

1 Thessalonians 1:5

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in 1 Thessalonians, and it's really from verse 5, although we looked 40 ago at the first five verses.

And Paul is saying, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. And he says, you know what kind of men we proved 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 on.

And then verse 9, of how we see that they turned to God from idols to serve the living and through God, and to wait for a son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Now, this church was a model church, and that's some accolade. It wasn't a perfect church. There's no such thing as a perfect church.

And as somebody once said, if you join that church, if you think you've found the perfect church and you join it, it won't be perfect anymore. There's a lot of truth in that, because none of us are perfect.

[1 : 18] But this church seemed to have been a model church, and Paul, although the church in Philippi seemed to have been closer to his heart than any, this church was a church that absolutely thrilled him.

And he saw it really in many ways as a model church. And they were a great example to the whole community and to Macedonia and Achaia.

Now, it's little wonder that the apostle is always giving thanks. We saw that in verse 2. We give thanks to God always for all of you, because as we were looking at before, they were a church that was your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope.

And they were a church who lived, lived life, and they lived it in such a way that people knew and could see the reality of their faith, of the tremendous transformation.

We'll see that in a moment of how they had turned from idols to worship the living and through God. That made a huge impact in the community and in the place. But they also spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 32] So it was a church that was influencing the whole community for good. And we've always got to ask ourselves, and whatever we see in the New Testament, it's all very well looking at how things are and examining it, which we're bound to do.

But we've always got to bring it back home to ourselves and say, well, yeah, that's great. But are we like that? Am I like that? Because it's all very well to look at something and to look at it just purely for study in an academic way or in a theological way and not then seek to apply this to ourselves.

So we're going to ask ourselves, are we the kind of church that influences the community? Are we made up of believers that influence the community?

Do we influence people at work? Do we influence people at home? Do we influence people for good? Well, obviously, this is the kind of church we had here in Thessalonica.

And Paul remembered how the word had come. It had come in power. And Paul knew all about this power. And Paul often wrote about this power. And he said the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

[3 : 52] And Paul knew the reality of this. Paul wasn't somebody who just wrote these, yes, being moved by the Spirit of God because the word of God, the Spirit breathed.

But Paul knew the reality of what he was writing because that's exactly what had happened to him. The gospel had come in power into his life.

If it hadn't, it wouldn't have made any difference. Paul had heard the gospel and he hated it. Because Paul hated Jesus who was at the center of the gospel.

Paul was the greatest persecutor of the Christian faith. He hated Christians. He wanted Christians dead. And he created havoc in the early church because of his animosity, his hatred of Jesus Christ.

There was only one thing or one passion, one influence that changed Paul's life. And that was God, the power of the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 54] And that's why Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation. As we often said, it's the dynamite of God.

Blows apart, breaks down, removes the barriers that are there. And my friend, if you today have still not come to embrace Jesus, if there's still barriers, there's only one who can break down these barriers, who can make the unwilling become willing.

That's what happened with Paul. And that's why Paul was able to go throughout the world and say, I know the reality of what I'm preaching. I have met the king who I preach about.

I have met with Jesus. He broke my heart, but he made it new. And Paul knew exactly what he was talking about. And this is what he wished for everybody, that they would come to embrace as Jesus.

So Paul knew that the word had come in power into the lives of those in Thessalonica. And so he knew the reality of this power.

[6 : 01] And then Paul says at the end of verse 5, Now, Paul, throughout this letter, is always defending himself against false accusations.

Because in the day that Paul lived, there were a lot, a lot of traveling philosophers. And they would be going around teaching their ways and their systems of thought.

And there were a lot of people going around who were wanting to manipulate people. There's nothing new under the sun. But wanting to manipulate people for their own end, for their own gain.

Now, Paul was always at pains to show that whatever he and Silas and Timothy were about, it was not about for their own gain. It was not about so that people would say, Oh, hasn't Paul done well?

It was always for the glory of God. And it was for the good of the people. You see, when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, that is always for their good.

[7 : 07] You can never say, Oh, well, it's disappointing that a person has become a believer. Because that means that their lives have gone, that they won't have such a good life.

