

# 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Would you turn with me in a Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1? If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, that's page 986. As we said, we're studying 1 Thessalonians this winter and spring because it gives a picture of a community shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And it's a beautiful picture, I think, as we look into it, and we pray that it would be a compelling picture. That as we study this book, that we too would be shaped by the same gospel of Jesus Christ into the community that God has called us to be.

Thessalonica was an ancient city. As we've seen, it was in some ways like New Haven. It was a crossroads with many people coming and going. It was a prominent city in its region with a proud history.

Paul and his companions had arrived there around 49 AD and proclaimed the message about Jesus. They only stayed for a short time, perhaps a couple of months, but they developed a strong bond with the new community of Christian believers there.

And despite facing some serious opposition. After Paul left, he continued to remember them in his prayers, praying for them regularly, thinking about them. And probably just about six months after he first visited is when he wrote this letter.

[ 1 : 15 ] We're looking at the end of chapter 1 today. And throughout chapter 1, Paul's been giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians. Verse 2 and 3, he thanks God for their faith, love, and hope in Jesus Christ.

Verse 4 through 7, he thanks God for loving and choosing them and shaping their lives by the gospel. In verse 8 to 10, what we're looking at today is he thanks God for the widening influence, the widening impact of their ministry.

So today I'm going to read chapter 1, verses 6 through 10, but we'll be looking especially at 8 through 10 as we read today. So 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, beginning at verse 6.

Paul says, For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you. How you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. And to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

[ 2 : 39 ] Well, today as we look into these verses, I want to consider two questions. First, what does it look like for a healthy church to have a widening impact? This is verse 8.

And second, what is the source of such a widening impact? Verse 9 and 10. Paul describes the widening impact of the Thessalonian church in verse 8. Verse 8 contains two parallel main clauses. If you like grammar, you might notice there are two subjects, two verbs, and an adverb and an adverbial phrase, giving a location. So two subjects tell us what is spreading, the word of the Lord, and your faith in God.

Two verbs tell us how it's spreading. It sounded forth, and it has gone forth. And two locations tell us where it's spreading. In Macedonia and Achaia and everywhere.

So let's look at those three things each in turn. First, what is spreading? Well, the word of the Lord, or the message about Jesus, is spreading.

[ 3 : 37 ] And your faith in God. Or as he said in verse 7, your example. Your godly example. And both of these are crucial. Proclaiming the message about Jesus and living out a Christ-like example.

Right? The gospel is a message about what Jesus has done. And so we have to communicate it in words. It's not, you know, it's not enough to just say, I want to try to live like Jesus, but never say a word about him.

Because if you never say a word about Jesus, it's sort of like quoting somebody else all the time, but never ever telling who you're quoting. You're plagiarizing. You're actually stealing their glory and acting smarter than you really are.

But on the other hand, just talking about Jesus a lot without living like him is hypocrisy. Right? And the gospel message, what Jesus has done for us, is actually meant to produce a godly and loving character in those who receive it.

And that was also evident. Right? People saw the example of these Thessalonian Christians and they heard the message about Jesus from them. People could look at their lives and see the results.

[ 4 : 51 ] And so the gospel of Jesus spread and the good reputation of the Thessalonians spread as well. And God certainly used that to open people's hearts to the message. So that's what spread.

Right? The word of the Lord, the gospel, and their example. Well, how did it spread? Well, Paul uses two verbs. First, he says, the word of the Lord sounded forth. And it's an interesting verb. In Greek, the word is *ex-ekleo*.

It's where we get the word echo from. In other contexts, the word could refer to a clap of thunder or a roaring crowd of football fans in a stadium. Sorry, that was a modern adaptation.

Or a loud trumpet blast. Or a bell ringing out. But Paul uses a second verb in verse 8. He says, your faith in God has gone forth.

And that word generally referred to something moving out of an enclosed area. Could be a rumor or a report spreading. Could be water overflowing.

[ 5 : 52 ] Or even a person leaving or escaping from a city. And that process might not be loud. And it might not be very public. But it's spreading just the same.

