

1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

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[7 : 13] ..

.. to the church of the Thessalonians and 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.

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 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and the 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.

[8 : 53] As we look at Paul's message to the Thessalonians particularly as we look at verses 4-7 his message today to that church and to this church is this God has chosen his people in love and we know it because of the gospel imprint on their story.

So we're going to look at each of these pieces in succession. First we're looking at verse 4 and God's choosing his people in love and then we'll look at verses 5-7 and looking at the evidence of the gospel imprint on their story.

So first Paul reminds us of this that God has chosen his people in love. Look with me again, do you see it? For we know, brothers loved by God that he has chosen you.

In case you're feeling left out the footnote reminds us brothers is not a gender specific term here. It means you who are part of the family of God brothers and sisters alike.

He says God chose you and he loves you. Now these are two very simple very common words and it might be so easy for us to skim over this and to keep going.

[10 : 17] But this is the thing that Paul explodes with thanksgiving to God for. That God has chosen them and loves them.

So I want to explore this a little bit. These two concepts for a few minutes. God has chosen you. This is at the very core of his work in the whole world that God would be choosing a people to be his own people.

This is the grand narrative in the creation that God is doing this. He didn't simply create a world to run on its own. He didn't simply create people hoping that they might turn to him.

He created a world where he was determined from the beginning that he would choose people and say you are mine to display my glory in this world to know me to reflect me and to be mine.

Ephesians 1.4 tells us that the beginning of the story was before the actual foundations of the world. That before the foundation of the world God chose his people.

[11 : 26] He chose them in Christ to live for his glory. He chose them to be adopted from outside his family to become his children his brothers and sisters.

The story of God's choosing continues. God creates a world that then rebels against him and in the midst of this fallen wreckage of a world.

God chooses Abraham. He says out of all the peoples of the world I'm going to choose you. I'm going to make you the father of a great nation. And as he plays this out in the family of Abraham and his descendants we get to the verse we read earlier in Deuteronomy chapter 7 where the descendants of Abraham may become a huge nation and the people of Israel are called the chosen people.

The ones that God said I'm going to make you mine. But did you listen to that verse that was read earlier in Deuteronomy 7? It wasn't because they were special. It wasn't because they had any intrinsic value that made him choose them.

In fact it says you are the smallest of all people. God chose them because he loved them. His free overflowing love was the cause of their choice.

[12 : 51] and this then sends us on the trajectory for the whole rest of the Old Testament as God's people repeatedly fail repeatedly struggle to respond to God's choosing with loyalty and faithfulness.

But God is not deterred. God is not done. If you were here and we preached through Hosea last fall you would know God's persistent pursuing unrelenting love for those that he chose.

Knowing that this is ultimately going to be fulfilled in the coming of Christ. God comes and he sends Christ to ultimately be the one who will accomplish the work necessary to make God's people his forever.

And even in his earthly ministry Jesus says in John 15-16 you didn't choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

He says this to his disciples and it overflows to us. And so Peter can write in 1 Peter 2 9-10 of the church he says you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light once you were not a people but now you are God's people once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

[14 : 32] Jesus Christ came into the world to rescue God's people from their place of alienation because of their sin. He did this through his death and resurrection and today God is working out that redemption that he has accomplished in Christ he is working it out in the world as he patiently gathers people from every tribe from every nation from every tongue from every corner of the earth so that the glory that he receives from the people of this world will reflect all of it.

and when he's done he will return and he will recreate the world in which his people will live with him forever.

And friends this is the grand story of God's choosing. This is the grand narrative of God's work in the world. And I want you to see that it's meant to be a comfort a hope a precious truth for you.

You may be one who feels like I don't want to just be a cog in God's wheel of accomplishing his purposes. To you I say this it's more that God has set his love upon you.

And this is exactly what Paul says. Paul says God did this to you beloved of God.

[16 : 12] Do you see it in verse 4? He doesn't say God did it to you peons of God or cogs in God's plan cosmic plan.

He said you beloved of God he chose you. He chose you as an act of love. He chose you to be a part of his plan.

