

A Model Church

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First Thessalonians.

And I'm going to read from verse two to ten. First Thessalonians, verse two to ten. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and father your work of faith and labor, of love and steadfastness, of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only has the word of God, Lord, sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere. So that we need not say anything, for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for a son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. Let's pray.

Well, Father, we thank you for those that have proclaimed the word of God to us. God, that you opened our heart and brought full conviction to believe that Jesus is Lord and savior, the only way, God in the flesh, the one who came into the world to die in our place and to save us from our sins. We thank you for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, that we will spend eternity with him, God, everything that we do for him, God

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will be rewarded. I thank you for Daniel and Kalyani and their ministry in India. And I just pray your blessing on that ministry, that you give him wisdom and insight, revelation, ways that he can reach out to people around him and have an impact some way there in Pune.

And bless them, take care of them, protect them. Lord, we also lift up Israel as they were under attack last night. And God, we know you still have a plan for Israel and the basis of Abraham's faith, that your promise is true and you're faithful and all Israel will be saved. Those who will name Christ as their lord and savior. And we're told to pray for them.

And we just pray for wisdom in the midst of this conflict. But we also pray for strength and for safety and for victory. We thank you, God, that we can come before you today and we pray your blessing on the word and knowing that apart from your spirit, there's nothing that I or anyone else can say that would impact our lives apart from you. And so we pray, as our savior taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

May be seated.

It's been a real joy to have the Eichelbergers with us last night and today. And Terry and I were visiting last night, and it was a lot like a little walk down nostalgia lane, remembering what God had done in our lives 34 years ago. Little church in pony, Montana, in the tobacco root mountains old mining town. And God did some amazing things while we were there. The thing that I remembered the most as we were visiting was we would get together on Sunday evenings at Terry and Vanessa's house.

A different Terry and fellowship. It was open to everybody, but it turns out five couples came. Terry and Karen, Terry and Vanessa, my wife and I, Ralph and Judy and David

and Garrett. And all of those people end up going into the ministry. It was open to everyone, but they were the ones who come.

We'd get there and the ladies would go in the kitchen and prepare some snacks. The guys would kind of catch up on their weekend. We'd all give Terry a number, a little songbook. We didn't have to say the title, just give him the number. He would put that together, and there'd be a time of worship.

And then if someone had a verse or a testimony to share, they would. And then we would pray together. And it was a time of great joy, a time of encouragement, a time that we really believe strengthened us for. For the struggles that all of us face in this christian life. So kind of nostalgia looking back on a time when God was working our life.

But I thought of that because of this letter to the church of Thessalonians. And it's almost as if Paul is defining a model church. Not a perfect church, but a model church, what a church should be like. He spends the first two chapters thanking God for them. A very positive letter.

But he ends that second chapter with these words in verse 19. Chapter two, verse 19. And he says, for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you, for you are our glory and joy. And so Paul is boasting in this church at Thessalonica, said, you are our hope, our joy, our glory.

And when Christ comes, that's what we are going to boast about, the work that you have done in our life. This is high praise coming from the apostle who established hundreds of churches, who gave us most of the New Testament. And he praises this church. He'd only been there a few weeks before he was forced to leave, and yet he can say these positive things about them. So it made me think and ask myself, what is a good church?

Are we a good church? Is there anything we should be doing to be a good church? And I think there's some things in this passage that we read this morning that mark what a good church should be. So let's take a look at those. I'm going to look at four things.

First of all, a good church is one that has been chosen by God the father. Chosen. Look at verse four. For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you. There needs to be a sense in a body, a knowing that we were chosen by God, not just to worship him and to spend eternity with him, but to fellowship with one another, to build each other up in the Lord.

Several weeks ago, we looked at that word chosen, and it's the word *elektos* in the Greek, which King James translates elected. And the fact is, God the Father, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been elected to salvation. He chose you for a purpose. That means you've been born again, that you've been translated out of the realm of sin and into the realm of grace, and that you're no longer living for yourself. You're living for Christ Jesus because you belong to him.

