**Faith In Uncertain Times**

**Prayer and Encouragement - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Jan. 3rd, 2021

**Intro:**

* This morning we are starting our new series entitled "Faith in Uncertain Times.” We will walk through the letters to the Thessalonians. I imagine this series will come in around 15 messages or so, and it will help to equip us to fulfill our purpose of bringing about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations.
* In order to more fully understand the books of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, it is helpful for us to understand their context and the conditions of the original recipients of these letters, and then bridge their context and conditions to our context and conditions so that we have a firm grasp on the meaning of the letters and how to best apply them in and through our lives.
* Today we will see that what we need to in uncertain times is to continue to live our convictions, following the examples of people who have lived through similar circumstances, and becoming examples ourselves of following Christ for others to follow.
* By the way, most of the time, I use the ESV to preach from; sometimes, I use the NIV, or NLT, or another translation. Sometimes I put together several versions and make up my own translation, which today that is the case, even though the text you will see on the screen is mainly from the NIV. No matter what version I use, I would encourage you to have a Bible open in front of you as we walk through our passages, and if the notes would be helpful for you, grab some here or download them.

**Understand the context**

**1 Thess 1:1**

**Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.**

* Paul and Silas were missionary partners who joined together on Paul's second missionary journey. They asked a young man named Timothy to join them as a partner and to help pastor and grow the new churches.
* According to Acts 16, their journey took them to a city called Philippi, where because of their preaching, evangelization, and ministry, they were beaten and thrown into jail. God delivered them from jail through a violent earthquake through which people came to faith, and the city officials asked them to leave the city.
* They, indeed, left Philippi, traveled through the region, and arrived at another city called Thessalonica, to whom the biblical books of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians were written. (By the way, all of the letters authored by Paul were written to particular churches in various cities or individual people.)
* Thessalonica was a city around the size of Rockford, somewhere between 100,000 – 200,000 people. It was a city at a crosspoint between important trade routes, like our city. It had its own city councils and city officials.
* The city was also religiously pluralistic, meaning they had many different religions and Gods, including Roman emperor worship, which again is very similar to Rockford (Jewish, Hindu, Baháʼí, Muslim, Unitarian, secularists, etc.).

**Acts 17:2-5 ESV**

**And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.**

* Paul focused on and preached first and foremost about Jesus, what He did, who He was, and what that means. Thus, some of the Jews became believers in Christ, along with a great many devout Greeks and leading women.
* The Jewish leaders were jealous (Lord help us not to be more concerned about our popularity than we are about the truth), so they incited a mob and started a riot, dragged the person they were staying with (Jason) and some of the believers before the city officials. So, as soon as it was night, the believers were sent away to another city called Berea (see Acts 17). (Anytime there is reception to the Gospel, there will be opposition against the Gospel. Do not be surprised by this, be prepared for it.)
* A short time later, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to help the church, and then Timothy came back and gave a report to Paul, who was then in the city of Corinth. Paul then wrote his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, which is the letter we have in our hands, 1st Thessalonians. Then about six months later, Paul wrote another letter primarily correcting their false understanding that the "day of the Lord" had already come, which is the letter of 2 Thessalonians.
* This letter focuses on prayer and encouragement, explanations about ministry, motivation, and persecution, instructions on Christian living, and the return of Christ (which is a rough outline of this book).
* Good Bible reading first understands the context of the original readers, then overlaps that context with our context to looking for proper application. In communicating the Gospel, understand your context, choose your approach, focus on Jesus, know there will be people who powerfully respond and embrace the Gospel, and know there will be opposition against the Gospel and you as well.
* Second, live your convictions at all times, and especially in times of uncertainty.

**Live your convictions**

**1 Thess 1:2-3**

**We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

* The work of evangelism is not complete once the message is shared. There must be continued prayer, connection, inspection, and instruction for a Christian and Christian community to be healthy, strong, effective, and reproducing.
* Because the people were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, what was produced in their character was faith, love, and hope. And from these characteristics rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ came work, which was produced by faith, labor that was prompted by love, endurance which was inspired by hope. This was not humanitarian aid, but fruit and actions based in faith in the faithful one, Jesus Christ.
* Our actions must evidence our Christianity; if you have faith, then work, if you love, then produce labor, if you have hope then to endure. Our faith must have feet. This is the "obedience of faith." Work, labor, endurance . . . these are the fruits of faith, and love, and hope. And hopefully, they can be done with joy, bringing satisfaction resulting in reward.
* They also give evidence that we are saved.

**1 Thess 1:4-5a**

**For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our Gospel came to you not only in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.**

* The Gospel comes in words, and the words have power provided by the Holy Spirit that brings deep conviction and life transformation. A changed heart is evidenced by a changed life that springs from deep conviction, empowered by the Holy Spirit, built upon the words of the Gospel.
* We have the word of the Lord empowered by the Spirit of the Lord, and we are also given people of the Lord for us to know and follow.

**Follow the examples**

**1 Thess 1:5b-6**

**You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.**

* Christian community and relationship are of vital importance. This is where we know others, and this is where we are known. This is where we grow, and this is how we are shaped. This is where we are led, and this is where we lead. This is where we know what to do, and this is where we are shown how to do it. Our faith is proved genuine in the context of community. Anyone can speak the Gospel, but not everyone can live it.
* Paul told them; you know what kind of men we are because we proved it to you by how we lived. And what they heard them say they believed, and what they saw them do they did.
* If you want to know how to live, then look to Biblical examples… look to historical examples… look to personal examples…
* These believers also proved their faith had deep conviction because they welcomed the message with joy, in spite of their severe suffering…
* Understand the context, live your convictions, follow the examples, and finally, become the examples.

**Become the examples**

**1 Thess 1:7-10**

**And so you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the 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 coming wrath.**

* Your faith, your calling, your convictions, and your giftings are for you, but they are not about you. Obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations. Live your life following the example of others; live your life as an example to others.
* Their faith resulted in them turning from idols (other things they served) to serving the living and true God. Their hope was grounded in the truth of the promises of God that the Son of God will return from heaven, that we will live again because He is the firstborn among the dead, and our faith is placed in Jesus, the only one who can rescue us from the coming wrath. God saved us from Himself, by Himself, for Himself, and in Him, we live and move and have our being.

**Conclusion and Communion**

* Know the context, live your convictions, follow the examples, become the example, hold onto the promises of God, and remember Him until He returns.