



river west church

What Kind of Church? (Part 1)

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Pastor Christopher Coffman

9.02.2012

Thessalonians: The Church That Turned The World Upside Down

In the end, every local church is going to be known for something. Sadly, many churches throughout history will be remembered for all the wrong kinds of things—senseless controversies, sex scandals, loveless tirades—the list goes on. On the other hand, many churches today are known for the things they offer—great programs, gifted teachers, excellent music, etc. If every local church is going to be known for something, then the real question is this: What kind of church are we going to be? Better yet: What kind of church is God calling us to be? For the next six weeks, we're going to be opening God's Word and asking these questions together as a church. As we kick off this six-part series, we'll begin by looking at a letter the apostle Paul wrote to a church he planted in Thessalonica—the bustling, cosmopolitan, capital city of Macedonia. When the Apostle Paul lifted up the Thessalonian church in prayer, he remembered their “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th 1:3). Talk about a great list of things to be known for! It's no surprise then why this church “became an example to all the believers...”—including us today (1 Th 1:7). Today, as we consider the example of Thessalonians, we will begin to see the kind of church the Lord is calling us to be.

A Church That Responds In Faith

When Paul preached the Gospel in Thessalonica, the entire city was set in an uproar (Acts 17:5). Eventually a mob of opponents rounded up Paul's companions and dragged them before the authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...” (Acts 17:6)! Whenever the Gospel makes contact with a community, God's saving power begins turning everything as we know it upside down. As Paul himself recounts, the “gospel came to (the Thessalonians) not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Th 1:5). In Paul's mind, the Gospel is much more than a set of spiritual principals we understand—it is a spiritual power we can experience by faith (cf Rom 1:16-17)! As the Jews and God-fearing Greeks of Thessalonica listened to Paul unpack the Gospel from scriptures, they responded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and placed their faith in Christ. As a result of their faith, “the word of the Lord sounded forth” from Thessalonica and the world was radically impacted for the cause of Christ! However, none of this would have happened if the Thessalonians had not responded to the Gospel the way they had—by “(turning) to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Th 1:9). As a church, God is calling us today to do the same. As we turn to Christ in faith He will strip us of idols and make us into servants our living God can use!

A Church That Labors In Love

As we respond in faith to the Gospel, it begins to reorient our entire way of life—including the way we love and serve one another. Just as faith without works is dead, a church without love is lifeless as well (cf Jas 2:14-16; 1 Cor 13:2). Thankfully, when Timothy brought back a report about the church of Thessalonica to Paul, he was encouraged to hear how they were loving one another. In fact, their love for one another was so great, that Paul had little to admonish in this church (1 Th 4:9-10). Instead, he encouraged them to continue laboring in love (1 Th 1:3; 4:10). In light of the Gospel, followers of Christ labor to love one another because God has graciously chosen to love them (1 Th 1:4). Upon hearing and

believing the Gospel, the Thessalonians were constrained by a radically new selfless concern for others in their community. Convinced that Jesus laid down His power, privilege, and rights for them on the cross, they joyfully laid down their lives for others as a church. The Thessalonians had witnessed this kind of love firsthand in the apostle Paul—who not only announced but also embodied the love of the Gospel to the Thessalonians (1 Th 2:8).

A Church That Endures In Hope

As we consider the exemplary faith and love of the Thessalonians, it's easy to see where we fall glaringly short both individually and collectively as a church. However, that's not the point of Paul's letter. The reason Paul penned this letter was to fix our attention on the one thing that will never disappoint and fail us in this life: the "steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Th 1:3). If we fix our hopes on our own efforts to turn the world upside down for Christ we will find ourselves upside down. As a church, we must continually fix our hopes on the only one who has the power to save and change us—Jesus Christ! As we serve the Lord together as a church, we must also learn to "wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Th 1:10). As we set our hopes on Jesus, let's pray and ask the Lord to fill our church with the faith, love, and hope of the Gospel!