

While I'm Waiting
(Week 2)
1 Thessalonians 1:5b-10
"We'll Work 'Til Jesus Comes"

Introduction

Therefore, we don't need to say anything, for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned 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 rescues us from the coming wrath. 1 Thessalonians 1:8b-10

Have you ever wondered what you would do if you knew for a fact that Jesus was coming back this afternoon? I imagine that folks plans for the day would change dramatically, if they knew. Some would spend the day in constant prayer, repenting for the things that they should not have done, and for not doing the things that they should have done. Others would immediately pick up the phone and try to witness to those lost friends, neighbors, or relatives in the hope that they would receive Christ, before it's too late. Still others would, more than likely, ignore the news altogether and just go living as normal. But the question is; what would you do?

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Thessalonica, encouraged the young church for its faith, hope, and love. He and his companions had indeed seen a powerful work of the Holy Spirit in this Greek metropolis. And after they had left the city as a result of intense persecution, the old apostle was pleased to learn that in spite of everything that they had suffered, the church was not only enduring, but flourishing. Christ had indeed come to Thessalonica, and the city would never be the same again. That's what The Spirit of Christ does to a people. He makes them new. He gives them faith, hope, and love.

Paul had taught them the truth about the gospel, and he had also made it known to them the message of the angels in the **First Chapter of Acts**:

They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, Who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven." Acts 1:11

I love that verse. To me, it was as if the angels were saying, "Don't just stand there star gazing! Jesus will be coming back soon enough. So, in the meantime, get to work!" You see, we are supposed to be doing something, while we're waiting. Every now and then, some cult leader predicts that Jesus is coming back on such and such day. Don't be fooled by people like that. They are false prophets. For Christ has told us that no one knows the hour of his return (**Matthew 24:36**). But in spite of this, every few years, it seems some deranged soul claims to have figured out the exact time and date of the second coming of Christ. And when they do, scores of their cultish followers will climb to the top of some mountain and look up, as they wait to see Jesus.

If I may be so bold, I don't believe that these misguided souls actually believe in the same Jesus that I do. For if they did, they wouldn't be gazing up into heaven. They would be working as hard as they could right up until the moment of His return. There would be a sense of urgency to witness like never before. This is the mark of a Spirit-filled believer. We have not been chosen of God to gaze up into the heavens. NO! We have been set apart to work 'til Jesus comes. And that is exactly what was happening in Thessalonica. And the way that they were doing church there was having an impact far and wide.

When Timothy brought the news to Paul about the goings on in the Thessalonian church, he was delivering a second hand story. For their reputation had reached Paul's waiting ears even before Timothy arrived. It seemed that everyone was talking about what was going on in Thessalonica. As far as 300 miles away, their reputation was the talk of the entire region! Paul had to have been thrilled to hear the news. And he knew that it wasn't because of him. He hadn't been there very long, before he was run out of town. What was happening in Thessalonica could only be explained as a work of Almighty God, and to Him alone would be the glory. There are three things that every church will automatically do when The

Holy Spirit has set a fire in the hearts of the people. They will **Witness**, and **Work**, while they **Watch and Wait** for Christ's return. As the old spiritual song used to say, "We'll work 'til Jesus comes!"

Witness (vs. 5b-8a)

You know how we lived among you for our benefit, and you yourselves became imitators of us and of The LORD when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from The Holy Spirit. As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For the word of The LORD rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out. **1 Thessalonians 1:5b-8a**

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had been witnesses for Christ, bringing the message of the gospel when they had come to Thessalonica. And the people there accepted the word of God with joy. Even in the face of intense persecution from the Jews of the city, the church at Thessalonica was flourishing. We see here two words that by this world's standards should never be used in the same sentence: **joy** and **persecution**. But when God does a work in a believing heart, no matter the circumstances, come what may, that person has a never-ending wellspring of joy. This is the very essence of the fruit of the Spirit. A born again child of God can experience the joy of The LORD in all things.

