paul and Silas came to visit and spent some time ministering the gospel in their midst, a short period of time of around three weeks, many people came to faith. But it brought with it many challenges as well. As the gospel made a great impression, as we saw, it also turned people in a challenging way against the gospel too. The gospel took hold, it says, of many. Many came to faith from the Jews, from the Greeks, and it says many important women in the city. It's interesting how it describes those different categories of people who came to faith, Jews, Greeks, and important women of the city. It's almost as if it's highlighting for us the unexpected places that the gospel took hold. Among the Jews who had their own way of looking at things, among the Greeks who had their own forms of religion, and among the important women of the city, it's almost like the business side of the city, those who were involved in things, where it almost seemed the gospel could not penetrate. It came and took hold in the midst of all different kinds of people. But as you read on in the book of Acts in chapter 17 and into chapter 18, you see the many different kinds of opposition that arose in the midst of all the good things. The gospel as it came, it disturbed people. And that's what it still does to this day. As we hear the gospel, it disturbs us. And we see how today it disturbs people in the same ways it disturbed them in Thessalonica as well. Some, it was in a bad way, it brought opposition. There were those who would say, those people who are turning the world upside down, they have come into our midst, and they're going against our king. They're going against our rulers, those who have authority over us. We need to get rid of them. We see that kind of opposition today as well. But we see how it also brought this disturbance in a good way. It caused people to turn, as it says, from their idols to the living and the true God. And that is the way the gospel disturbs and challenges to this day as well. It brings people to turn to the living God.

And that's the wonder of the gospel, how down through every generation it has this impact, it has this effect, it disturbs people, it unsettles people, and how sometimes it needs to unsettle us in a bad way where we think we don't want this because we're feeling convicted by it.

But how over time it disturbs us to a place where we recognize we need God. We need this true and living God. And so as Paul and Silas and others were going around all these different places, they were taking the gospel with them. But here Paul is writing to the Thessalonians, and he's writing to them, longing to be in their midst again, but so encouraged by what he's hearing about them that he wants to give them this word of encouragement to keep them going. During a short time there, Thessalonica had been changed in so many ways, and he was longing to hear something from them.

[ 34 : 16 ] And he did hear from them when Timothy came to him with news of what had happened. And we read that further on in this letter. In chapter 3 and verse 6, he says, But now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you.

Timothy has brought this report to him, that they are going on in the faith. And so he's thankful for what has happened since he left, and his desire is to encourage. And this letter is a letter full of encouragement. And for ourselves today, encouragement is such a great thing. The difference it made to the church in Thessalonica to know that Paul was remembering them and encouraging them. It gave them that spirit to go on encouraged in the Lord. And so that's sometimes what we need ourselves to, to be a people who are encouraged, who are encouraged by what the Lord is doing and what the Lord can do in our midst. To be encouraging one another, to be encouraging those around us, to be encouraging people who are even outside of the church as we would see it at the moment. We live in a world that needs encouragement. And the church of Thessalonica flourished and was a great example to others around them throughout Macedonia, as we read here, and many other different parts. They were hearing about this church, this people at Thessalonica, and what they were doing, and how they loved the Lord, and how they loved the people. And it made such a great impression to others.

And as we were looking at last week in Isaiah 58, we were thinking of loving the Lord, and serving Him, and loving the Lord's day, we see that that's the kind of impact that was felt here in Thessalonica as well. The people, they loved the Lord, they loved to worship the Lord, and through that they loved the people around them. They loved those who were around them, not just their own people, but all people. They sought to bring the gospel to all around them.

Other churches in the time, such as Corinth and the church at Galatia, they met with so many discouragements. They met with so many different challenges. And discouragement sometimes has that negative impact. It puts down on any encouragement that there is. It holds people back. People start to think, what's the point? And there's a struggle going on. But encouragement has this opposite impact.

It spurs people on. It keeps people going. It keeps people looking for more and more from the Lord and from His people. So encouragement in the Lord is great for His people. And that's what this letter wants to do for us to encourage us. And so what encouragement can we take from this chapter today?

