

1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

“Gathering, Growing, Going”

2000 yrs ago Paul & Team brought Great NEWS to Great CITY > Thessalonica

Founded in 4th C BC by Cassander KING of Macedonia

LARGEST and MOST IMPORTANT City of Macedonia

Paul UNEXPECTEDLY Torn AWAY from Young, Thriving CHURCH
 Fatherly Words of INSTRUCTION and ENCOURAGEMENT > 1st Letter
 CONFIDENCE > Jesus will Change THEM and THRU them the CITY

Almost 40 yrs BICF Bringing Great News of Jesus to Beijing

Telling People of ALL Nations that Lord of Universe – LOVES and SAVES

TODAY we REJOICE – 17 Congregations / 10 Different LANGUAGES

Text > BICF ZGC English Ministry Motto: 1. Gathering 2. Growing 3. Going

1. Gathering

MOST Urgent and Important THING in all of Life is to KNOW Jesus
 PURPOSE of Church > GATHER People from Everyone to Make Him Known
 Gk wd EKLESIA – Called OUT of World to GATHER Together in Assembly

v. 9 Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

URGENCY of TASK > ‘the COMING Wrath’ / HORRIBLE and DEFINITE
 2nd Coming of Jesus in EVERY Chapter of these TWO Letters to Thessalonica

v. 1 Grace and peace to you. > UNIQUE Greeting of Apostle Paul

NOT Found in Any Literature of ANCIENT World > Wonder of GOSPEL

SHALOM of God of Israel and GRACE of Full Redemption > NOW in JESUS

a. Called > KNOWING God is by INVITATION Only

v. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you

We love because He first loved us

1 John 4:19

SEEKING, SAVING Love of God Drew Paul to Bring Gospel to Macedonia

Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" ...we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:9,10

PREACH the Gospel with CONFIDENCE in PROMISES of SAVIOR

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. John 10:16

Doctrine of GOD'S ELECTION filled with PRACTICAL Implications

Give us ASSURANCE of Salvation but NOT PRESUMPTION of Importance

Prompt us to HOLINESS NOT Moral CARELESSNESS

Drive us to HUMILITY for Undeserved GRACE, NOT Pride of our Worthiness

Encourage Preach Gospel, Not FEAR or Laziness > His Sheep Hear His Voice

b. Changed

Paul was CONFIDENT of their ELECTION > SAW God working IN Them

vs. 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction

CONVICTION > Inward State of Preacher

POWER > Outward Result of the Preaching

HOLY SPIRIT > Working at BOTH ENDS – IN the PREACHER & PEOPLE
 CHANGE was in PREACHERS AND the PEOPLE > God Changing CITY
 Jesus Author & FINISHER of Faith: When He SHOWS UP He SHAKES UP!

vs. 9 They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God
 MODERN World is COMPARTMENTALIZED > esp RELIGION

IF you have GOD – HIDE Him/She/It in your HEART – Not Wear on Sleeve

The city of Thessalonica was also the home of...the fisherman, the farmer, the carpenter, the cook, the scribe, the hunter, the weaver, the miller, the rhetor, and the temple servant...these people dedicated the tools of their trade to their patron deity...these persons did not separate their religion from their labor. Gene L. Green

Thessalonica > 50 Miles from Mt. Olympus > HOME of Pantheon of Greek gods
 Just FEW Months before ALL Church Members – Pagans, Idol Worshipers
 Gods of Greece ORDERED Weather, Agriculture, Politics, Economy, Education

RADICAL Repentance > TURNED Backs on Olympus > Whole Way of Life
 FOCUS on ANOTHER Mountain – GOLGOTHA – True God DIED for Them
 NOW Life ORDERED Around Him as King, God, Lord, Master, Savior, Friend

Infinitely WISE Decision > Idols are DEAD – God is LIVING

Idols are FALSE – God is TRUE // Idols are MANY – God is ONE

Idols are VISIBLE, God is INVISIBLE // Idols are CREATED, God CREATOR
 Millions ENSLAVED MODERN Idols > Jesus came to set PRISONER'S Free!
 REPLACE Emptiness of Idol with FULLNESS of LOVE, HOPE, and FAITH

c. Corporate

v. 1 To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

NO Lone Ranger Christians > BORN Again into FAITH and a FAMILY of Faith
This Letter Filled with YOU, YOURS and WE, OURS - NOT I, ME, and MINE

