

Topic	How the Gospel Makes Christians
Reference	1-Thessalonians 1:1 – 10
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BACKGROUND:

Paul was on his second missionary journey. He came to the town of Thessalonica and as was his custom, he goes into the synagogue and he reasons with the people about Jesus. He tells people about Jesus and very soon some Jews and some God-fearing gentiles believed and the church was started and almost immediately as soon as the church was started, persecution came. The Jewish people in the synagogue were not happy and they started to persecute the church and as a result Paul was sent away by the Thessalonian church, and because of how short of time he was there, Paul was worried for them. Paul wondered about their faith as he moved onto other cities but he sent Timothy to go and check on them and about a year after first time they went to Thessalonica and after a year later Timothy delivers very positive report and Paul is really-really happy and he writes this letter.

So in the beginning of this letter, he recounts the ministry that he has done in that short period of time and in this we can see how the gospel produces genuine faith. So today we are going to look at what happened in the Thessalonians life and we can ask, has that happened to me or is it happening to me, are the same things that changed the Thessalonians changing me.

Why is it important for us to know this?

For some of us it is very common to struggle with assurance of salvation, we don't know whether we will make it to heaven, we don't know whether we are saved. For those of us who don't struggle with it, the Bible encourages us to test ourselves to see whether we are in the faith.

The Gospel Comes by God's Plan

What I mean is that the gospel comes as an initiative from God. If God doesn't make it happen, it won't happen.

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul is thinking about them, he is giving thanks to God. The next verse tells us the reason why he is thanking God.

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

So Paul basically wanted to tell them that the gospel comes to us and affects us and changes us because God first chose us. In the Gospel of John, it is written

6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

6:40 For this the will of my father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

So Jesus here is saying that if you come to me, if you believe in me you will have eternal life, I will raise you up. So that is what it means to not hunger and not thirst, is to have eternal life.

6:36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

So Jesus makes himself known to everybody, to the world but yet some will not believe in him. Some will just not come to him. Two different people hear the same gospel, yet two different reactions. This is because,

6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

In verse 44 Jesus says this different way.

44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.

So basically Jesus is saying the difference between someone that comes to me and someone that does not come to me, is that one is given to me by the Father. The Father chose him and because the Father chose him he comes to me. John Piper says this,

“What will you say to God at the judgment if he asks, ‘Why did you believe on my Son while other didn’t?’ You will not say: ‘Because I was smarter.’ No. Surely you will say, ‘Because of your grace. Had you not chosen me, I would have been left spiritually dead, unresponsive, guilty.’”

The gospel is not man trying to reach God. It is rather God coming down to reach mankind. The gospel is not humans climbing up the mountain of self-actualization, but it is God descending upon the earth to adopt children. The gospel is not that, we love God in order for him to love us, no, the gospel is he demonstrates his love for us while we were sinners he died for us. The gospel is not loving God to gain his favor and love, no the gospel is we love because he first loved us. The gospel always comes as an initiative from God. We are people that journey in our jolly good way and then God comes and interrupts our lives. We are heading in certain direction, we are just doing our own thing, Abraham was chilling, Moses was attending sheep, Peter was fishing, Paul was out to kill Christians but God intervenes. God comes in with a call. Our coming to Jesus is always first rooted in God coming to us.

The Gospel Comes Through Preaching:

5 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.

The gospel means ‘good news’; it is information that needs to be communicated with words. The term ‘our gospel’ is a very specific news. There are statements and sentences, affirmations and denials that make up this particular gospel, in fact Paul was so protective of the gospel he says if an angel comes to you and preaches a different gospel than I preached before, let him be a curse.

Every religion in this world teaches kindness and good words. If you open the door for someone to Christianity with your good works but you don’t preach to them with words, then it might not be useful for them. Paul also did things like these.

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 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.” Acts 17:2-3

This is the essence of the gospel, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians are a group of people that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, came to live a life we should have lived and he died a death that we should have died in order for us to be reconciled back to our heavenly father. Christians believe in very specific gospel.

The Gospel Comes in Power

5 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.

Possibly Paul did have signs and miracles wherever he went. It was possible that he went around preaching he did pray that people receive tongues but most likely and most definitely the power spoken here was specifically manifested in the form of transformed lives.

The gospel came to you in power and the power is manifested and presented in the form of Paul and Silas and Timothy and there transformed lives. The gospel didn't just come in words, it came in physical representations in Paul and Silas and Timothy as they ministered in Thessalonica their lives were testimonies that gave credibility to their message.