- [ 37 : 34 ] Well, the first thing we see here is the elements of encouragement that existed here. The elements of encouragement. The church at Thessalonica gives us a clear example of what every church should be in terms of a witness for the Lord. Because it's obvious as you read through this letter that the church made such an impact in their day. It made such an impression near and far, not just in this city, but far and wide. This was a church that was spoken of and spoken of in a wonderful way. And so their witness was clear to all. And we have to remember ourselves today, just as they were a witness to all around them, so are we today. So are we as a church here in Stornoway, as a people here in Stornoway, so we are a witness to all around us, near and far. People will speak of us and will maybe show an interest in what is happening in Stornoway. And if they hear what's happening in Stornoway, it's a real discouragement.



And they'll think maybe, well, you know, if a congregation the size of Stornoway is feeling discouraged, what kind of impact will that have on the wider church? But if they hear that we are people who are encouraged in the Lord, who are loving the Lord with all our heart, who are serving the Lord with all our heart, even in the days in which we live, that seems so challenging in so many different ways, the impression that that can make to encourage others. And so it's important for us how we conduct ourselves, how we are witnesses to other churches around us, but also to the people around us. In this past week, the free church has been spoken of in so many different ways, negative ways, nationally and even locally. How even the church here in Stornoway has been blamed for some anti-social behavior in the town. You think to yourself, well, how do the two relate together? But then people are looking and asking, what kind of church are we? And we have to show that we're a church that loves the people around us, that has concern and compassion for all around us, that we'll be encouraged to do that. And so the elements that we see here in Thessalonica, we often speak of the marks of the church in a sense of the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, the Lord's Supper and baptism, and church discipline. Now, these are some of the marks of the church that people would look for, for a true church. They are things that we want to have as our church. But flowing out of that are other elements of the church. And that's the elements that we see here in Thessalonica as well. They had preaching of the Word, they would have the sacraments, they would have a discipline, they would have all these things. But alongside that, there was all this encouragement that was flowing from it.

And the first element that they had was this joy in the saving work of Christ, the salvation that Christ has for his people. They rejoiced in this salvation. That was clear from the outset. It talks about here, remembering before God our Father your work of faith, in verse 3 there, their work of faith.

This was first and foremost the key to everything. They were a people of faith. They were trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. And out of this element flew encouragement and joy in the Lord.

When you read Hebrews chapter 11, it's a great passage speaking about a people of faith, faith. How they had faith. But it speaks about what they did through faith. It says, by faith, and it goes on to say, they did something. And that's the kind of people that were in this church in Thessalonica as well. By faith, they did. They knew the salvation that Jesus had purchased for them. They loved the Lord with all their heart. And they showed this saving faith amongst others.

[ 41 : 58 ] They rejoiced in the Lord. They trusted the Lord with all their hearts. There was a farming community that was once experiencing a time of severe drought.

Crops were failing. And the ground was getting so dry, it was starting to crack. And unless they got rain very soon, the harvest that year was going to fail.

And so concern turned to panic. And in their panic, the people said, we'll call a day of prayer. We'll call a day of prayer to call on the Lord in prayer. And so as that day came, and as the people were making their way up to church that day to call on the Lord in prayer, some of the folks noticed a little girl walking along with them. And she was carrying an umbrella.

And they turned to her and they asked her, why have you got an umbrella? And her response was this, we're going to pray for rain, aren't we? She was prepared. She thought, well, if we're going to ask God to help, he will send rain. If we come trusting in him, if we come with faith. She had more faith than the rest of them that God could answer.

And that's the faith, the element that we should have in our midst too, to be a people of faith and trust in God. Because without that, how can we encourage anyone else?

[ 43 : 27 ] We see another element of their work here was their serving. They were encouragement of salvation and they were the encouragement of serving. They labored here, they toiled in all that they did. It's like they were doing every bit with sweat and effort to serve the Lord. And we see that as you read through this letter, they were remembering people who remembered others, their labor of love, it says in verse 3, they served the Lord with all their hearts. And what a great encouragement that is in any church as well, to see a people laboring in love for the Lord, side by side with one another.

It's such an encouraging element of any church, to be a people who have this longing to serve the Lord with all their hearts. We serve in the church, we serve in our communities, we serve in all that we do.