And we see the evidence of this in verse five. He says, it was the power of God that brought you to full conviction. And if you are convinced that Jesus Christ is your lord and savior, that was God's power working in your life. That was not a decision you made. It wasn't a rational thought.

Oh, I guess I belong to Jesus. It's his power working in you, letting you know that you were chosen by him. You're no longer following a person. You're not following a church or denomination or philosophy. You've been chosen to follow Jesus Christ.

You belong to him. Concerning that election, Paul says that the logical outcome, if you've been chosen by God, the logical outcome should be to praise his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved good churches praise Jesus Christ because he chose them to be his followers, chosen of God. And we see the evidence in our lives. Second thing a good church is. Is one that is changing.

Look at verse six and seven, and it says, and you became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. So you became an example to all the believers in MacedoNia and AChal. And what we see here is a progression in a christian life. They've been chosen by God.

Then God starts working their lives to change them. He says, first of all, they imitated Paul and the other missionaries who were there in Thessalonica. And there's a sense that if you are a believer, that someone shared that message with you. They modeled Christianity, and you began to imitate them. You became more and more like them.

And so they imitated Paul's team. And second, it says, after that, they became examples. They learned through that imitation to be like those who are following Christ. And then they became an example to other words. In other words, what we see, that God was changing them to become more and more like Jesus Christ, more and more like our savior, chosen.

If you're chosen, it always leads to change. If you're chosen, it always leads to change. And that's the evidence that God is working your life. When God chooses someone for salvation, he puts his holy spirit in them, and the Holy Spirit starts working to make them more like Christ, to change them, to become like the son. That work may be quick, and you see people that take off like a rocket, and that's exciting.

You see people that have started at a young age, but it may be slow, and it may be something that happened later in life. But there needs to be change if you're going to be a church that glorifies God. The reason I know that God always changes the one he chooses is because they have been taken out of this kingdom of sin on the one hand, and they've been placed into the kingdom of grace on the other. And that grace is at work in our lives. In Sunday school, we've been looking at Romans and Romans 5:21 tells us so that as sin reigned in death, and before you came to Christ, sin reigned in your life.

As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ. When anyone turns to Christ and puts their faith in him, they all of a sudden are under a different reign, the reign of grace. Grace is working in their life. That word reign means absolute power. A sovereign authority.

It has control, and it will accomplish its purposes, which is to make you more like Christ. It might be slow, that might be quick. We might go kicking and screaming, or

we might go rejoicing. But because God reigns, grace reigns in your life. It will happen, Paul tells the Corinthians, and we all, with unveiled faces beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed or changed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord, who is the spirit. And our prayer, our daily prayer, one that we need to pray, is summed up in this song. Change my heart, o God, and make it ever true. Change my heart, o God, may I be like you. You are the potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me. This is what I pray. And a good church is a church that is changing. It's not content to be the way we always were. This is the way the ancestors did it.

This is the way we're going to do it. God's spirit is working and changing us to be more and more like Jesus Christ. And we'll see that not just in church, but we'll see it in our workplaces, we'll see it in our homes, we'll see it in our private devotional lives, that God is changing me from glory to glory and praise God. And so a good church is one that people have been chosen by God, and then they're being changed by God. Third, a good church is one that is a channel.

Look at verse eight and nine. For not only has the word of God sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything, for they themselves report concerning us. The kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. God chooses us, and God changes us so that we can be a channel for his holy spirit to work through us and to touch other people's lives to glorify God. It says here that God's word went out from the Thessalonians.

And again, Paul had been there maybe a month, maybe a little longer, but their word went out to Macedonia, Kei, and everywhere. They were channels that were being used by God when they came to Christ. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. And Paul didn't even need to say anything about it because people

recognized the work that was going on in their life. God used them as a channel for the Holy Spirit to reach other people for Christ.

In the same way a church is not content to just have a holy huddle. Why aren't we nice? Don't we like each other? Isn't that potluck going to be delicious?

We thank God for those things, but God wants us to be channels to reach out and to touch people in our community, our families, even around the world. And so a good church is looking for opportunities to reach out and serve others. One of the reasons that we love supporting missionaries is God is helping us to help them to reach out to others. And we're part of that. We want to be channeled.