NOTICE > Primary LOCATION – NOT in Thessalonica > IN GOD

NORMAL Pauline phrase “Church of God IN Corinth” / Only Here IN GOD

HIGH View of JESUS – ONE with GOD and FULLY GOD

NOT SPATIAL as if LITERALLY Inside of God – Some Bizarre Meaning

‘living in’ ‘rooted in’ ‘drawing life from’ // Vine & Branches – Body & Members

Church was ATTACKED by World / but AFFIRMED by God

Church was PERSECUTED by World / but they found PEACE in Jesus

Wd transl. CHURCH Greek: ASSEMBLY, Common Meeting > Deciding Body

Paul cannot think of GOSPEL without CHURCH > DEPEND on One Another

The gospel creates the church which spreads the gospel, which creates more churches, which in turn spread the gospel further – and on and on it goes.

John Stott

NO Doubt these NEW Believers are Somewhat AFRAID

FOUNDER of Church – Human FATHER in Faith: Paul – had to Get out Town

HATED by Influential JEWISH Lders – SUSPECTED by ROMAN Authorities

Jesus: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; *no one can snatch them out of my hand.*”

John 10:27,28

2. Growing

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness... Acts 17:11

But DESPITE whatever was LACKING in their Character > Paul is POSITIVE
 Follows STANDARD Form of ANCIENT Letter > Fills w/ Christian Meaning
 USE Current FORMS of Communication to Advance KINGDOM Message
 KEY Ministry TOOL ZGC – WeChat Dozens of Groups – PAYING Offering

vs. 2,3 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOT Empty FLATTERY or FALSE HOPE, God FINISHES Good Work in Us
 RESPONSIBILITY for Growing in Grace OURS/ REASON for Growth is God
 HE gets the GLORY / We experience the REJOICING

In this 1st Letter of Paul we SEE first TEACHING about FAITH, LOVE, HOPE
 NOT Natural Human Qualities: IDOLATORS becoming True WORSHIPPERS

All 3 Virtues are OUTGOING:

FAITH toward GOD / LOVE toward OTHERS / HOPE toward FUTURE

FAITH rests on PAST / LOVE works in PRESENT / HOPE looks to FUTURE

All 3 Virtues are PRACTICAL and LIFE CHANGING

Faith WORKS / Love LABORS / Hope ENDURES

Every Christian MUST be a BELIEVER, a LOVER, and a HOPER

a. Followers v. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord,

IF People FOLLOWED You > Would they be FOLLOWING JESUS?

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1

PEOPLE Need Good EXAMPLES from Us: Real, Honest, Grateful, Trust God

80% Our CHURCH UNI Students – NEED More MENTORS for them to Grow

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9

b. Leaders

v. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia

the imitators in their turn were imitated

Leon Morris

Jerusalem APOSTLES were MAXED OUT with Duties – Needed LEADERS

Apostles to Church: “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be *full of the Spirit and wisdom*...They chose Stephen, a man *full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas...”

Acts 6:3-5

Leadership VALIDATED by their CHANGED LIVES

WHAT took them to that NEXT LEVEL? From Followers to Leaders?

v. 6 severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit

December 1980 1st Trip to UGANDA > Ruthless, Dictator IDI AMIN left 1979

THOUSANDS Tortured, Killed, Suffered > Land of ORPHANS

Thought > “SADDEST Month of My LIFE” / OPPOSITE! Gold refined by Fire!

HOLY Spirit gave PROFOUND Joy in their SEVERE SUFFERING

Doubt if I HELPED them MUCH? – by THEY CHANGED my LIFE Forever

Biblical GROWTH is MORE Often thru times of PAIN and not PLEASURE

3. Going

vs. 5 our gospel came to you...

Did NOT Fall Out of SKIES > People had to GO and PREACH Good News

a. Team

v. 1 Paul, Silas and Timothy > LEADERSHIP TEAM of 2nd Missionary Journey

Gospel Ministry in Thessalonica > TEAM of Gospel WORKERS & Teachers

LETTER – WRITTEN by Paul > ENDORSED by Team of Brothers / Leaders

No CHURCH in NT is led by ONLY ONE MAN

PENTECOST > *Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd...*
Acts 2:14

Paul an APOSTLE > Emphasized when Necessary – Ch 2 > Galatians

Paul was SENIOR > But – Like Me – Not Need REMINDER that he was OLD!