We are to do all as to the Lord. And there is such great encouragement in that. And that should be an element for ourselves here as well. That we long to labor side by side, to work side by side in every effort of the gospel here. And there's so many different ways that we can be involved. There's so many different things that we can do. Some are helping out with young people, some are helping out with older people, some are just quietly encouraging others through phone calls or messages or visiting all these different kinds of things. We can all play our part. And that's what we see in the church of the Thessalonians. There were a people whose labor was one of love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we also see the element of faith that they had here was this sustaining faith. They had this vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and it all, as it says in verse 3, a steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 10 it speaks about waiting for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. So there is this sustaining faith as well.

This faith that keeps him going through thick and thin. And all the challenges and all the ups and downs, their hope is in the Lord. And the Lord who is to come. So they had all these elements of encouragement in their midst. That they were a people who loved the Lord with all their heart.

[ 46 : 14 ] They were a people who served with all their heart. And they were a people who were sustained, looking to the Lord at all times. So that all these things in their midst. And through this, they were encouraging. And through this, what we see secondly is the encouragement they got.

This is the reason why Paul is writing to them. Maybe up to a year having passed since he was last with them, last in their midst. He hears this encouraging report. And so he wants to write back to them to encourage them in their faith. He's encouraged to hear that they're going on in the faith, not just in the sense of plodding on in the faith, just going through the motions, but really growing in their faith, rejoicing in the Lord and serving him with all their heart.

And so as Paul is hearing of this health and vibrancy of the church, church that is flourishing, he wants to encourage them. There were so many positives in all that they were doing.

But what he really writes them about is to encourage them to keep going in their faith, to keep going for the Lord, to keep recognizing that they are loved in the Lord. They're not doing it for themselves or for other people to please others, but it's all about pleasing the Lord.

And their faith has a past, it has a present, and it has a future. And that's what Paul is encouraging them in. He gives thanks, as it says in verse 2, always for you, constantly. He's thanking them for the experience they had in the past, of how the gospel had come, and the gospel had borne fruit in this place. People had come to faith, and this faith is what's keeping them going. So Paul is reminding them of their past and how the Lord came to them in that powerful way, how he came to them through the power of the Spirit and through his Word, how they turned from God to God from idols to serve the living and the true God. There is this encouragement that God has worked in their past, and this is what keeps them going. Again, there was a young man by the name of Benjamin West, and he was an artist later on in his life, a famous artist in the 18th century. But when he was a young boy, something happened to him that could so easily have discouraged him from being an artist at all. But instead, it had the effect of really encouraging and really keeping him going. He was looking after his younger sister while his mother was out. And while she was away, Benjamin found some bottles of ink in a cupboard.

[ 49 : 15 ] And he decided he would make a portrait of his sister. And so he got out all the brushes and the ink and started doing this portrait of his sister. But while he was doing it, ink was going everywhere. Not just on the paper. It was going on the floor. It was going on the furniture. It was just going everywhere.

But he finished the portrait just as his mother was coming home. And when his mother came into the room, she started looking around. She started looking around. And she saw ink everywhere. Now, myself, if I walked into a room and saw that, it would probably be to start bawling at someone.

Look at the mess you've made. But that wasn't Benjamin's mother's response at all. She looked around, saw the mess, but stayed quiet. And then she saw the picture, the portrait that Benjamin had done of his sister. And her first words to Benjamin were, what a beautiful picture of your sister. And she bent down and kissed her son. And many years later, as Benjamin was looking back on his life and how he had become a celebrated artist, he looked back to that time and he said, it was my mother's kiss that made me a painter.

She could so easily have discouraged him by telling him what a mess he'd made. But instead, the focus was on the portrait. And as a reminder to ourselves as well as how the Lord looks on us, he doesn't focus on the mess that we've made of our lives. He doesn't focus on all the wrongs that we have done. But what he focuses on is what we can be in Christ. And by faith in him, that is what he sees.

And that is what he looks on. And that is what he remembers of us. Not every fault and mistake that we've made, but the fact that we've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is what keeps us going too. The love of God that keeps us going. That's what helps us in the present to keep on. That's what helps us in the future as we look to it, that the Lord has loved us and that he will keep us.