And the gospel spreads in both loud and soft ways. The gospel spreads when people, when it sounds forth, when it's proclaimed to large crowds of people.

Whether in person, or even on TV, or on a podcast, or outdoors. But the gospel also goes forth. Maybe not as loudly. Maybe not as publicly. When one person shares it with another.

When one person lives alongside someone else. And they see their example. And they hear. And they see the difference in their lives. So I pray that none of you would ever think.

Something like, because I'm not a pastor. Or because I'm not eloquent. That I'm less important as a Christian. Because the gospel goes forth. Whenever someone, whenever anyone shares it.

[ 6 : 57 ] If you love Jesus, you have a key role to play. In the gospel going forth. Whether it's in a loud way, and public way, or in a soft way. On a one-to-one level.

Well, third, where did it spread? Paul shows two locations. In Macedonia and Achaia. And everywhere. Now, obviously, Paul's using a little hyperbole in saying everywhere. He's painting a picture. Not making a precise statement.

But the point is, the impact of the Thessalonian church. Extended not only to their city. Not even only to their region. But even beyond their region. Now, I want to give you a picture of this by showing you a map.

I think we have a map. That we're going to put up on the screen. And hopefully. Great. All right. So, let me show you a little bit of how this report spread.

Or how this echo resounded. So, Paul came from the east. Through the province of Asia. He went to Troas. And then over the sea up to Philippi. And then traveled to Thessalonica.

[ 7 : 56 ] That's how he traveled to first bring the gospel to the people in Thessalonica. And Paul refers to that first arrival of the gospel. That resounding fourth of the gospel.

When he arrived. In verse 5, he talks about how our gospel came to you. Then Paul stayed in Thessalonica. He went on to Berea. Then he took a boat all the way down to Athens.

And then he went over to Corinth. And he probably wrote this letter from Corinth. But what happened during that process is, Paul says, The word of the Lord sounded forth from you.

That the Thessalonians, the Thessalonian Christians, maybe people who traveled, people who left town, proclaimed it throughout Macedonia and Achaia. Those two provinces. And so it seems that at some point, Paul arrived in the city thinking, Nobody's heard about Jesus.

And I'm going to proclaim him. And he arrived. And some people said, Hey, we just heard this message from these Thessalonians. They told us exactly that you already arrived there.

[ 8 : 59 ] And you told them about Jesus. And they told us about Jesus. That he died and rose again. That he's the Messiah. And Paul said, Well, then I don't need to say anything. You've already

heard it.

So the echo went, right, from Paul speaking to the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians speaking to this whole region. And it gets echoed back to Paul later in his travels. It was a reverberating echo of God's word.

It was sort of like a game of telephone, except it actually worked. And the message came through loud and clear. And it didn't get distorted. And Paul says, Paul describes this resounding echo of the gospel actually as a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy.

If you want to look at Isaiah chapter 66, verse 18, it's page 626 in the Bibles. It's a fascinating prophecy. So in the Old Testament, the Israelites were God's chosen people.

And so there's many prophecies that talk about Israel one day being a light to the nations and people coming to the light of God through them. But if you read Isaiah 66, it speaks of a time when people from the nations, the Gentiles, would proclaim the message about the true God.

[10:20] So Isaiah 66, verse 18, God says, I'm going to gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and they shall see my glory. And from them, in other words, from the Gentile nations, I will send survivors to the other nations.

To Tarshish, that was the far west, Spain. Poul and Lod, probably Africa in the south. To Tubal, that was Russia in the Caucasus. The northeast. And then Javan, which was Greece.

Or perhaps western Turkey. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. So Isaiah is saying that it's not just the people of Israel who are going to proclaim the truth about God, but the Gentiles, the nations, are going to hear the truth and then they're going to bring it to the ends of the earth.

And Paul is saying that's exactly what's happening with you Thessalonians. What God promised hundreds of years ago is being fulfilled in your lifetime as you're going to Greece and proclaiming that message.

Now what would this look like today? What would it look like for our church to have a widening impact? Maybe not just here in New Haven, but in our region.