Not at all. It's the very opposite. That's when life really occurs. That's when life truly begins. Life in Christ. Jesus is a source of life. Paul knew where he had been, and he knew now where he was.

And he said, There is only one life, and I wish that everybody had this life. Now, when Paul goes on to say, And you became imitators of us, And of the Lord.

It doesn't mean there that they were, In order to be really good Christians, They had to imitate the life of Paul. Now, you and I would find that very, very hard.

We couldn't say, I certainly could never say to anybody, In order to be a good Christian, Live as I do. Because that would be a disaster. Whatever you say to people, You always have to point them to Jesus.

[8 : 10] He is the one we are to follow. Our life, certainly my life, Is full of failings and inconsistencies, And we're so aware of all these things. But what Paul is meaning here is that Paul suffered a lot as a believer.

It cost a lot. As somebody said very wisely, It costs nothing to become a Christian. But it costs everything to be a Christian.

And that's true. It doesn't cost us anything to become a Christian. It costs Jesus everything To enable us to become Christians. But it costs us everything To be a Christian.

To follow Jesus. Because it means taking up our cross, Denying ourselves, And following Him. And for the early church, They lived at a time when persecution was rife.

And the fires of persecution had begun to burn. And there was a growing hatred and animosity Towards Christ. And the things of Christ. So these were difficult days.

[9 : 17] So when you became a Christian, You were embracing. Yes, you were embracing Christ, But you were also embracing affliction. You were embracing persecution.

And that's what Paul means When he says that in verse 6, You became imitators of us And of the Lord, For you received the word In much affliction.

And so we find that Paul, As he lived out his life, He lived as one who had experienced this affliction. They knew that Paul was suffering.

Because everywhere he went, He was suffering for the gospel. But he had never allowed the suffering To be a stumble. In fact, The question is sometimes asked, What kind of Christian are you?

Are you a Christian Who's like a stepping stone Helping people to move on In the right way? Or are you a Christian Who's a stumbling block To other Christians?

[10 : 12] It's a very solemn thought. Well, Paul certainly Was in the category Of the stepping stone Christian. Where he was, By his life And by his ministry And by the way he worked, Was helping people to develop And to grow And to move forward.

But there was the affliction. But side by side With the affliction He talks about You have received the word In much affliction With the joy Of the Holy Spirit.

And that's a wonderful thing Is that The Lord will often In the midst of The suffering For his sake Bring joy.

And if you were to If we were to study this theme Throughout the Bible And indeed if we were to Study this theme Throughout the history Of the Christian church We would find it to be true.

That often in the places Where there is most persecution And where the Christian church Is suffering the most The Christians Experience the greatest joy.

[11 : 17] They're not The joy doesn't come Because of the suffering But the Lord gives them This joy. And through that joy They receive strength. The joy of the Lord Is your strength.

That's why Paul and Silas Sang in the prison After being beaten up. That's why the disciples Rejoiced That they were counted worthy To suffer for Christ.

And that is why When you go through The history of the church You will see martyrs Going to the gallows And martyrs being burned At the stake Singing. It defies human logic And reason.

There is only one answer Is that they were full Of the joy of the Lord. The joy of the Lord Which enabled them Caused them To sing in the flames.

It's a supernatural joy. And so Paul Who often spoke about this joy Was saying that the church In Thessalonica Like himself They were suffering For the faith But also They were receiving This joy.

[12 : 27] And then he says In 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.

Now one of the things Obviously that The Christian church In Thessalonica Were noted for Was their enthusiasm Because I think That's very clear From this That they were The kind of people Where the word Was sounding forth Everywhere.

They were enthusiastic Believers. Enthusiasm is a great Thing in life. And I believe It's a great thing. Now I know We all have different Dispositions And different personalities.

And it's very hard For somebody Who's more Melancholy Of spirit And so on Always to be bubbly And enthusiastic. We're different. And we're We're not to try To be who we aren't.

But You know If we are The kind of people Who are expressing Despondency And heaviness The world As they look And they will say Well I thought a Christian Was somebody Who had joy.

[13 : 45] I thought the Christian Was somebody Who had new life. And so We've always got to be Looking at ourselves And saying Is it the old me That people are seeing?