[ 51 : 50 ] And so that is what Paul is writing to the church at Thessalonica about the people here. He's encouraging them to remember the Lord, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, your labor of love, and your steadfastness of hope. These things are what are important. And these are things that we should be encouraged in and seek to remember it in ourselves. So the encouragement that they got was to keep on. And that's the encouragement for ourselves today as well. To be a people who keep on encouraged in the Lord. Encouraged in the Lord. That when we put our trust in him, that that's what he sees. And that's what he looks on. And that that's what we live for as well. So the encouragement they got. Finally we see here the encouragement that they were. And it's amazing how you read of these people, how they'd gone from idols to trusting the living God in such a short space of time. And when you read in verse 6, it says, 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 in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in these places, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. Isn't that wonderful? A testimony.

They didn't have to say anything. The word had already gone ahead of Paul. People had already heard about this church, the church of the Thessalonians. They had heard of these people. And what they had heard was about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their work of faith, their labor of love, their steadfastness of hope. This is what had gone ahead of Paul into other places. They already knew about it. And wouldn't it be wonderful if that's what was said of ourselves as well? If people would hear of the church here in Stornton and already hear before we even open our mouths that we are a people who are steadfast in hope, that we are a people who are laboring in our love for the Lord, but above all that we are a people who work in faith, that we go on in the strength of the Lord. You know, if you'd asked the people of Thessalonica, what kind of example of a church are you? If you asked the people there,

I'm sure the response would have been somewhere along the lines of, we're just poor witnesses. We're a poor example. But what Paul is saying to them here is in verse 6, as he says, that you are an example to others. You became imitators of others and of the Lord and received with great affliction, with the joy in the Holy Spirit, that you became an example to all the believers. He's saying, you became someone who other people looked to. They looked to you and they followed your example, because there they saw something that was good, something that was right, something that was a real encouragement. We can look to others and learn from them, other churches, other Christians throughout our islands, throughout our nation, throughout the world. We can learn great things from others.

But wouldn't it be great if others could look to us and see in us Christ in us, the hope of glory. Christ, the one we serve and love with all our hearts. Christ, the one whose strength we go on in.

We ask ourselves, and what do people see in us? That's the challenge. Do they see us as a people who are encouraged and who are encouragers? Or do they see a people who are discouraged, plodding on, not really hopeful in the gospel? We need to be a people who are encouraged.

[ 56 : 15 ] And we are encouraged because we have the gospel. And the gospel reminds us that there is good news, that there is good news that God has given to us his son, that he is the living and true God, that we wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. That is the hope that we have as a people. That is what should encourage us.

That we have this hope. And that that is what we should live to encourage others by as well. The encouragement, the hope that there is in the gospel. The church at Thessalonica, it grew through a faithful people. A people who are faithful because they were encouraged. And they were encouraged because Christ Jesus had taken hold of them. And so we should look to be that kind of people as well. A people of faith and a people who labor in love. I read this saying once, flatter me and I may not believe you. Criticize me and I may not like you. Ignore me and I may not forgive you. Encourage me and I will not forget you. That's the kind of people that we want to be.

Encouragers. That we would be encouraged ourselves through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that through that we would encourage others. And that they would remember who we are. But not just who we are, but who we represent. The Lord Jesus Christ and the hope that is in him. So may God bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we rejoice in your word that builds up your people and encourages your people. And help us that we will be built up by it day by day. That we will be encouraged through it.

That we would see the Lord Jesus, our hope and our saviour. And as we see him, may we seek to represent him. To be examples for him. To be witnesses for him. And to be encouragers to those around us.

In our own midst. In our homes and our families. And our community far and wide. We pray for your help and your grace to help us to that end. As we ask it in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

[ 58 : 58 ] We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 37. Page 252 of the Psalm books. Psalm 37. We'll sing from verse 3 to 6.

These verses remind us of the great joy that there is in trusting the Lord and in serving him. Set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good. And so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food. Delight thyself in God he'll give. Thine heart's desire to thee. Thy way to God commit.

Him trust it bring to pass shall he. We'll sing verse 3 to 6. And the tune is Amazing Grace. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thy dear bring good.

And so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food.

[ 60 : 23 ] Delight thyself and thought in here.

Thine heart's desire to do. Thy way to God, come it in trust.

It bring to pass shall be. Abide unto the light, ye shall thy righteousness display.

And be thy judgment shall be for.

Thy gift, thy job, the day. Amen. After the benediction, I'll go to the main door.

[ 61 : 47 ] Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with us all now and forevermore. Amen.