[11:32] Right? In Hampton and West Haven and Branford, North Haven and Milford and Madison and even New London. Would it mean one day planting a church in one of those areas?

Now planting a church, especially here in New England, is no easy task. To plant a church you need a core group of people, a place to meet, elders to teach and shepherd, people who devote time and energy to sacrificially loving their neighbors and reaching out to them with the gospel, people who will pray and persevere and trust in the sovereignty of God.

Probably a little money wouldn't hurt too. Now a few years ago I met a pastor who was coming to plant a church here in New Haven. And he was from a larger church. And he was coming with a group of 20 people.

And I think they had some money to start it off. And they had a website, sort of a cool logo. And the church lasted for one year. And then it shut down. I don't know all the details.

But it was hard. Now thankfully, church plants don't always fail. Forty years ago, Trinity was a church plant. It was first started in the early 70s. Which wasn't the easiest time to be in New Haven.

[12:41] And then in the 90s, Christ Presbyterian Church, Church on the Rock, started then. And in the last few years, Elm City Vineyard, City Church, CPC and the Hill have started.

And they're all going strong. And so we praise God. And even besides that, just in the last two years, two churches that are sort of historically mainline churches have called Bible-believing pastors and are starting to grow again.

All in the downtown area. And so we praise God that in this area, in the downtown area, there are gospel-preaching churches where 30 or 40 years ago, there were hardly any, from what people tell me.

And we have a vision for ministry here in New Haven. I will share about that more at the congregational meeting on Thursday. I hope you'll come. And we pray that the gospel would take root and flourish in us and through us.

Last month, we looked at Jeremiah 29 about how God has called us to be exiles here in this world. Exiles for the sake of Jesus. Citizens of God's heavenly kingdom and full-time residents where he's placed us here in New Haven.

[13:44] But if we're to be a gospel-centered church and a gospel-driven church like the Thessalonian church, our vision shouldn't stop at the city limits of New Haven. Right? We must pray and seek to have a widening impact, even in our region.

Whether it's through starting small groups in different places or partnering with other ministries or training up future pastors or even sending some of us out to plant a church someday.

Now, the Apostle Paul, if you notice, if you read the story of his missionary journeys, he didn't spend a lot of time in rural areas. In fact, there's hardly any records of him spending time in rural areas. He went to major cities and planted churches in major cities so that the churches in those cities would have an influence on their whole region. So the gospel would spread to the smaller towns and then to the countryside.

Now, obviously, cities and towns were configured much differently back then, but the same principle applies. As an urban church, as a downtown church in a major city, we have a strategic opportunity to impact not only our immediate surroundings, but even our whole region, and beyond that, to the world.

[14:55] Now, you might ask, well, how would that actually happen? How did it happen back then, and how would it happen now? Well, you know, most of the Thessalonian Christians did not become full-time traveling missionaries like Paul.

But as we said, Thessalonica was a crossroads, and with people coming and going all the time, and as people went, they carried the gospel message with them, and they didn't keep it to themselves. They didn't hide it.

Now, we do know that later on, after this letter was written, several of the Thessalonian Christians joined Paul at some time or other, a few of them at least, joined Paul and supported him during his travels.

So Acts chapter 20, verse 4, tells us the two men, Aristarchus and Secundus, from Thessalonica, traveled with Paul on his journey to Jerusalem. Romans 16, 21, tells us that Jason, who had first received Paul and Silas into his house, was with Paul later on in Corinth, when Paul wrote the book of Romans.

Acts chapter 27, verse 2, Aristarchus again, accompanied Paul on a ship all the way to Rome. He almost got shipwrecked along the way. And Paul was being taken to Rome as a prisoner.

[16:02] And Aristarchus actually joined Paul in prison in Rome. And Paul calls Aristarchus his fellow prisoner in Colossians 4.10 and his fellow worker in Philemon 24.

So we see that this church over time sent people along with Paul as full-time missionaries, perhaps, or at least for a time, and that they were willing to sacrifice, even to the point of being in prison with him.