And what a glorious thing. What a glorious thing it is to be a part of God's plan. Because what it means is that when the little narratives of our lives crash and burn when the storylines that we have built hit dead ends and encounter unexpected tragedy, we have not lost our way.

Because we know that our lives are rooted in something greater than that. things that perhaps we have put our hopes in our jobs and our careers, our family and our loved one, our personal achievements and aspirations.

things that we have to be around us. We still can stand on the truth that we are in God's story.

[17 : 30] And God has a plan for us to glorify him that can withstand even the fiercest storms of our lives.

God says to us, you are part of my plan. You are part of my story. And even when those things happen to you, hold on because I have not given up on you.

You will find your fulfillment and meaning in me and in my story. God does this because he loves us.

He says to his people, you are my beloved. What kind of love is this? Well, the Bible has rich imagery. It is like a father who says to an adopted son, I chose you, not for any other reason but because I chose to set my love upon you.

And I do love you. Our heavenly father says to us, his people orphaned by sin, come and be mine. Come into my family. Be my daughter.

[18 : 43] Be my son. live in my love. The Bible also pictures God's love like the love of a bridegroom saying to his bride, I will pursue you.

I will woo you with my love. I will win your heart. Come and be mine exclusively. Love no other. Come and join into an intimacy where you will know what it is like to be fully known and fully loved.

It is also the love of a sovereign king who says to his subject, my love for you will keep you safe in my realm. I will spend all of my energy, all that I have at my disposal to provide for you and to protect you and to care for you, to bring you into the joy of my kingdom and my world.

I will be your protector and provider. I will marshal all my power to come to your aid. God's love.

These are just some of the pictures of God's love for us in the scripture. How do you respond to those things? I know my heart, it's not easy some of the time to receive that, to bask in it, but friends, this is perhaps the most basic and powerful truth of the gospel, is that God loves you.

[20 : 20] He has chosen you in love. One of the verses that I turn to over and over again, to remind myself of this and to help my heart feel, experience, take in what my head knows is true, is Zephaniah 3, 17.

I've probably quoted it three times to this church already. I'll keep doing it because it's one of the richest places in scripture where God says to his people, the Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing. And that's the part that gets me the most, is the end.

God sings. God sings over his people. God sings over you, brother and sister in Christ. He sings over you because he loves you and he overflows with joy.

Amen. Amen. And friends, this is what makes us people like Paul and his companions who were described in Acts 17 6 when they came to Thessalonica as people who turn the world upside down.

[21 : 48] When we know the love of God like this, we are people who cannot be shaken. This soundtrack of God's love in choosing us and saying, you are mine, you are my beloved.

When it dominates the storyline of our lives, it makes us unshakable and unstoppable. Whatever the trials we face, when we're passed over for the promotion again, when the rejection letter arrives and we think we're on to plan, not B but C or D or W, when the investment account vanishes, we're left without a safety net, when the friend that we had counted on to be there in our time of need is suddenly unavailable, and even when we stand at the grave of a loved one, God sings over us.

And it does not make these realities less true. But what it says is, these are not the defining things about your life.

God has chosen you, he loves you, and that narrative arc, that storyline, is what is able to carry you through the hardest moments.

This is why Paul wanted to remind the Thessalonians of this, because he knew how hard it was for them to stand firm. He knew how hard the things they were facing were.

[23 : 40] And he wanted to remind them of what God has done, for we know, brothers beloved by God, that he has chosen you. He wants that to ring in their ears.

Friends, I just want you to say, this is why we are preaching through 1 Thessalonians. This is my hope for our church, is that this would ring through our church, through our lives individually, and through our life as a congregation.

This is what it means to be a gospel-centered church, is that this reality, this truth of the gospel that God has chosen us in love, would ring forth.

And it will carry us through the hardest times, and it will overflow in the most unlikely places, in the most unlikely ways, that God has chosen us in love.

Now, it raises a question, doesn't it? The question is, how can Paul be so confident in this? Maybe that's a question you have, you thinking, looking of your own life and wondering, is this really true of me, that God has chosen me?

