**October 22, 2023 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

***A Model Church***

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 NRSV

*(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. (2)We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly (3)remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (4)For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, (5)because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. (6)And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, (7)so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (8)For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. (9)For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a 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 wrath that is coming.*

**Notes:**

1. The Thessalonians are a ***working*** church.
   1. See that those in ***need*** get what they ***need***.
   2. Make others feel ***loved***, invited, and welcomed.
2. The Thessalonians are a ***steadfast*** church.
   1. Do what is ***right*** regardless of what everyone thinks.
   2. Stand up against ***false*** teaching.
   3. Endeavor to remain ***faithful***.
3. The Thessalonians are an ***imitating*** church.
   1. ***Follow*** Jesus.
   2. ***Live*** your life the way Jesus would.
   3. Friends and neighbors see Jesus ***living*** in you.
4. The Thessalonians are a ***joyful*** church.
   1. Be ***joyful*** when we worship.
   2. Sing with ***joy*** in our hearts and a ***smile*** on our lips.
   3. Be ***cheerful*** givers as God desires.
5. The Thessalonians are an ***evangelizing*** church.
   1. Be concerned about the ***spiritual*** welfare of others.
   2. ***Work*** as soul winners.
   3. ***Invite*** others to come to church with you.
6. The Thessalonians are a ***hospitable*** church.
   1. Treat guests ***appropriately***.
   2. Take the time to ***cultivate*** friendships.
   3. Take the time to ***know*** guests, make them feel welcome.
7. The Thessalonians are a ***waiting*** church.
   1. What matters; that Jesus is ***coming*** back!
   2. What matters; ***friends*** are ready when Jesus returns!
   3. What matters; ***children*** are ready when Jesus returns!
8. Be a ***model*** church, a church ready for Jesus to return.

**Script:**

Many times, I think back to the church that was here when I was a child. We met in what is now the fellowship hall. We had no indoor plumbing so when we had to go to the bathroom we went to an outhouse; the girls were to the left near where the red shed is now; and the boys were on the right down over the bank behind where the dumpster sits. We had Spirit moving services; people came to know the Lord. We had large vacation bible schools and large Sunday school classes which met in the basement. As a child I believed my church was a perfect church. But as I grew and started to see the goings on behind the scenes, I soon learned that we had our share of struggles.

That church broke ground for this church in 1972, and the construction process began. The people put their sweat and tears into the construction of this building. They moved into this building around 1974. I do not remember walking from the old building to the new one, but I have heard stories of them singing songs of praise as they walked from the old and entered the new. But building the church did not stop at the structure, there was a lot more to building a church than sticks and mortar. In less than ten years they paid off the mortgage. I sit back at times and look at where we have come since those days, and I wonder about many things. Are we a good church? Do we promote Godly standards? Are we the type of example that others could model their own life and church after?

There’s no such thing as a perfect church. Reading through the New Testament, we see that churches are not perfect. The Corinthian congregation had a whole host of problems; the Ephesian church was a good congregation, but they had left their first love; the church at Pergamum did not deny their faith in the face of martyrdom, but they did allow false teachers among them. Today as we look at our sermon passage we find a church that while not perfect, is a model we could use to build a church. We find it in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; join me in sharing this word today.

*(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. (2)We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly (3)remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (4)For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, (5)because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. (6)And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, (7)so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (8)For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. (9)For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a 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 wrath that is coming. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 NRSV*

The church at Thessalonica, while no doubt is not perfect, is able to serve as something of a model church. When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonian church, he broke out in praise for them. Notice the opening of this passage: “We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly.”

Paul thanked God over and over and over for the Thessalonian church. Paul nearly always starts his epistles with a greeting of thanksgiving. In fact, some scholars think that in this epistle Paul’s thanksgiving goes through the entire first three chapters. But what I really want to look at today is that in our passage this morning Paul describes the model church.

SO What does a model church look like? Paul implies that the Thessalonians are a working church. Paul remembered *“…before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Here we find the famous triad of faith, hope, and love that we read of in 1 Corinthians 13 as well as elsewhere in Scripture. Paul doesn’t share nor can we find it elsewhere exactly what their work in faith and love was, but if Paul is speaking of it, I am certain it was there. We do know however, that they were a loving and faithful group of people. When Paul was stuck in Athens and sent Timothy to find out what was going on in Thessalonica, Timothy reported their “faith and love” (3:6). Thus, the Thessalonians were putting their faith, their beliefs, and their love, their care for God and their fellow man, into action.

What about us? Are we a working church? A church working in faith and love? When you look at church growth studies, those churches which grow are those which do what they believe, a work of faith, and those which care about others, a work of love. Let us commit ourselves this morning to being a church of faith and of love. Will we see that those around us who need food and clothing get what they need – not just as a congregation, but as individual Christians? Will we see that when a guest comes into our midst that we make him or her feel loved, invited, and welcomed? Will we see that in our daily lives that we practice Christianity, and that we, as individuals, really live up to what we claim to believe? Will we be a model church, a church working at faith and love?

Paul states that the Thessalonians are a steadfast church. They were steadfast in the face of some unbelievable odds. When the church was established in Thessalonica, “the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked fellows of the rabble, they gathered a crowd, set the city in an uproar,” and attacked the home where Paul and his companions were staying (Acts 17:5). “*You suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they [the churches of Judea] did from the Jews*” (2:14). But, in spite of all the persecution the Thessalonians endured, they were steadfast, and they weren’t going to move from the truth of the gospel.