Or is it the new life In me That people are seeing? Very important question. Well it's very obvious For the In the In the Day there It was a new life In Jesus Christ That was manifested For That was so clear In the life Of the believers.

And now that's I'm not saying That there won't be times When we When we're overcome With a sense Of our own failure And our sin And we have a Repentant spirit And all these things Are right. But we have life In Jesus Christ And we find that This church That they were What we might say They were amplifiers Of the word For not only As the word of the Lord Sounded forth This word Sounded forth Is like the sound Of a trumpet A trumpet that's blowing Or like thunder Jesus spoke about The Pharisees That they were people Who liked to kind of Blow their own trumpets They liked to We use that expression For somebody Who likes to boast Somebody who likes To hear their own voice Somebody who likes To parade their own opinion Somebody who is So full of themselves And the Pharisees Were like that And Jesus was dismissive Of them Paul on the other hand Says it's the very opposite Here are people And they're sounding forth But they're like amplifiers

They've received the word And they're spreading it on It's like it's coming in and out My friends That's how it should be With ourselves as well They were the great evangelists And you know Every believer in a sense Is a missionary When you become a believer You do not You have received Jesus Christ And you always will have Jesus Christ But you have Jesus Christ To live for But you have Jesus Christ To share the good news With others as well And it's reckoned I read Some time back A survey was done I don't know in what part of America But 70 to 80% I think it was Of people who had come to faith In Jesus Christ Had come Through the witness Of work colleagues Or friends

Or people within the community People that they were speaking to Almost on a daily contact That is the greatest influence Of the church Is where Wherever we are By What we are And by what we say Influencing people for good Well that's what was happening In this place In this church In Thessalonica And so Paul is He's Delighted about About that For they themselves Know For they themselves Report concerning Is the kind of reception We had among you And how you turned to God From idols To serve the living And through God This was remarkable work That went on here In Thessalonica Here are people Who steeped in idolatry Now I don't think It's very easy For us to understand How radical It was How revolutionary It was To turn

[17 : 24] From worshipping idols To the living And through God We have been brought up In a community That has had a strong Christian emphasis And whether You have been brought up Within the church Or not The influence Still within the community Is strong It's not as strong As it was But it is still there This is not a community That we would say That is given to idolatry But there it was Mount Olympus Was nearby Which was supposed to be Kind of like The home of the gods These were people Who would have been Just From their earliest days Would have been Steeped In paganism And in idolatry And so to turn From idols Which they had been Brought up with They knew the names of They had been taught To worship And to go and turn To the living And through God It's no wonder That the accusation Levelled against The disciples

Was These are the men Who have turned The world upside down That's how people Were looking at it Everything that they Had known Was thrown upside down Now the one thing That these believers Had come to realize Was the beauty of life In their worship now Because before that When you worship an idol An idol is dead It's dumb It's useless And there's an incredible Although people are blinded By the devil In this respect There's an emptiness There's a deadness In any form of paganism Or idolatry But there's life In Jesus Christ And that is That is the beauty of it When our hope Is in Jesus Christ You know the saying When there's life There's When there's life There's hope Well you know The believer can put it

Even the other way around And say When there's hope There's life When we have hope In Jesus We have life And that's a wonderful thing Now When Paul went into this city And he looked around And he would have seen The shrines And he would have seen The idols It would be very easy To say Well where do I start I might as well Pack up and go home But the apostle Was never like that Because one of the cities He went into Was the city of Corinth And the city of Corinth Was a city where It was a city Where you could do Whatever you wanted It was a city That was just awash With every form Of immorality And idolatry It would be very easy For Paul To just look around And say Well This is beyond me There's nothing I can do here But what did the Lord Say to Paul Paul he said I have many souls

In this city What a boost To the evangelist So Paul got to work He didn't know Who they were But he preached And he preached And he preached And he witnessed To people And many souls Were turned From their paganism And their idolatry To embrace the Lord And it was the same In Thessalonica And we've got to have The same belief Because the Lord Hasn't changed And sometimes As we look around Our communities And we say Well You look at certain people Or maybe you're working Beside certain people Or there are people That you've known For years And you say Oh there's no point How do you know The church is full Of people That others once said There's no point The history of the church Is full of people That others would have Written off But thankfully The Lord didn't So we've got to be faithful And we've got to speak And we've got to live And that's exactly