It's not like, how can we spend all of our money on our building, you know, our programs or a better pastor that looks better or whatever, you know? No, we want to use the resources we have to be a channel for God to use to touch other people's lives. I've been reading through the book of Exodus in my morning devotions in the Old Testament, and after Israel had taken. After God had taken Israel out of Egypt. And of course, they crossed the Red Sea, and then they ended up in the desert.

Finally, they ended up at Mount Sinai. And Moses was called up on the mountain to receive the ten Commandments. And we won't go into that whole story, but he also was given instructions on how to build a tabernacle because God wanted to dwell with them. You want to have this relationship and won't go into all of those instructions. But one really hit me, and that was the menorah.

Everyone know what a menorah is? That was a seven arm candle and instructions. It had to be beaten out of gold and had seven different arms that came out with a bowl on top. And then there was a bowl of oil that would feed into all seven of those arms so that there would be light inside that tabernacle. When God chooses someone to change them and become a channel, the Holy Spirit is in them.

That oil, wanting to produce a light in your life that others can see the glory of God. And again, the work may be quick, it may be slow, but it is a work that God will accomplish in your life if he has chosen you because he has taken you out of the

kingdom of sin, and he has placed you in the kingdom of grace. And again, going back to romans 5:21, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ. When anyone turns to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes in their life. He reigns, and he is wanting to change them so that there will be a channel that the Holy Spirit can work through.

To produce light so that others can see, Paul tells the corinthians, and we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of. I'm getting back on that. Let me go here. Jesus. We want to get to Jesus, not Paul.

Jesus says, we are the light of the world in Matthew five. And then he says, in the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father, who is in heaven. And as we become channels for the Holy Spirit to flow through our lives, people are going to see the glory of our God and Father, our savior, Jesus Christ, through the good things that we do for him. We're a channel that the Holy Spirit, again symbolized by that oil, flows through the branches to give light to the world and glorify the Father. A good church realizes we are God's workmanship, created to do good works, which God prepared in advance for those who walk with him.

And so a good church is reaching out. God chooses us, he changes us, and he channels us for his own glory. And then one last thing. In verse ten, it says, and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. A good church is one that conquers and will receive a crown for the work that we've done anticipating the return of Jesus Christ.

I mentioned a few weeks ago that every chapter, all five chapters in Thessalonians, every chapter ends with the coming of Jesus Christ. That's their focus, and that's what he's dealing with in both first and second Thessalonians, the return of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is coming again, and a model church does not forget that it focuses on the future. Yes, we do what we have to do in life and in ministry, but we keep our eyes on the fact that Jesus Christ is coming again. That's the ultimate goal, to see Christ.

He's coming again, and we are told that we are to wait for him. He alone delivers us from the wrath to come. If someone is not under the reign of grace, and they're under the reign of sin, and God's wrath will be poured out on those people. And you may say, oh, we're nice people. You may be, but you and I were created for the glory of God, to live for his glory.

And if we're not living for his glory, we've fallen short. And the Bible calls that sin. This world and everything in it will be destroyed by the wrath to come again. I mentioned Iran attacking Israel last night and not surprised by that if you read prophecy, you know that things are going to end in the Middle east, in Israel, that God's enemies want to destroy the nation of Israel. And it's just a sign that we're getting closer and closer to the end.

When we put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ, we are more than conquerors. And the Bible says we will receive a crown of life as a result of our love for him. I've been thinking more and more about seeing Jesus and whether he comes back in my lifetime or whether I leave this world and I see him when I enter into heaven. And the more I think about that, the more I focus on him, the more I want to live my life to glorify him, not myself. I'm thinking about doing a little sermonette for my funeral.

What do preachers do? They preach. And I want to have one last message, short one, and I'm going to request that there's no open sharing, that people won't say, oh, Jim was a good guy, or Jim did that, or whatever. And not that I wouldn't want to hear those things. I wouldn't be there anyway.

Not that I wouldn't want to hear them. But you know what? In the long run, it doesn't matter what somebody else thinks about me. The only thing that matters is what Jesus thinks about me. Was I faithful?