[24 : 58] I don't feel like it's true, I don't feel like it's real, even if it might be true in some theoretical sense. Maybe you're here exploring Christianity, and you're looking in from the outside, wondering, okay, that sounds nice, sort of, but I'm on the outside of that.

Why would I, what would, how do I respond to this? Well, Paul goes on to explain, doesn't he? Verses three through five begins with an explanatory because, and he says, we know that he has chosen you in his love because the gospel imprint is on your story.

right? In verse five, he actually appeals to the gospel imprint, not on the Thessalonians, but on Paul and his companions as the gospel came to Thessalonica in the first place.

And then in verses six and seven, he talks about how it actually landed and the effect that it had on the Thessalonian church. Paul says, do you see it? He's reminding them, do you see the gospel imprint?

Now, you may be wondering, the gospel imprint, what does that mean? Well, if any of you have lots of books, you may have one of these things. There are these cool things called book imprints, right? And it's kind of like a little vice, and if you have a big library, you might have one in, what you do is you open up to the first page and you go, and it makes an imprint on that page, and it usually says, this book belongs to the library of John Hinkson, or someone like John who has a large library.

[26 : 36] And it's there forever. It's not written, it can't be scribbled out, it's more like a watermark, but it's actually an imprint. And what Paul says is, I'm confident of what God has done for you because there is a gospel imprint.

God has printed it on your life, on your story in a way that cannot be mistaken. God has So first, Paul says, this imprint is on those who came and proclaimed the gospel to you.

Paul isn't bragging here, he's simply saying, this is what happened. So look with me at verse 5, right? Because our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake.

Now, first read, you might think this is really about the Thessalonians, that they received power in the Holy Spirit, but really Paul is saying, no, this is what happened when our gospel came to you.

And the end of the verse doesn't really make any sense unless you read it as it probably should be better translated, even as you know what kind of people we were among you.

[27 : 53] Our gospel came to you with these characteristics because of the kind of people we were among you. And so Paul is saying to the Thessalonians, look at, do you remember?

Do you remember what you saw in us? What did they see? Well, first they saw the word of the gospel, right? It came not only in word, but also in, right?

So the first thing that came was the word of the gospel, the good news that God sent Christ to die on the cross. And rise from the dead so that he could save sinners and ultimately to redeem the creation itself from the curse of sin.

This was the message that Paul proclaimed. It wasn't a human opinion that he offered for your perusal. It was not an option among many other religions for you to consider in the, in the comfort of your coffee shop.

He proclaimed it as a revelation. This is what God has done. What will you do with this message? And the proclamation of that gospel then came not only in word, but in power and the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

[29 : 09] What kind of power was this? Well, the imprint of the gospel is a kind of power where the curse is reversed. The effects of the fall of the alienation of humanity against God begins to be reversed.

This is what you see in the, in the ministry of Jesus when he walked the earth. Wherever he went, the blind could see, the lame walked, demonic forces were cast out, the shame, shamed were restored, the lost were found, and the dead were raised.

Everywhere God, everywhere Jesus walked, the effects of the curse were reversed. And this happened with the apostles too, didn't it? As they walked through, as they proclaimed the gospel, God attended it with signs and wonders and miracles.

Things that have no human explanation. They were a display of God's power, a foretaste of the final redemption that is yet to come.

We don't know how much of this happened in Thessalonica. We're not told. But we do know that Paul and his companions were called the people who turned the world upside down.

[30 : 23] And it wasn't only power that was in this gospel imprint. It was the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit bringing fruit in these men's lives of things that don't make sense otherwise.

Because in the face of persecution, in the face of hardship, Paul and his companions persevered and they persevered with joy.

It is throughout their ministry travels, this story. They come to a town, they begin to preach the gospel, somebody doesn't like it, a mob is raised up, they get stoned, they get cast out, they run out of town, whatever it is, everywhere they went, it seemed, they faced this kind of trial.