But you know, most of the people who took the gospel out from Thessalonica were anonymous. Their names haven't survived. Perhaps they were traveling businessmen who found in Jesus an all-surpassing treasure worthy of their highest investment.

Or household servants, lower-class workers who found a new dignity in belonging to Jesus, who was both the master and the servant of all.

Or government officials who began to carry out their jobs differently, because they weren't just serving Caesar anymore. They were serving Jesus. Or homeless wanderers who had finally found a home and a family with Jesus and his people.

[17:19] And all of these people would have traveled, and they all carried the gospel with them wherever they went. What would it look like for us to take the gospel with us wherever we go?

If you work in the hospital, what would it look like to take the gospel with you? Perhaps to respond with grace to the constant onslaught of needs and demands instead of retreating into cynicism or self-pity.

To cast your burdens and your patients' burdens on the Lord instead of trying to bear them all yourself. Because you know that Jesus, and not medicine, is the source of true and ultimate healing.

And we are only instruments in his hands. Or perhaps it would mean serving heartily as unto the Lord, even if you're doing a menial, repetitive task and no one ever says thank you.

But you serve knowing that you're serving the Lord, not just your boss. Or if you're a student, what would it look like to take the gospel with you when you go to discussion section?

[18:27] To think not, how do I impress my professor so that I can get an A for my discussion section grade? Or how do I avoid revealing the fact that I haven't done any of the reading for this week? But how can I love my neighbor sitting next to me in section as myself?

How can I contribute to the discussion constructively by both listening and speaking? How do I approach my class being confident that my identity is secure in Christ?

It's not a function of my greed. Or maybe you'll be traveling. Maybe you'll be studying abroad or working at a client site or moving to another country for work or going back to your home country or intentionally relocating to be a full-time missionary.

Whatever the presenting reason for your travels see your travels as gospel-spreading opportunities. Your goal in traveling is not just to fulfill your work requirements or study in an interesting place or enjoy the pleasant aspects of a different culture, but to be an ambassador of Jesus to all the people that you interact with.

That's what it looks like for the gospel to spread out, to sound forth, to go forth into the world.

[ 19 : 50 ] And this picture of the gospel sounding forth and going forth, it's an exciting picture, but it can also be a scary picture. And so it raises our second question. What is the source of this widening impact?

What fueled the widening impact of the Thessalonian church? Well, you know, it wasn't a PR blitz. Paul didn't buy a bunch of banners or buy space on billboards or buy ads on the internet or create a really snazzy website.

You know, he didn't do the ancient equivalent. The ancient equivalent was when a traveling teacher comes to town, he would get people to throw a big parade and honor and acclaim him as he came into town.

Actually, chapter 2 talks about how Paul came into town. We'll be looking at that next week. about how he came with humility instead of pomp and circumstance. He came to speak the truth and not just to say pleasant things that people wanted to hear.

Now, there's nothing wrong, of course, with using publicity as means, but that's the whole point. It's just a means. Right? Last year, we designed a new website. I think it came out pretty good.

[ 20 : 58 ] We praise God for that. Thankful for all the people who are involved. But you know what? A new website will never be the source of our church's growth. Now, it's helpful. I know it helped a lot of you to find this church, so we praise God for that.

But it's a means. It's like a pipe carrying water. The whole point is the water is what people really need. The pipe is just a means.

So we want to use means but not confuse the means with the source of true growth. The source of the widening impact of a healthy church is the deep influence of the gospel in people's lives.

That's what Paul describes in verse 9 and 10. He said, You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven.

In other words, when the gospel came to the Thessalonians, the message hit home. And when it hit home, it sounded forth. Verse 9 says, They turned to God from idols.

[ 22 : 01 ] In other words, they had a definite conversion to faith in Jesus. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean they had a definite conversion moment, but there was a definite shift in their ultimate loyalties and in their hopes.

Right? You may or may not remember a specific moment when you became a Christian, but if you are truly a Christian, then there must be a shift in your loyalties and hopes to serve and to wait for Jesus.

You see, the Thessalonians didn't just add a statue of Jesus next to all the other pagan gods on their family altar. They didn't just selectively incorporate some of the moral teachings of Christianity that sounded attractive to them.

