

## INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

- WELCOME!
- 

## INTRODUCTION:

Recently as I was reading the letter of Paul written to the church in Thessalonica, I was impressed by the faith that the Thessalonians demonstrated.

- As I read through the letter it became abundantly clear to me that their faith in God had a great deal of significance to the churches in that region of the world.
- This morning, I would like us to evaluate their faith and to consider how valuable our faith is right here in Salem today!

Generally speaking, I tend to preach on a relatively short passage... Most of the time I focus on a text of about 8 or 10 verses or less... once in a while I'll actually preach on a couple chapters of the Bible, as I did with King Josiah last week, however, I very rarely focus on an entire book of the Bible.

- When we step back and look at the big picture, however, it just seems that we can get a lot more out of a passage.
- For example, if you're standing in the Sistine Chapel in front of a painting that covers the entire wall, but you don't step back or look up, you may be missing the beauty around you.
- Likewise, when we read a passage of the Bible, but only read a few verses or one chapter, it is very easy to miss the big picture.
- This morning, therefore, I would like us to look at the Sistine chapel (The big picture) of what Paul is trying to express regarding the church in Thessalonica.
- Those few verses may be beautiful and have some significance, however until we look at the entire letter and understand why it was written, we could miss some of its beauty.

In **1 Thessalonians**, it is apparent that Paul appreciated the faith of the Christians in Thessalonica.

- And as he wrote his letter to them, he let them know his thoughts about why their faith is so important.
- In like manner, I would like for us to consider the importance of our faith in God today.

### I. **Based on Paul's letter, we can see that A STRONG FAITH IS ENCOURAGING TO OTHERS.**

In the first five verses of **1 Thessalonians 1**, Paul gave a common greeting and mentioned in **verse 3** their "*work of faith*" and their "*labor of love.*"

- In **verses 6-8**, he expounds upon that faith—Let us begin reading from Paul's letter starting in **verse 6**.
- As we read this, think about how their strong faith might have been an encouragement to other Christians... Paul wrote, "*You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.*"

- Paul started by saying that they had become “*an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.*”
- Now keep in mind, the southern most parts of Achaia was about 300 miles away!

Imagine for just a second... Imagine that all the believers within 300 miles of us would be aware of our faith.

- Imagine the Salem church of Christ being an example to every church in Chicago & St. Louis, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Nashville, & Memphis and every small town in between!
- Now... granted the populations weren't nearly as high, but just imagine that our faith was known that far away!
- Notice that Paul continues on to say in **verse 8**... “...*the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth...*”
- We can assume that this means that their faith was also known throughout Galatia (Modern day Turkey) and probably all the way to Jerusalem.

Notice that Paul said that the “*word of the Lord... sounded forth*” because of their faith!

- It wasn't just a matter of them being well known because of their faith... It was a matter of the word of God being spread because of their faith!

Their faith was causing an increase in the kingdom! The Lord's church was stronger because of them!

I think we would all agree that faith increases because of the influence of the faithful...

- Once again... listen close... faith increases because of the influence of the faithful...
- Have you ever noticed that when you play a sport against someone who is a better player, you step it up a notch?
- I would bet that Chelsie and Adrienne can tell you that when they play tennis against someone that is really good, they usually play better as well.
- When this happens to me, I can usually return volleys and serves that surprises even me.
- I think I hit harder, I focus more on my serves, my returns are much more accurate and over all, I am a better tennis player!
- The same is true of Basketball, and baseball... ping pong.. You name the sport!
- When you play against someone that is stronger than you, the natural tendency is for you to get better.

Let's talk about attitudes... when you're around happy people, isn't it true that you are generally happier?

- When you are around people with a positive attitude, isn't it true you are more positive?
- When you are around someone who is kind, caring and compassionate, isn't it true that you exhibit these characteristics too?
- Well this is also true of those who exhibit a strong faith.
- Faith increases because of the influence of the faithful!

In **chapter 3** of this letter, Paul clearly demonstrates how the faith of the Thessalonians had affected others. Please read with me, **1 Thessalonians 3:6-9**...

***6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;***

**8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.**

**9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,**

Paul says several things about how their faith had affected them...