It was by observing how the church reacted by faith, in the midst of suffering, that Paul was fully convinced, that what had taken place in Thessalonica was a genuine work of the Spirit and not just the persuasion of men. I had a pastor once who used to say, "Whatever I can talk you into, the devil can talk you out of." Wise words from a man that knew all too well that only a work of God will endure.

Before I move on to just how the Thessalonian church became an effective witness for the gospel of Christ, I think it would be remiss for me not to speak for a moment on enduring persecution. The word most often used for "persecution" in *The New Testament* Greek is "*Thlipsis*", and it means "*intense pressure*". It seems that the times in which we now live are rife with *thlipsis*. There seems to be pressure from every direction these days. Not just from those who are opposing the message of the church, but from all directions in general. So, just how DO Godly people bear up under pressure? I'm so glad that you asked!

Do you remember the story in *The Old Testament*, when Moses sent twelve spies into the land of Canaan to scout it out and return with their report? (You can find it in **Numbers Chapter 13**). Well, ten of those guys came back scared to death of the giants that lived in the land. They compared the giants to themselves saying:

We even saw the Nephilim there — the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim! To ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and must have seemed the same to them. **Numbers 13:33**

But Joshua and Caleb had a whole different take on what they saw in the land;

The land we passed through and explored is an extremely good land. If The LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and give it to us. Only don't rebel against The LORD, and don't be afraid of the people of the land, for we will devour them. Their protection has been removed from them, and The LORD is with us. Don't be afraid of them! **Numbers 14:7-9**

So what made the difference? While the other ten compared the giants to themselves, Joshua and Caleb compared them to Almighty God! Just remember to do that, when whatever "*thlipsis*" comes over you. Don't compare your problems to yourself. Compare them to Almighty God instead. He is completely able to overcome them. He will take care of you. Just have faith, and you will see!

Now, back to the point I started out to make. The members of the church followed the example of Paul and his companions, they followed the example set by Christ Himself, and they became witnesses. So much so, that the fame of their faithful testimony had spread throughout the region and all the way into Achaia some three hundred miles to the south. In fact, it had gone out from them even beyond that (**vs. 8**)! It seemed that everyone was talking about the faithful witness of the church at Thessalonica. Can you imagine what it would be like, if everyone in the country were talking about the witness of our little congregation here at Freedom?! Talk about exciting! This is what happens, when a church is genuinely on fire for Christ. It will make waves that travel for miles.

Paul had told the church that he could see in them their faith, hope, and love (**vs. 3**). As a result of their faith, they became witnesses aflame with passion for the gospel of Christ. Paul told them that **“the word of The LORD rang out from them”**. The word he uses for “rang out” means “to sound like a trumpet blast”! These people weren’t ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Far from it. They boldly shouted it out to all who would listen. This should be our prayer today, that such a revival would take place in our midst that the whole world would be shaken by our testimony. A church that is truly in love with Jesus Christ will be a **witnessing** church. We must share the gospel every chance that we get. Jesus is coming soon. Let him find in us a faithful witness, when He returns.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have become an example for other believers (**vs. 7**). The word he uses, translated “example” is *typos* (pronounced too-pos) in the Greek. It is a word used to describe “the imprint made upon something by striking it”. Have you ever seen the stamp on a piece of cowhide that read “genuine leather”? Well that mark would be considered a typos. Not coincidentally, the disciple Thomas used the exact same word, when he said he would only believe in the resurrection of Christ when he saw for himself the “typos” (prints) of the nails in His hands. What Paul was saying to the Thessalonian church is that because of their powerful witness, they were living proof to others that what they had found in Christ is genuine. Would to God that this would be said of all of us!

Work

Therefore, we don't need to say anything, for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God... **1 Thessalonians 1:8b-9**

Genuine faith will produce results. Every time. Faith without works is dead (**James 2:17**). The church at Thessalonica, not only believed the message of the Apostles, they proved out their faith by doing something about it! They turned to God from Idols, and they **“SERVED the living and true God”**. This is what Paul was referring to earlier in the passage, when he spoke of their **“labor motivated by love” (vs. 3)**. It was their love for Christ that made them long to repent and to serve Christ.