Titles we Use should come from SCRIPTURE and not SOCIETY

This has been a team effort from the very beginning...we did this together

Billy Graham
as he received the Congressional Medal of Honor

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7

God brings GROWTH so He gets the GLORY

b. Talked and Talked About

v. 5 our gospel came to you not simply with words

NOT JUST Words > but NEVER Forget > NOT WITHOUT Words

Modern Man SICK of Words > EMPTY Words, FALSE Promises, LIES

Equally a LIE > “We do NOT Need Words – Just LIVE the GOSPEL”

Paul did MORE than make Tents in Thessalonica > TROUBLE Making Preacher

...he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead... Acts 17:2,3

The Spirit without the Word is weaponless; the Word without the Spirit is powerless.

John Stott

BEFORE they WENT OUT Talking they were being TALKED ABOUT!

Missionary to Mexico - Cameron Townsend - Remote Indian village

Wanted to TRANSLATE BIBLE into LANGUAGE of POOR INDIAN TRIBE
 Gov't Officer "As long as I am in office, the Bible will never be translated into the
 Indian languages - it would only upset them"

TOWNSEND PRAYED - SUPPORTERS PRAYED - DOOR NEVER OPENED
 DECIDED TO LIVE AMONG THESE PEOPLE AND WAIT ON THE LORD

Discovered a FOUNTAIN of Clear Spring Water sprang up in Town

Water simply Ran DOWN the Hill Unused

TOWNSEND Encouraged PEOPLE, PLANT GARDENS around THIS SPRING

SOON Village People GREW 2X's AS MUCH FOOD - ECONOMY GREW

Townsend wrote article about this for small Mexican paper

Article eventually seen by President of Mexico

SHOCKED! GRINGO LIVED WHERE Few MEXICAN WOULD EVEN LIVE

PRESIDENT: LIMOUSINE, MOTORCADE DROVE TO SEE TOWNSEND

PRES. TO TOWNSEND "Of course, you can translate the Scriptures"

BEGAN - Lifetime friendship Townsend + President Cardenas

AND work of Wycliffe Bible Translators

vs. 8,9 *The Lord's message* rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—
your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say
 anything about it, for they themselves report what happened when we visited you.

BOTH FACTS of Gospel: *Lord's message* & Their FAITH *your faith in God*

Across from our Apt > BIGGEST BELL in China > DA ZHONG SA

Want to CHANGE That...

Want BIGGEST BELL in China be BICF > CHURCH China > God's PEOPLE!
LET the Lord's message RING out!! thru ALL FORMS of COMMUNICATION

Church in Thess. NO MEDIA Budget / NO AD Campaign / No INTERNET
Men – Women – Boys – Girls FILLED with Holy Spirit – Radiant in Jesus
OVERFLOWING with HIS Presence & Power > led to PROCLAMATION
Not just FORMAL Sermons – Informal SHARING – HOLY GOSSIP

c. Transforming Message

v. 5 gospel...with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction

MUSLIM along NILE River: *“What can your God do that Muhammad cannot?”*

FARMER in Viet Nam: *“Can your God make it rain?”*

vs. 9,10 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

Note WORKING of God in US – TURN, SERVE, WAIT will be RESCUED

WAIT seems a STRANGE Activity of FAITH > gotta go! Gotta go!

BALANCE – We MUST Work WHILE we Wait

SERVE Jesus faithfully EARTH / WAIT Hopefully to Come from HEAVEN

PRESUMPTION we can DO IT ALL

PESSIMISM we can do NOTHING

Jesus CHANGES Cities > Jesus changes CITIES thru PEOPLE He CHANGES
People: Gathered to KNOW Him, GROWING in Him, GOING Forth with Him

African boy > Money selling Mangos from Tree in his yard
Sack of Fruit to busy Taxi Park in Center City
Crowds in Hot Sun and shouted, “Mangos, Mangos, Mangos!”
Shouted until Hoarse > Ignored > No Sale
To Soothe his Sore Throat > Decided to Eat a Ripe, Juicy Mango
Enjoyed fruit so Much > Forgot about Anything Else
Whole Face was covered with Sweet Juice > Flowed to his Elbows
Delight was Contagious > People lined up to buy a Delicious Mango

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what happened when we visited you. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.