- First of all, in **verse 6**, Paul longed to see them.
- Second, we see in **verse 7** that he was comforted because of their faith.
- Third, he said in **verse 8** that he can “**really live**” because they stood firm in the Lord.
- And Finally in **verse 9** that he rejoiced along with the other Christians because of them.
- There can be no doubt that our strong faith here in Salem will likewise be an encouragement to others.

## II. **Let us consider another closely related truth about faith that we can learn from the first letter to the Thessalonians... STRONG FAITH IS EVIDENT BY ACTIONS.**

Back up in **chapter 1:6**, we find that Paul praised them for being “**imitators**” of the Lord.

- This is important, because it demonstrates that their actions demonstrated their faith.
- The definition of the word imitate is this... “**To model oneself after the behavior or actions of.**”
- Their faith was evident to others because of their behavior and their actions.

It is impossible to physically see faith! In the same way that you cannot see wind, you cannot see faith!

- You can certainly see the affects of wind, but you cannot see the wind itself.
- If it’s there, you’ll know it! If it is very strong, it is impossible to ignore!
- If it is really, really strong... It will have dramatic results!
- As we read earlier... All of Macedonia, and in all of Achaia, and in “**every place**” their faith had become known!
- It was because of their actions and their behavior.

Let me briefly share with you a story...

- There was a small mid-west community that was very concerned about the drought that seemed to continue for an eternity and they were in a quandary as to what to do about it.
- The rain was important not only to keep their crops healthy, but to sustain the townspeople’s very way of living.
- As the problem became more urgent, the local church felt it was time to get involved and called a prayer meeting to ask for rain.
- In what seemed a vague remembrance of a native American ritual, the people began to arrive.
- The preacher on his arrival watched the congregation continue to file in.
- He slowly made his way to the front to officially begin the meeting.
- Everyone was taking the opportunity to visit across the aisles, socializing with close friends.
- The preacher’s thoughts when he reached the front were on quieting those present and starting the meeting.
- As he began to ask for quiet, his eyes scanned the crowd and he took note of an eleven year-old girl sitting on the front row.
- Her face was beaming with excitement and she quietly sat in her place.
- Next to her poised and ready for use was a red umbrella!
- At that point, the preacher couldn’t help but to smile as he realized the faith she possessed.
- No one else in the congregation had brought an umbrella!
- They had all come to pray for rain, but she had come expecting God to answer that prayer.

As with the church in Thessalonica and with the girl with the red umbrella, is our faith evident to those around us?

- Do people see our behavior and our actions and immediately think about how much faith we have?
- Do they see us consistently going to worship, and church activities, and reading the Bible?
- Do they see our behavior at school and in the workplace and notice our faith?
- If they don't see our faith... perhaps God doesn't see it either!
- Strong faith will always be evident by actions!

### III. The next thing that we can learn from this letter is that STRONG FAITH IS ENDLESS IN LIMITATIONS.

Even though it seems like Paul has been raving about their faith, we see a number of examples in this letter of a need for them to be increasing in their faith!

- In **chapter 3:10**, we already read the four verses leading up to it and found that Paul was comforted and encouraged and rejoiced over their faith and yet, he followed that up at the end of **verse 10** by saying that they were still “*lacking*” in their faith!
- He immediately followed that up in **verse 12** by praying that the Lord would cause them to “*increase and abound in love for one another.*”
- There was still room for improvement!
- There was still room for more faith to be demonstrated in their behavior toward one another!

In **chapter 4:9**, Paul continued to address their love for one another and in **verse 10** he said, “...*for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.*”

- Keep in mind, they were already renowned in the Lord's church for their faith, but Paul encouraged them to “*excel still more.*”
- So in **1 Thessalonians**, Paul encouraged them to do better... Does anyone wanna see the results of this urging to “*excel still more?*”
- Turn over to the second letter to the Thessalonians for a second and look at how Paul addressed them in **chapter 1:3-4**... “*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith...*”
- Paul asked them to step it up a notch in the first letter, and by the time he wrote back to them, they had responded once again and he said, “*your faith is greatly enlarged... and the love... toward one another grows ever greater!*”

Even with all that growth, we continue on to **verses 11-12** of **2 Thessalonians 1** and Paul prays that God may count them worthy of their calling.

