

## "The Witness of Faith" – 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Right before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told His disciples what they needed to be focused on, what their lifestyle should be centered around. His message is for us as well.

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)*

Does your lifestyle reflect your faith in Jesus Christ? When people look at you, can they tell there's something different about you? Do they notice that you adhere to a different sort of ethic? Do they see that you love not only your friends and neighbors, but your enemies too, that you are willing to serve those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you pray for those who treat you poorly? Do folks notice that you endure the trials of this life with an unusual peace, that you face tribulation gracefully and even with joy? Do people see you giving thanks to God in all situations because you understand that He is the author of every good and precious gift?

Christian, when your lifestyle is consistent with your faith, it is because God the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, but the Holy Spirit brought you to life. You were reborn; you were regenerated and you came to a point in your life where you could believe unto salvation. You recognized your sin, but you also recognized how much God loves you. You called on the Name of the Lord and you confessed with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believed in your heart that He is living and able to save to the uttermost.

Jesus not only saves you, He empowers you. You have been empowered to live a life that glorifies your Savior. All you have to do is yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

"You shall be witnesses to me to the end of the earth," says Jesus.

Have you been faithful to His calling? Have you been His witness here at the very end of the earth?

If you believe the Bible, and if your life reflects your belief, then you will have a powerful witness among those who do not yet believe. That is the sort of witness the young Thessalonian church had. Paul was thrilled to hear that the church he established in Thessalonica was progressing faithfully. They displayed the work of faith, the labor of love and the patience of hope. As a result, they had become witnesses to the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's read about it now.

*For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:5)*

Paul makes a few observations here. First, Paul observes that the gospel came to the Thessalonians in **word**. This does not refer simply to a word on a page, or a spoken word. This is *logos* in the Greek an incredibly important concept to understand. It is not just a word, *logos* embodies the entire concept behind the word, the underlying wisdom, the reality behind the idea. The Apostle John referred to Jesus as *ho logos*, because Jesus is not just the messenger, He is the message.

Paul brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Thessalonians. He preached Christ and Him crucified. He delivered the message. It's what I try to do here ... it's what I pray that the Lord would allow me to do. But you see, the message delivered is useless until it is

accepted. And the message of the Gospel will not be accepted apart from the illuminating work of God the Holy Spirit.

In this case, Paul knew that the gospel came to the Thessalonians in **power**. This is the Greek *dunamis* (δύναμις). It is the same root from which we get the word dynamite. It is explosive power. It is abundant power. It is miraculous power.

And of course, the power comes from none other than God the Holy Spirit, *in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance*. In other words, the Thessalonians were absolutely convinced of the Gospel truth. They were assured.

But this last phrase is really critical:

*... as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*

As Paul, Silas and Timothy delivered the Gospel to these folks, they lived the truth of their words. “Do as I say and not as I do” is no way to deliver God’s truth. A Christian who behaves the same way an unbeliever behaves is a horrible witness for his King. If you respond to the world with anxiety, fear, anger and wrath, why should anyone listen to you? But if you respond with patience, genuine love and display the peace and joy only available through Jesus, some folks are going to want to know what’s up.

Paul understood this principle and made use of it wherever he went. He demonstrated his commitment to service. To the Corinthians, he wrote:

*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.  
(1 Corinthians 9:22)*

When it is done the right way, the Gospel witness is multiplied. That’s what we see beginning with verse 6.

*And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)*

Do you see what happened there? Paul, Silas and Timothy delivered the Gospel. They lived the Gospel and as a result, the Thessalonians followed their example. They became followers (*mimētēs*, μιμητής), literally imitators. I find it interesting that *mimētēs* is always used in a positive sense in the New Testament. *And* they didn’t just imitate the evangelists; they became imitators of Jesus Christ.

Understand, though, that the faith of the Thessalonians came at a cost. They received the *word in much affliction*. Remember, Paul and Silas had to run from Thessalonica under threat of physical harm. Those who remained were subject to serious persecution. This was not a health, wealth, prosperity church by any means. Jason, in whose house the church probably met, was arrested by a mob. (Acts 17:6)

You know, we Christians should never fear persecution. Wherever the Church is persecuted, the Church thrives and the Gospel triumphs.

*“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven,” (Matthew 5:11-12)*

Just be sure you are persecuted for righteousness sake and not because you are being obnoxious!