Their lives were radically reoriented and reshaped around their new relationship with Jesus. He became the defining center of their lives so that they left behind their former idols in order to serve Him and to wait and hope for His return.

Well, by this time, some of you might be thinking, well, this is interesting, all this talk about the gospel going forth and the church making an impact and people turning to Jesus, but I sort of feel like I'm on the outside because I just don't know what to believe.

[ 23 : 20 ] You know, maybe I've been coming here for a little bit, but I'm not even totally sure what this gospel message that you're talking about is. Well, if that's you, let me speak to you for a couple of minutes. Verse 10, Paul tells us what this gospel is in three simple phrases.

Paul says, number one, Jesus is God's Son from Heaven. Jesus is not just one of many prophets, not just a great human teacher, He is God Himself, the King of Heaven and Earth who rightly calls

for our loyalty and our allegiance.

You know, no other founder of a major religion made this claim. Moses claimed to be a prophet, Buddha claimed to be a teacher, Muhammad claimed to be the last and greatest prophet, but only Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, the promised King Himself.

and so it doesn't make sense to simply say that Jesus was simply a prophet or simply a teacher like the others because great prophets and great teachers don't claim to be the Son of God.

They're humble and wise enough to know that they're not. But Jesus did make that claim and so we have to ask the question, was He a madman?

[ 24 : 41 ] He didn't know what He was saying? Was He a fraud? A liar? Or was He telling the truth? Was He really God's Son from Heaven?

Well, the second thing that Paul says is that God raised Jesus from the dead. The early Christians were confident that Jesus was God's Son because they saw the evidence that He had been raised from the dead and it had transformed their lives.

You know, the bodily resurrection of Jesus was not an idea invented by Christians many years after Jesus' death. It was part of the earliest Christian message. 1 Thessalonians is one of the first books written in the New Testament.

Written around 49 AD, just 15 years after Jesus' crucifixion. And already, Paul could summarize the Christian faith in a recognizable formula that included the statement, God raised Him from the dead. Some scholars even think that Paul was quoting a sort of early Christian sermon outline, an early summary of the gospel here. Jesus is God's Son from heaven, whom God raised from the dead, who delivers us from the coming wrath.

[ 25 : 58 ] 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does the same thing, another one of his early letters. He quotes an earlier Christian tradition, saying, Jesus died for our sins, He was buried in the tomb, He was raised from the dead.

If you go back to the earliest writings we have, they all talk about Jesus' bodily resurrection. And so it wasn't, it goes, the belief goes right back to the first apostles who saw Jesus during His earthly ministry.

And all those first apostles, without any exceptions, testified that this Jesus who was crucified, God raised Him from the dead. We saw Him alive again.

And you know, if we, and they said, His tomb is empty, and you know, if they were telling a lie, it would have been very easy to disprove. Because someone could have just gone to the tomb and produced the bones and said, here they are, He ain't alive.

But nobody did that. In fact, His opponents, the best story that they came up with was that His disciples stole the body. That's what His, that's what their, the early opponents said.

[ 27 : 04 ] So they admitted the tomb was empty. They said, the disciples stole His body. Now, if the apostles stole Jesus' body, then they deliberately made up the story that He had risen.

And then they went and suffered and were thrown in prison and died for it and none of them ever recanted. Doesn't really sound very likely. That they deliberately made up a story knowing it was false and then died for it and held on to it their whole lives.

A whole group of them. And they convinced others, too. You see, for the first apostles and for the Christians throughout history, their belief that Jesus had truly risen, gave them confidence to face suffering, opposition, and even death without fear.

Can you face death without fear? like the first apostles? Do you have a solid reason for hope of a life beyond death?

Or do you mostly avoid thinking about it? Or hope that it'll turn out somehow even though you have no reason for that belief? If someone had died, really died, not just a near-death experience, but if someone had really died and came back to life and was alive today, would you want to talk to that person?

