

In Uncertain Times, My identity matters.

Faith in Uncertain Times

1 Thes.

9.13.2020

Opening: I confess that this message and series feels different.

A. That's mostly because I feel different.

1. My desire is increasingly to make the glory and majesty of God known.
2. Why does this feel different?
3. Very often, sermons are constructed to make the truth easily applicable and accessible.
4. But what I want today is to make the presence and majesty of God known through the book of Thessalonians.

B. I hope, today, will feel different.

1. I want today to be different, because we need to be different.
2. We are living in a time unlike anything in recent memory.
3. What is going to carry us forward is our faith, love, and assurance in Jesus Christ.
4. **Our picture of God, and who He is, must become bigger than the picture of our problems!**

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 (CSB)

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy:

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

Grace to you and peace.

²We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. ³We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. You know how we lived among you for your benefit, ⁶and 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. ⁷As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith^r in God has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything, ⁹for 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 ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Introduction:

A. Thessalonica is a city in ancient Macedonia, or modern-day Greece.

1. At the time, it was a city of approx. 200,000 and was the capital of Macedonia.
2. The Apostle Paul established this church on his second missionary journey around the year 51 A.D.
3. That means that this is one of Paul's first letters that we know of, and takes place only 20 years after Jesus' ministry and resurrection.
4. It is safe to say that Christianity and the Church were pretty young at the time of this letter.

B. Thessalonica was a good church.

1. Paul had a good relationship with them and loved them very much.
2. Like all churches, they had problems.

3. Their main problem was they had begun to expect Jesus to return immediately.

4. Because they expected Jesus' immediate return, some had stopped working, others were becoming extremely idle, and others had stopped doing any good at all.

5. And so, when persecution and difficulty arose in Thessalonica, many of the believers started losing sight of the Hope they had in Jesus.

C. During this series, I hope for all of us to grow in our faith during our uncertain times.

1. 1 Thessalonians contains great insight into the people you and I are supposed to be.

2. Today we will see how we, the Church, are called to be people rooted in Jesus and examples of faith, hope, and love to those around us.

1. Have you ever noticed that Paul's letters all begin the same way?

A. That's because ancient letters all had a certain format and rhythm.

1. The authors were listed.

2. The audience was specified.

3. Many of them would refer or give thanks to a deity.

4. We have to remember that the Greeks and Romans were a weird mix of religious and secular.

a. They had altars and shrines everywhere, and loved ritual.

b. They also had no problem living however they wanted.

c. Americans have a lot in common with the Romans in this regard.

1. One minute we are living for the devil, doing whatever sounds good.

2. But we will end a speech with "God Bless America" or interrupt alcohol sales at a baseball game to sing "God Bless America", or print "In God We Trust" on the millions of dollars we give to planned parenthood.

d. We often have much more in common with our ancient ancestors than we want to admit.

B. As we read 1 Thessalonians, we want to keep in mind that this is an actual letter.

1. The Apostle Paul was led to write this to real people, in a real place, in a real time.

2. He wasn't thinking that He was writing Scripture, he thought we was building up the saints and doing the ministry God had called him to.

3. Yet, God led Paul to write this in such a way that God inspired the very words we have before us today.

4. We want to keep in mind that this human letter has become sacred Scripture for us, and if we will study it, it has the power to change lives and eternities.

2. To the Church of the Thessalonians.

A. From the earliest days of Christianity, followers of Jesus have gathered together on the Lord's day.

1. The Jews among them were used to worshipping God on the Sabbath (Saturday).

2. But for those who were not Jewish, and for many of the former Jews, gathering on the first day of the week was a way to honor Jesus' resurrection.

3. This is why we gather on Sunday's and not Saturday.

B. The word for Church is **Ekklesia**.

1. **Ekklesia was a common Greek word that referred to a gathering of people for a purpose or cause.**

- a. Ancient Greece had all kinds of Ekklesia.
- b. But there was something different about the Ekklesia in Thessalonica.
- c. Unlike other people in other Greek cities, they were not meeting to discuss policy and government or philosophy.
- d. This group of people were meeting in the name of Jesus!

2. Their purpose was to give God glory by worshipping Jesus.

- a. This is what makes the Church unique.
- b. When you and I gather together in Jesus' name, we are not worshipping alone.
 - 1. We worship with other like-minded believers of Licking and Houston.
 - 2. We also worship, in spirit, with like-minded believers all over the world.
 - 3. We also worship with the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.
 - 4. Have you given much thought lately to why attending church and worshipping together is important?