- Worthy of their calling?! How could they NOT be worthy? Everyone knew about their high degree of faith! How could Paul say that he prays that God would find them worthy?!
- Paul's point had to have been that you have to continually feed your faith and nurture it so that it keeps growing stronger.
- In the next chapter, we see that Paul was concerned about apostasy and the lure of Satan and he was concerned that they might lose faith fall away.
- I've heard it said, “**Feed your faith and your doubts will starve to death.**”
- That is a very true statement! If you are beginning to doubt in God, you need to feed your faith!

- At one point, Paul spoke about, “...*forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.*” He then said, “*I press on toward the goal.*” (Philippians 3)
- If he was to come to Salem and preach from this very pulpit, I bet he would tell us that the only way that we can fail in our faith is for us to fail to try and increase our faith.
- We can always grow stronger. There is always room for improvement.

IV. **As we begin to wrap up our thoughts about the faith of the Thessalonians, let us recognize that... FAITH IS FOR ETERNAL PREPAREDNESS.**

Take a look at what the apostle Paul said to them in **chapter 5:1-6...**

*1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.  
 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.  
 3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. Notice the contrast here...  
 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;  
 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;  
 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.*

(Jumping down to **verse 9...**)

*9 For God has NOT destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

When Paul begins talking about the “*day of the Lord*” (the Judgment Day), Paul talks about the destruction that will come upon the wicked “*like a thief in the night*” and “*like labor pains upon a woman with child...*”

- He makes it clear that there will be some who have not taken the time during their lives to be adequately prepared for the “*day of the Lord.*”
- To the Thessalonians, however, Paul said, “*But you brethren, are not in darkness*” and in **verse 9** he says, “*God has NOT destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

As we close, I’d like to share with you a real life example of the kind of faith we should have when we depart from this world.

- This past week, I read an article written by Jeffrey Dillinger, minister of the church of Christ in Whitehall, Tennessee.
- He was writing about his 65 yr old mom was dying of pancreatic cancer.
- He told about how his mom and dad read their Bible together every day.
- His mom asked that he read to her even if she was to slip into a coma.
- During this incredibly difficult time, the family really drew strength from the Lord.
- I’d like to read for you a couple of paragraphs from what he wrote...

“My mom has been under hospice care, and we were told that she would drift into a non-responsive state within twenty-four hours. Mom has not been able to respond much. Dad leaned over, kissed her, and told her he would be okay and that we kids would help take care of her. Mom replied, “I’m tired.” Dad told her it was okay. We gave them alone time, and dad talked to her. He came out to us and cried. He asked us to all go and say good-bye one last time. One by one we all said our good-byes and cried. When the last one was finished we gathered around her. We asked if she would like us to sing “Amazing Grace.” Her response was, “Ninety-four verses.” We began to sing, and this little woman of ninety pounds began to mouth every word. No voice, but her spirit was singing. As we finished, she cried. In the strongest

voice she could muster she said, “I love you.” She reached out and hugged dad, then asked that we carry her to bed.

Her body is with us, but her eyes are closed and she no longer grabs my hand. We watch now as she anxiously waits to be with the Lord she loves. Her faith preaches sermons beyond any that I preach from the pulpit. She is dying with dignity, but even greater, she is dying with the Lord. As David so beautifully said, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” While that verse has never been easy for me to understand, I think I glimpsed some of the preciousness that God sees, in the death of my mother. I will miss her. My mother taught me how to live, but now she has taught me how to die.”

It is my prayer, that each of us here one day, will die with the same level of faith in God.

- It is my prayer that we will have the same confidence that we have been faithful in our service to the Lord....
- It reminds me of the words of our Lord in **Revelation 2:10**, when Jesus said “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*”
- This is precisely what Paul was trying to encourage the Thessalonians to do in these last few verses that we read.
- Paul felt that they were not currently “*in darkness*”... they were not involved in the sins of the world, however he did warn them to be “alert and sober.”
- He wanted to encourage them to remain strong in their faith.

### **SUMMARY / CONCLUSION:**

As we apply this letter to our lives here in Salem, let us always remember that our faith will be an encouragement to others.

- Let us remember that our faith will be evident by our actions and behaviors.
- Let us remember that our faith is endless in limitations.
- And finally, let us remember that our faith is for eternal preparedness.