What was happening here And so there was This amazing turnaround From serving idols To serving The living And through God You know We are children Of the living And through God He's a living God Everything about him Is life And we serve That's what we do Everybody has to serve somebody Today you're serving somebody You're either serving yourself Or you serve your work Or you serve something The believer Is somebody who has been called To serve the Lord And there's no greater master You could ever serve Sometimes you won't understand What he's asking you to do But he always has a great plan In view For your life And he has a great end in view And it's a glorious end If you could see it today You know this

[22 : 27] If you Thankfully the Lord Doesn't show us If we could see The glory That lies beyond We wouldn't want to stay here Any longer We would want home Right now The Lord doesn't show that to us Because there's work For us to do here yet We've got to carry on We've got to live And serve And work for him But then The apostle Finishing with this He says to them How you've turned to God From idols To serve the living And through God So they're to work away And to wait for a son Here's the other side Of the coin On the one hand They're working On the one hand They're serving But then on the other hand They're waiting Waiting for him And that's one of the things That the Christian church Is doing We're waiting For the return Of Jesus Did you think about that today?

Have you thought about it today? That Jesus might come back today? One day he's going to come back One day we might I don't know We might see The return of Jesus We don't know Because Jesus said Not even the angels In heaven know There is an appointed day For that return We don't know when it is At the moment We are living Between the two comings Of Jesus The world has already Seen a coming His first coming Two thousand years ago We are now waiting For the second coming Of the Lord Jesus Christ And so We find that Paul is saying You're to wait For his son From heaven Whom he raised From the dead And of course We know that this is At the very heartbeat Of the Christian faith The dynamic Really of the Christian faith Is the resurrection Of Jesus We're thinking about that Last Lord's day

Where there was a grave And everything seemed So final And everything seemed So secure in death But Jesus rose Triumphant He left the grave Clothes behind Never to use Or need again Death Was swallowed up By life The grave No longer Had the victory It's all In Jesus And no wonder This is The only message That has real hope In this world Is a message Of the gospel Because it gives To people A hope Not only in this world But for eternity For the glory So that death However sorrowful And painful And difficult Death is For the one Who goes through death It's glory It's a one It's all really

So wonderful Jesus is coming Again Just as the Angel said Remember to the Disciples This Jesus Who was taken up From you Into heaven Will come In the same way As you saw him Go into heaven That's amazing Remember how the Disciples were Standing up in the Hill with Jesus And he just Rose up from them And they saw him Go into heaven He was hidden By a cloud Which makes me Often think That heaven Is not as far Away As sometimes We think And Jesus Will return In the very Opposite way But in the same Way he will Visibly come Down Just as he Went up He will come Down It's an amazing Thought And he's going To come to Judge the world In righteousness But we're told Here The great Deliverance That we have To wait for A son from heaven Whom he raised

From the dead Jesus Who delivers us From the wrath To come That's an awful Expression The wrath To come We're told already That God's wrath Is revealed From heaven Read about that In Romans 1 Not in its Full display Just a little Of it But one day His wrath Will be shown That's part of What Jesus did On the cross He dealt With God's wrath And so we never Need to experience It What a wonderful How wonderful That is And I hope Today that you've Come to Know this Jesus Who will one Day Descend From heaven Who one day We all have to Appear before Well let's Know him Before we have To appear Before him Let's know him And let's know him As our own

[27 : 26] Let's pray Oh Lord We give thanks For what is Revealed to us In the truth And we pray That we may be Sufficiently Challenged Within ourselves That we might Always be looking At ourselves In light In the light Of the word To see where We stand To see how We are And how We're developing Are we growing Are we moving Forward Are we becoming More Christ Like Help us Also to realize That so often For the believer That we grow Down In ourselves But we grow Up in Jesus No Lord We pray Then to bless Us all Bless us With a sense Of purpose And a sense Of victory In Jesus As we go Through Life in this World Take us all Home safely We pray Part us With thy Blessing And forgive Us our Sin In Jesus Name Amen