3. Our purpose for gathering is not to see friends, deal with political issues, or to feel better about ourselves.

- a. Our PURPOSE is to gather in Jesus' name and bring Him glory.
- b. **Old Song:** We have come into this house, to gather in his name, and worship Him..."
- c. **Can I say something hard?** There are many Sundays when I am sad about the way we all participate in worship and preaching together.

1. My heart's desire is to see you worshipping Jesus with passion and sincerity.

2. *Yet, too often, we worship with a spirit of indifference instead of the Spirit of Jesus.*

C. Our passion for God comes from our identity in God.

1. **As long as we are finding our identity elsewhere, we won't find our joy in Jesus.**

2. What the days to come require of us are people who are people of God and established in their relationship with Him.

D. Not only did these followers meet together as the church, they met in "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".

1. If we are not meeting in the presence, power, and glory of God, then we have no reason to meet.

2. If we identify more with denominations, political parties, or church styles than we do with our identity in Jesus, then we have no reason to meet.

E. What makes the "church" is the presence of Jesus among us.

1. Music style does not make the church.

2. Architecture Does not make the church.

3. Preaching style (loud, soft, whatever) does not make the Church.

4. It is all of us, together, with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, that makes us the Church.

5. The Apostle Paul expresses abundant grace and peace to those in Thessalonica who were meeting in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. This is what we should strive for today as well.

7. Point 1 from Thessalonians: Believers must find their unique identity in their relationship with God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

3. After we establish our identity, we then must establish our activity.

A. Vs. 3 Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (CSB)

³We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Three of the key elements of every believer is faith, love, and hope.
2. These elements root our activity in the power of God.
 - a. By faith in Jesus we can move mountains.
 - b. By faith in Jesus we can love the unlovable.
 - c. By faith in Jesus we can hope for the impossible.
 - d. Faith, hope, and love are necessary elements for every Christian's walk here on Earth.
3. But these elements are not just dangling out there.
4. They are all connected to activity.

B. Work produced by faith, labor motivated by love, and endurance inspired by hope.

1. If your faith, love, and hope isn't doing something then you aren't doing what God has called you to do.
2. Remember that the name Church comes from a group of people meeting for a purpose.
3. The people of Thessalonica were not sitting around singing campfire songs, they were meeting with purpose.
4. They were making Jesus known as they worked, and labored, and endured the struggles of this world.

C. **The Church is called to do more than sit around and take up space.**

1. The church is called to be engaged in the mission of God.
2. We are to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and represent the oppressed.
3. We are to be conduits of Godly love and Godly hope.
4. We have been chosen by God for a great purpose, not to sin around and whine!

When our identity is in Jesus, and our activity is in Jesus, then our power will be in Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 (CSB)

⁴For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. You know how we lived among you for your benefit,

4. **Let our power be from Jesus.**

A. The Apostle is reflecting about his time in Thessalonica, and he was excited.

1. Not only did he preach in that city but God did so much more.
2. Not only did the word of God come to them, but so too did Holy Spirit power, and the full assurance of God's love.

B. Hard Statement: **The Apostle Paul expected more from God than just good preaching every once in a while. He expected God's people to have an encounter with God.**

1. So why are we ok with a good word but not demonstration of God's power or assurance?
2. Why has the Church overall reduced Christianity to 3 songs and a sermon?

3. In fact, Paul is saying that activity of God's power, God's Spirit, and God's assurance was proof that God had chosen them and accepted them.

4. Does that mean that the absence of Power, Spirit, and Assurance means the absence of God's blessings?

C. **Could it be the powerlessness in many of our churches is because God has rejected the ministry of that church?**

1. We are, in our day, seeing a shaking and a shifting in the pew and in the pulpit.

2. Many churches are seeing less than 50% of people returning to church. When people are asked "when are you coming back" they are responding with "we aren't coming back".

3. Over the past few months, some of the biggest and most popular preachers have been removed, dismissed, or resigned from ministry due to various illegal or inappropriate activities.

4. There is a shaking and a shifting happening within the spiritual realm.

5. Someday, I hope none of us are happy meeting together unless we have the power of God in our midst.

Close: *When we are established in Jesus, we can withstand anything.*

A. The Thessalonian church quickly found herself under persecution.

1. But how did she make it?

2. With the joy of the Holy Spirit.

3. **When we have the Holy Spirit, we have the power and the joy to make it through tough times.**

B. Does anybody here need joy today?

1. Does anybody need the kind of power that only God can bring?

2. Today, let us take a few minutes to seek God.

3. If you feel like you are drifting, today is the day to encounter Him fresh and anew.

4. If you are struggling, today is the day to encounter the faith, hope and love that God can bring.

May the Spirit of Jesus move upon us in a real way!