And he sees everything. You don't get to see everything. Thank God. Okay? But he does.

And the only thing that will matter in that day when we stand before him and give an account of our life is, did I love him? Did I devote my life to him? Did I allow him to

change me? Was I trying to be a channel that somehow the Holy Spirit could work in? Did I experience the victory that is in Jesus Christ, that he promises to all that follow him?

Jesus talks about this a lot. There are several parables that he gives. Where the master went away on a journey, he left gifts or talents to his servants. And finally they came back and they had to give an account. And the one in Matthew 25 specifically, the first two came and they said, hey, look, master, you know, you gave us five or you gave us two and we got five more.

We got two more, and we did the work that you asked us to do. And of course, his response was, well done, good and faithful servant, you've been faithful over a little. I will set over you much. And then the words that I think that everyone in this world should desire to hear enter into the joy of your master, a joy that will last for all eternity, that nothing can undermine or take away from. And that's for those who have been chosen, who are being changed, who are channels for the glory of God, and who are conquerors through Christ.

That third servant, though it says he buried his talent, in other words, he didn't do anything with it. He buried the talent. And Jesus angrily calls him a worthless servant. Into the outer darkness there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And the point is, and we need to remember this, no matter what's going on around us, what happened in our life, and we talked about this in Sunday school, it's not all hunky dory things happen.

And because we live in a sin world, that sin impacts us one way or another. Even if we're not sinning, we experience the consequences of sin around us. But a good church remembers that we're here for a purpose. And that purpose is to glorify Jesus Christ with our lives. We're called to be overcomers.

And in revelation seven, the seven church is a letter to every overcomer. There is a gift that's given, and one is the crown of life for everyone who faithfully completed the work that Jesus gave him. And that means as a church, we need to stay focused. And I

look around at the religious landscape, and so many people are losing focus in the church. They're compromising the word of God.

Oh, we got to get along, or they're nice people or this or that. Instead of, no, I'm going to stay faithful to the word of God and to Jesus Christ, who purchased my soul and who promises eternal life. And that means that we will conquer sin, we will conquer self, and we will conquer Satan. Means we don't have time for the petty endeavors of life. What color is the bathroom going to be?

You know, I mean, the stuff that churches fight over is just unbelievable. Did you hear what so and so said about me? They're on and on and on and forgetting their purpose. I don't have time.

The metal and stuff, that doesn't matter. Got to stay focused on the fact that will stand before Jesus Christ someday. And there's a crown for everyone who is faithful to him. And so just to sum it up, if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you have been chosen by the father. The Lord Jesus Christ is changing you.

The Holy Spirit is using you as a channel to be a light to people around you. And God promises victory for everyone who is faithful to Jesus Christ. And there will be a crown of life and a crown of righteousness that he will award to everyone who kept their eyes on Christ, no matter what the distractions are around you. And there's so many. And that, I submit, is what makes a church a model church, an exciting church, when we focus on the goal and we don't let that petty stuff keep us from accomplishing what God wants us to do.

And that fills the deepest needs of our soul. None of us like petty, do we? We find ourselves being petty at times, but we just keep the need. Reminding me. No.

God chose me for a purpose. He's changing me from glory to glory. I want to be a channel that the Holy Spirit can use in some way for the glory of God. And by the grace of God, I will be a conqueror. And I will receive that crown.

Let's pray.

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Well, Father, I thank you first of all for this letter to the church of Thessalonica and God. It's hard to comprehend where Paul. Paul had just spent a few weeks there, and yet he's able to praise them, not just for their salvation, but for their faithfulness. God, they had a desire, even through suffering, they had a desire to spread the good news about Jesus Christ. And I know they're not a perfect church and there are no perfect churches.

But I pray that you would work in us, Father, and that we'd be a model of the others, of the love of Christ and what it does in a person's life. We ask protection from the enemy. We know that we have an enemy who does everything possible to try to undermine your work in the church. And we just declare our dependency upon your holy spirit to be doing that work in us. And I pray you be glorified.