[ 28 : 31 ] That's what the Bible says. That Jesus died, he was crucified, but God raised him from the dead and he's alive. He wasn't just resuscitated and then died later on. He's alive, he's in heaven, he's sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

And if you pray to him, he will hear you. So I encourage you, pray to him. Ask God to reveal himself. So Paul says, Jesus is God's son from heaven, raised from the dead.

And the third thing he says is that Jesus delivers us from the coming wrath. Now many people today are uncomfortable with that idea of God's wrath.

In the ancient world, the pagan gods were angry. And when they got angry, their anger was arbitrary. And irrational and uncontrolled, like an abusive parent. So people were always trying to appease them and hide from them.

You can never be sure whether you're on their good side. Now the philosophers reacted to that and the philosophers came up with the idea of a God who wasn't wrathful at all. Actually, who didn't have any passions at all.

[ 29 : 43 ] He was detached from the world. An impersonal principle. In the end, neither angry nor loving. Now the God of the Bible is not the unpredictable pagan God and He's not the abstract God of the ancient philosophers.

The God of the Bible is deeply personal. In the heart of His very being, He is love Himself. And He is holy and pure.

And so when people violate His law and betray His trust and destroy His world, God is rightfully angry because He cares. And He promises to one day bring final and destructive judgment against all who have violated His law and rejected His rule.

That's what God's coming wrath is. It's not arbitrary, but it is real. You know, maybe you long for God to come and establish justice and righteousness in the world.

But if God actually did that, if He actually came and did justice and established perfect justice and righteousness, how do you know that you would be totally on God's side?

[ 30 : 57 ] Or would the sword of justice come down on you, too? Would God also call you to account for your unjust thoughts, words, and deeds?

You see, the bad news is that every one of us, according to the Bible, is a rightful object of God's righteous wrath. But the good news is that Jesus stepped in to deliver us, to deliver all who turn to Him.

from that wrath, from that destruction. When God's final judgment comes into the world, God will destroy our sin, but He will not destroy us if we come to Jesus and take refuge in Him.

You know, maybe deep in your heart you know that you do deserve God's wrath and judgment. Maybe you have a past and almost nobody knows the whole of it because you're ashamed and you're afraid.

If you're honest about it, you're afraid to face God because you know you're not right with Him. But Paul says, Jesus delivers us from the coming wrath.

[ 32 : 03 ] Jesus delivers all who turn to Him from the wrath to come. And Paul says that confidently. He doesn't just say, maybe Jesus will deliver you if you try hard enough to make up for it. No, you could never make up for it.

Paul is confident of this because when Jesus died on the cross, He stood in the place of sinners like us. And He received in our place destruction and righteous, God's righteous anger against the sin of His people.

And so if we come to Jesus, you can know your death sentence has been served. Your punishment has been paid. God's wrath is no longer directed against you because Jesus has stepped in and He has become our deliverer.

So if we suffer in this world like the Thessalonian Christians did, it's not because God is against us. It's not because He's seeking to destroy us. God uses suffering to purify us and make us more like Jesus and even to reveal His glory to the world.

See, for the Thessalonians, the gospel sounded forth from Him even in the midst of great suffering because they remained steadfast because they knew that they had a Savior who had taken the punishment that they deserved and so they could go confidently into the world.

[ 33 : 32 ] You see, even suffering can be a means for the gospel to sound forth and go forth from us, counterintuitive as it might seem. when this gospel message hits home that Jesus is God's Son from Heaven whom He raised from the dead, who delivers us from this coming wrath, when that message hits home, it sounds forth.

That's what this passage is about. When Jesus becomes the object of our loyalty and our hope, we proclaim Him and we live like Him and the gospel spreads and there's a widening impact just as it was with this church so long ago.

May that be true for us today. Let's pray. God, we thank You for sending Your Son Jesus Christ. Lord, that we might know who You truly are, that we might be delivered from death and from the fear of death, that we might be delivered from our sin and guilt and shame, that we might be able to

stand confidently even despite suffering, confident in Your love for us, confident in Your grace and mercy.

Lord, we pray that these things would, that this message would hit home in our hearts and that it would sound forth from us as a body of believers. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[ 35 : 12 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.