These Thessalonians were subjected to persecution, but they faced it with joy, with the *joy of the Holy Spirit*. I found this quite convicting. The persecution we Christians face in this

country is very, very mild and praise the Lord for that. But you know, we American Christians are quite the whiny bunch. Too often we push back in ungodly ways. Too often I push back in ungodly ways. I wonder what would happen if we responded to every persecution with the joy of the Holy Spirit? Well, here's what happened in Thessalonica:

*[they] became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.*

They became examples! (*tupos, τύπος*) in the Greek. The word means to make an impression by striking a die. The faith of these Thessalonians made an impression. It inspired believers all over the region.

This is the way the Gospel is supposed to be propagated. Consider the fact that Jesus taught before thousands of people, *but* really, He only mentored twelve. And of the twelve, He spent even more quality time with just four guys. Paul is said to have evangelized the Mediterranean Basin but he couldn't personally witness to even a fraction of those who came to Christ in the First Century. He had faithful Christians working along side him, folks like Luke, Barnabas, Titus, Silas, Timothy, folks like Priscilla, Aquila and Mark. It's why he told Timothy:

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)*

Our community desperately needs an awakening. So many of our neighbors, friends, and family members are on a superhighway to destruction. They need Jesus Christ! I cannot reach them all. They won't all listen to me. In fact, I can't reach a fraction of them. I need your help.

I have been called to prepare the saints for the work of ministry. (Ephesians 4:12) You are the saints and you have a ministry to conduct! Every one of us needs to be about the business of making disciples and teaching them all that Jesus has commanded us. (Matthew 28:19-20)

This is about multiplying the Gospel witness and it starts by every Christian living their faith, not just giving it lip service, not by just showing up for an hour and a quarter on Sunday morning but by demonstrating the work of faith, the labor of love and the patience of hope every hour of every day. I promise you, unbelievers will notice. Your witness won't bring everyone to Christ, but it will save some. And God, working through you, will add daily to the Church those who are being saved. (Acts 2:47) That's what happened in Thessalonica. That's why Paul was thrilled with the report he received.

When Christians demonstrate their faith by living their faith, the impact is profound.

*For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. (1 Thessalonians 1:8)*

I have to believe Paul was grinning from ear-to-ear as he dictated these words. I think it is safe to assume that Paul had heard this news from Silas and from Timothy but I'm guessing he also heard it from other folks too. Thessalonica was a major trading center, so news of what was happening there could easily be spread. It's almost as if Paul was anxious to tell people about the great faith of the Thessalonians, but before he could get started, visitors were telling him all that they had heard. Talk about an encouraging deal!

You know, I've had those experiences. On multiple occasions, I've met folks down in the valley who say something like "Oh yeah, I've heard that great things are happening in that little church up in the Canyon." The young folks working for the ACMNP ministry said the same thing. "Your church is alive!" "I can see the Spirit working!" I can't tell you how heartwarming it is and believe me, it has nothing to do with me. It's all about you folks living your faith, and sharing what God is doing among us, sharing it with everyone you come in contact with.

*For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)*

These last two verses summarize the witness of faith we all must have. We're all sinners. We're all idolaters by nature. Oh, I know you probably don't have little bronze figurines in your house that you worship, but anything that you value above God is an idol. Maybe it's your job, your house, your car, your desire to get just a little more stuff. I could go on and on. The bottom line is, you need to turn from those idols and serve the true and living God.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Jesus paid the death penalty I deserve. Jesus paid the death penalty you deserve.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

Jesus paid it all; He did all the work. All you have to do is believe. Admit to God that you are a sinner. Believe that Jesus paid for your sins. Believe God raised Him from the dead so that you can have a living relationship with Him. Bow down to King Jesus and make Him the Lord of your life. He will give you peace and He will make you free indeed.

And then, you can live for Him, because He is coming back. We can *wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* There is our hope. There is our peace. There is our joy!

I believe the Bible when it says that God is working everything together according to the counsel of His will. (Ephesians 1:5) I believe the Bible when it says that all things work together for the good of those who love God and are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28) I believe the Bible when it says that the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God endures forever. (1 John 2:17) And I believe that no matter what sort of tribulation or persecution I have to endure, I can still have peace and I can still face every day with joy because my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has overcome the world. (John 16:33)

I hope you do too, because if you believe the promises of God, you will have the witness of faith.