And they persevered. And they kept going. Because the very presence of God, the Holy Spirit was in them. And he was bearing this fruit.

That the preciousness of the gospel was worth so much that no suffering and no trial would deter them. And finally, came with power and Holy Spirit and full conviction.

[31 : 30] salvation. When the apostles preached the word, they knew that it was the thing that made everything else make sense. This is what Jesus taught his disciples on the road to Emmaus.

That all the words of Moses and the prophets pointed to him and the good news that in him, God had accomplished what he set out to do in winning a people back for himself.

When Paul experienced the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he did perhaps one of the most dramatic 180s in the entire history of the world.

A man who was bent on persecuting and killing Christians, those who believed in Christ, became the greatest servant and proclaimer of the love of Christ for the world.

They preached with full conviction because this was the truth that made everything else make sense. And so the Thessalonians saw the imprint of the gospel on the story of Paul and their companions.

[32 : 46] The reality was these men ministered out of the knowledge, the wellspring that God had chosen them in his love. And their apprehension of this, the reality of that truth in their lives was how Paul is confident, confident in what he says about the Thessalonians because they saw it and they responded.

And this is what he says in verses 6 and 7, isn't it? They responded when they saw the gospel imprint on Paul and his companions.

The gospel imprint was then passed on to them. You became imitators of us and of the Lord. And in the face of much affliction, you received our message with joy in the Holy Spirit.

Remember the story of Jason? We're going to keep telling the story because it's the only one we have in Thessalonica, but it's a really good one, isn't it?

Do you remember Jason in Acts 17? He's just a guy. He's a guy who owns a house. But Paul comes and he hears the message of the gospel and he believes it. And he says, hey, why don't you guys come and teach in my house because you got kicked out of the synagogue.

[34 : 05] And so they came to his house and he taught. And then one day, Jason's, you know, putting around his house and he hears this noise coming down the street and it's an angry mob.

And they stop at his door and they bang on the door and they say, where's Paul and Silas and Timothy? Well, you know what? They weren't there. And so the mob ripped open the door, said, where are they? Jason said, I don't know.

And so Paul said, okay, or the mob said, okay, well, Paul isn't here, so you can come with us instead. And they dragged this guy who had believed the gospel for, who knows, a month, maybe?

They dragged him out into a street, him and some others. And they brought him before a public mob trial. How frightening is that?

And yet, and yet he stood firm. He stood firm because the reality of the gospel had sunk deep in his life. He knew that God had chosen him in love and he would not recant.

[35 : 06] He would not shade away. He would not do what Peter did. I don't know him. Paul, never heard of him. I don't know. He would not disidentify himself with Paul and Christ.

But instead, he suffered. He responded by believing the glorious truths that he had embraced. And he saw his story in the broader arc of God's story in the world.

And it gave him strength. And he did it with joy in the Holy Spirit. This wasn't simply dogged determination. It's also not like super happy, like, I don't care.

I just got attacked by a mob, but I'm fine. You know, it's not that kind of happy-go-lucky. But it is a joy that springs from the truth.

It is not defiance. It is not droopy resignation, but joy. He had seen it in Paul and his companions, and he had heard of it. He had heard of the joy of his Savior.

[36 : 14] He had heard of the one who suffered so much for him. He had heard of the one who embraced the suffering that came with leaving heaven and coming to earth and taking on human form so that he could identify with us.

He heard of Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame so that he could be the author and perfecter of our faith, that he could be the redeemer of God's people.

The gospel imprint was not only in Paul and his companions in its proclamation, but it was all over the story of the Thessalonian church themselves.

God had chosen them. God had loved them. And this made all the suffering endurable. And so they themselves became an example to others.

And the imprint that goes from Paul to the church in Thessalonica then gets spread on, an example to all the people in Macedonia and Achaia. Greg's going to preach more on this next week.

[37 : 31] But what an incredible picture of the gospel imprint, this core truth. God has chosen a people in love, overflowing and spilling out, cascading from one community to the next, from one life to the next, from one story to the next.