How steadfast are we? Are we Christians who will do what is right regardless of what everyone at work thinks, or will we go along with the crowd to be popular? Are we Christians who will stand up against false teaching, or are we Christians who will be enamored by what is new and sounds so good? Are we Christians who will endeavor to remain faithful regardless of what is taking place around us? What about us, what about you; will we be a model church, a steadfast church?

Paul goes on to describe the Thessalonians as an imitating church. Paul writes in verse 6, “*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit*,” Paul and those who traveled with him faced persecution almost constantly; in fact Paul had to leave Thessalonica shortly after establishing the church there because of persecution. Jesus suffered greatly because of persecution that ended in his death. In writing to Christians facing persecution, Peter wrote, “*To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps*” (1 Pet. 2:21). We often use this text to speak of being imitators of Jesus without ever mentioning the context. What Peter says, in context, is: “*You Christians be willing to suffer, even die, for the faith, because Jesus did*.” The church saw the example of Christ in Paul and his team of companions. Paul was the example of Christ’s love and the people saw this and soon began to imitate these attitudes, actions, and behaviors due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; in spite of the persecution, they endured. Even though the context in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Peter refers to following Jesus in suffering, there is an important principle we can learn: We need to follow Jesus.

There is a Christian classic entitled *In His Steps*, and the main point of that book has been popularized with the slogan: “What Would Jesus Do?” I’ve never really cared that much for clichés, that one certainly hits the point. We need to live our lives the way Jesus would. Do you live your life the way Jesus would? Do your friends and neighbors see Jesus living in you? Will we be a model church, an imitating church?

Did you catch what Paul says about them at the end of verse 6, “…*for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit,*”. The Thessalonians are a joyful church. The Thessalonians had great joy inspired by the Holy Spirit. “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” *(Gal. 5:22-23)*. Thus, as the Spirit operates in our lives, we can have joy. “*The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom. 14:17). As the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians, he brings unutterable joy, and he has every reason to bring joy into our lives We have been forgiven of every sin through Jesus, we have a Father who loves us and hears our prayers, we have a home in heaven when this life is no more.

But, are we a joyful people? Are we joyful when we worship? When we sing, do we sing with joy in our hearts and a smile on our lips, or do we just sit there and endure it? When the word of God is preached, do we rejoice to hear all that God has done? When we give, are we cheerful givers as God desires? Let us worship joyfully! When we greet guests at our services, do we do so with a smile and an “I’m-so-glad-you’re-here?” If we aren't joyful people, why would anyone else ever want to be a part of us? When we speak of the church at home, at work, at school, do we do so in a way that displays the joy in our heart? Will we be a model church, a joyful church?

“*(8)For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it*.” God’s word had gone out from Thessalonica into Macedonia and Achaia. This was a congregation concerned about the spiritual welfare of their fellow men, making them an Evangelizing church. We too, need to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of our fellow men as well. “*Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that 1 have commanded you*” *(Matt. 28:19-20)*. “*You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth*” *(Acts 1:8)*.

Will we step up to the plate and be an evangelizing church? How many of you are willing to work as soul winners? How many of you call and invite others to come to church with you? God sees your work, and God will bless and reward your work. But, what about all of us? Will we all step up to the plate and do what we can to make this an evangelizing church? If we want this congregation to grow, it can’t be just a few doing all the work. We all need to labor and work as we’ve been given talents to further the cause of Christ. Will we be a model church, an evangelizing church?

*“(9)For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you,”* The Thessalonians were a Hospitable church. In Acts 17, we find that the Thessalonians welcomed Paul and Silas. They were staying at the house of a man named Jason. When the Jews incited riots in the city, they sent Paul and Silas to Beroea at night so that they might not be harmed. The church in Thessalonica knew how to treat guests, and we needed to treat guests appropriately. Hospitality is very important. One of the qualifications of elders is that they be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2). “*Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality*” (Rom. 12:13).

Are we a hospitable people? Will we take the time to cultivate friendships with those around us who aren’t Christians in order that we might be able to win them? When guests come into our worship services, how hospitable are we? Do we take the time to get to know guests, to interact with them, and make them feel welcome? Or, would we rather not have to fool with them and ignore them? How many of us really make an effort toward our guests so that this congregation might be warm and inviting? Will we be a model church, a hospitable church?

Finally, the Thessalonians are a Waiting church. *“…to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming*.” It is a wonderful thing to be said about a church that they are waiting for Christ’s return. We don’t read about them bickering amongst themselves, because they really know what matters; that Jesus is coming back! They’re not too busy to speak to a friend about Jesus, because they know what really matters is that their friends be ready when Jesus comes back! They’re willing to step up in the classroom and teach, because they understand what really matters is that those children be ready when Jesus comes back! Will we be a model church, a church that is waiting for Jesus to return?

I have said this over and over, We are the only example of Christ others may see our lives lived in front of the whole world is an example of what being a follower of Christ is all about.

Are you being the example of Christ that others would want to follow? Are we exemplifying the love of Christ in such a way that others would become interested in learning more? Are you working towards the fulfillment of God’s kingdom? Are you standing firm in the hope of Christ Jesus? Are you imitating the life of Christ or other good Christians that have been an example for you? Are you practicing your walk with Christ with joy in your heart and can others see it? Are you the type of example others would point to as an example of the Christian walk? Are you evangelizing; concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of others and are you striving to make them aware of Christ's love for them? Are you being hospitable to those unknown to you and are coming into your presence?

Some believe this church to be a glorious church. What are you doing to promote that image? I pray that today as we come to a close that you are able to identify ways in which you are participating in the acts that identify with a model church. I pray that you find the Joy of the Lord in these activities and I pray that as we leave this place that we are able to follow the leading of the Lord wherever we may go.