Just this past week, I saw a statement from the pope, who has now come out in support of same-sex marriage. (Yes, you read that correctly.) He went on to say that he believed that “no one should be excluded from God’s family”. What a sad commentary for our world today. Apparently *The Bibles* at the Vatican are difficult for him to understand. No one is excluded from God’s family, as long as, they are willing to turn TO God, FROM sin. This is called repentance, and without it, it is impossible to be accepted into God’s family. Period. For the Thessalonians to become a part of God’s family, they had to turn toward God and away from their sin. This means ANYTHING *The Bible* describes as sin! In their particular case, they had to turn away from the worship of false gods. They could NOT receive Christ, in addition to those other gods. Our relationship to Christ can only be an exclusive one. You cannot stay where you are and go with God! Apparently, even the pope has trouble with this concept. But let me assure you, there can be no salvation, apart from repentance. We prove that we truly love Christ, by doing what He tells us.

If you love me, you will keep my commands.

John 14:15

Because of their love for Christ, not only did the Thessalonians repent, but they also served Him. Again, faith with out works is dead! This church was so in love with The LORD Jesus, that they were serving Him with their whole heart. The word that Paul uses for “serve” in this passage is “*douleuo*” (pronounced dool-yoo-o’), and it means “to serve as a slave”. This church had gone from being enslaved to sin to becoming slaves of Christ Jesus. This is what it means to be a Christian. And if anyone should try and cheapen this relationship (even if it is the pope), do not believe them for a minute. True love of Christ, brings about repentance from sin and dedicated service to The LORD. If we love Jesus, then we will work till Jesus comes!

Watch and Wait

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead — Jesus, Who rescues us from the coming wrath. 1 Thessalonians 1:10

When I hear preachers, who don’t believe in the rapture, try and teach from *Thessalonians*, it always ends in disaster. Make no mistake. **1 Thessalonians** is “The Rapture Book”. This world may persecute the children of God without mercy, but know this; God will never, **EVER**, hurt His own children! When judgment begins to fall upon this wicked world, rest assured. Our Father will take us out of the way. It is His very nature to protect those that He loves.

Someone once asked me why that I believe so strongly in the rapture of the church. For me, it goes all the way back to **Genesis 6-7** with the story of Noah. When the torrents of God’s judgment came down... the ark rose up. Now that Ark, my friends, is a picture of Jesus Christ. And those of us that are in Him will never suffer God’s wrath. To be in Christ is to be seated in the heavenlies with Christ. God allowed His Son to suffer His wrath for sin upon the cross. Rest assured. Christ will never suffer again, and we are IN CHRIST! Those of us that are in Him have not been appointed to wrath (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**). Christ will come for us when the time arrives for judgment. Trust in this hope of rescue.

The Bible tells us that when that day comes, it will be like a thief coming in the night (**1 Thessalonians 5:2**). No one knows the day or the hour. But as Christ’s church, we must be prepared at all times. The Thessalonian believers were suffering intense persecution at the hands of sinful men, but Paul wanted to remind them that God’s wrath will one day come upon those who reject the gospel. And when that wrath comes, we, The Church, will be safely taken out of harms way. This was the hope of the Thessalonians, and it is still our hope today. We are commanded, therefore, to live in the meantime as though Jesus could come at any moment. Our desire is that when He comes, He will find us faithful, serving diligently with the time that we have been given to gather in His harvest. If this was the way they were expected to serve in Thessalonica two thousand years ago, how much more should we serve, as the Day of The LORD is fast approaching? We must work ‘til Jesus comes.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at there proper time? Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when He comes. Matthew 24:45-46

That is one of my all-time favorite verses by the way. I want to be the kind of servant that Christ finds hard at work for His kingdom, when He comes to take me home. Can I get a witness? We are to be *Watching* and *Waiting*, not as one who gazes up into the heavens, but diligently bearing *Witness* to the gospel message, *Working* to serve Christ in sincere devotion, making disciples like there is no tomorrow. For indeed, there may not be! Let us be about the work of the harvest while there is yet time. Let us work... ‘til Jesus comes!

And let all His servants say... TRUTH!!!