And that's why Paul was so confident. We know he has chosen you, beloved of God, because the gospel imprint is all over your story.

How are we to respond to this? How are we to think about this? Well, first, we are to look at the evidence in our own lives. We are to think, where is the gospel imprint in our lives?

Do you receive the message of God's loving choice of you? Or do you resist it? Do you presume that it's true because you've always been religious?

Have you allowed something or someone else, a person, a career, a trial, a tragedy, an aspiration or an achievement to define the narrative arc of your life, to dictate it?

[38 : 52] Have you made God a means to an end rather than the end itself? Friends, it is a sobering truth.

If there is no gospel imprint in our lives, then we must hear it as a call, a call to run to him, a call to go to him, a call to be afraid that to be outside of his loving choice of us is a terrible thing.

And we are called to run to him. And if you hear it, do not be afraid. He will not turn you away. If you can hear his call, if you long for that, he will receive you.

But for your encouragement, because my guess is that many of you may struggle more with the question of, well, I don't feel like I see this, not like I did in the New Testament.

Maybe I'm not. Maybe I'm not chosen. Maybe I'm not. Where can you see the curse being reversed in your life? How have you seen God begin to change you?

[40 : 15] Where, when have you found that being chosen by God gives you comfort even in the darkest moments? And friends, if you feel like, I don't know if that's even true, do you long for it to be true?

Do you want it to be? Do you see it as something desirable? Even that spark, even that glimmer is an evidence that God is at work in you.

Don't quench it. Cherish it. Pursue it. Don't beat yourself up. But cradle it.

And ask God to make it not just a spark, but a flame. A flame of the full conviction and power in the Holy Spirit. That God would do that in you.

But I also want you to hear Paul's call because it'd be very easy for us to think that our proper response to this message is to engage in some great spiritual navel gazing.

[41 : 22] Think, just thinking about ourselves. But Paul says, no, don't do this. Because it wasn't just in you that there was evidence. It was outside of you. And so, look around.

We can find confidence in the gospel not just because of what we see in our own lives, but what we see around us. Can you think of someone you know or have known who displayed the gospel reality?

Where there is a gospel imprint in their lives? Look around this room. Do you know how many stories there are in this very room of the gospel being precious and sweet of the truth of God's choosing and loving His people?

I can see those who have endured in great suffering and trial and have held firm. And that makes me encouraged. to hold fast to the gospel.

Look through the history of the church. This is why biographies are so great. In my own life, the stories of people like Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael of Jim Elliott and Helen Rosevear have all affirmed to me by the different ways their stories have shown the power of God's loving choice of His people.

[42 : 52] Friends, do you see? The gospel really is good news. The gospel that God has chosen us in His love.

That He has accomplished making us His in Christ. This is the best news in the whole world. And I want for you more than anything for it to capture your hearts this morning.

If you are in Him, if you have the confidence this morning, then I want you to revel in it. And if you aren't this morning, again, if you hear any whisper that this is what you want, if there is anything desirable about what I have said this morning about who God is and how He has worked, then God says, come.

Come to me. Come and believe. Come and receive this great truth. And I will make you mine. He says this to those who are in Him.

I've chosen you before the foundation of the world. I have set my love upon you. I've shown you your sin and your need for a Savior who is greater than you.

[44 : 12] I have awakened in your heart a gladness in the great salvation that I have done for you in Christ. I have worked power in you to change the curse.

I have given you my very self, the Holy Spirit, to dwell within you. I have convinced you of the truth of the gospel with full assurance. I have filled you with joy in spite of trials.

I have given you an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and kept in heaven for you who believe. I rejoice over you with gladness.

I quiet you with my love and I exult over you in my singing. I've called you.

I've called you out of the little narratives of your life to find the great hope and the great calling to be in my story, to be in my narrative, to be my people for my glory.

[45 : 21] I love you. You are mine and I have chosen you. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, we love you.

God, what an incredible truth this is. Lord, I pray. I pray that we would hear your voice by your spirit in your words speaking to us today about this great truth.

God, draw us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.