Mahatma Gandhi said, *I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.*

What he said was painfully true. There are so many peoples in the world that turned away from the gospel because of Christians. They were wounded by Christians. The gospel message loses credibility when the messenger's life is not in sync with the truth of the gospel. This is very important for us Christians as we are trying to influence people for the gospel, we are trying to preach the gospel. If the gospel doesn't affect every part of our life, we might not be a good testimony for Christ. The gospel has to control us.

2-Corinthians, For the love of life compels us, controls us.

The gospel is power. The gospel turns proud people into humble people, because in the gospel we are all sinners, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us need the grace of God. So we can't be proud. We can't be angry either. The gospel turns us from angry people to patient and forgiving people because in the gospel we learn about the forbearance and the everlasting love of Jesus. The gospel turns selfish people to generous people because in the gospel we have a God who gave up everything, because of our sake He who is rich became poor. So the way we think about work, the way we think about money, the way we think about time, the way we think about relationship, it all supposed to change because of the gospel. For Paul, Silas and Timothy, their lives were so transformed that they were willing to suffer for the gospel.

1 Thessalonian 2:2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

Paul and Silas were jailed in Philippi and their feet were shackled in two wooden planks. Then there was an earthquake and they walked out of the prison, but after that they have to leave Philippi. So their legs were hurt, but they had to travel to a different city, but yet they still did it and they came to a new place and still boldly preach the gospel.

2:9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

Their perception of work changed because of the gospel. They worked day and night. They needed to work because they had no money and they didn't want to burden the Thessalonian church and so Paul went back to his tent-making profession, day and night. Because he wanted to preach the gospel, the gospel changes our perception of work and even of rest. The gospel so powerfully transformed their lives that their lives powerfully testified of the gospel. The gospel didn't just come in words; it came in powerful testimony. So much so that the Thessalonians themselves also became like Paul and Silas and Timothy.

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. **7** And so you became a model 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,

So their faith so affected by the lives of the missionaries there that they themselves became missionaries. The word of the Lord was sent forth from them. Matthew Henry in his commentary says, *the gospel came to them also not in word only but in power. They not only heard the sound of it but submitted to the power of it. It didn't merely tickle the ear and please the fancy, not merely fill their heads with emotions and amuse their minds for a while but it affected their heart. A divine power went along with it for convincing their conscience and amending their lives.*

The Gospel Comes as a Promise:

To be sure the gospel has transformative powers because it is fueled by a promise. The drive behind that power is the promise. We make decisions in life based on promises. Whatever is promising we put our faith in it and we serve it, whatever difficulty that comes because of the hope that we have in that promise we persevere until something more promising comes along. The gospel also comes as a promise but is it more promising than the other things that we have been spending time on. Is it more promising than the rest of the things, the other things that promise us happiness and joy.

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.

The gospel comes with a promise of a savior. The Thessalonian church, Paul found them in the synagogue, they subscribed to the Jewish faith and they were holding on to a different kind of promise. They were holding on to the promise of the Old Covenant which says if you obey me I will bless you. If you disobey me, I will curse you. So they were in the synagogue, they were holding onto that promise, they were trying to save themselves from the wrath to come. They were trying to save themselves from God's anger and they did it by their good behaviour, by their good works, by their righteousness. That's why they were in the synagogue. So when Paul says, you have turned to God from idols, it is not that they were pagan worshippers, their idol was their self-righteousness. They were putting their trust on their own good works.

There is a desire in every one of us to have the moment of happiness, because for a moment in that time it will help us distract us from the dread that we have. All of us actually feel that sense of dread, because we know judgment is coming. We know that there is a God who created the heavens and the earth and as creation we have a standard to fulfil. We have things that we have to comply with and actually we are not good enough to meet those standards and that's why we chase after all these other things because in that moment that thing will tell us you are good enough.

The gospel comes both as a good and bad news. The bad news is that you are never good enough and there is dread hanging over us. The gospel tells us that we aren't good enough. Even our best efforts are merely dirt on the carpet. The good news is that there is someone good enough, he is good enough and he came and he performed a divine exchange. You that is not good enough and He that is perfect, He came and He swapped places with us. He became the guy who was not good enough and in His place when we put our trust in Him, when we put our hope in Him we become perfect. We have the righteousness of God. He took upon our sins so that we can take upon His righteousness that is the promise of the gospel and when we see the cross of Jesus Christ, when we see the work that He has already done for our sin, we know that this promise is not only promising, this promise delivered, the gospel came true at the cross of Jesus, he made it happen. It is already guaranteed and that's why the Thessalonian church can turn away from idols and they can serve the true and living God and they can wait for the son to deliver them from the wrath to come and we can say along with the Thessalonian church that I can trust Him, I can serve Him, I can hope in Him, the gospel comes as a promise.

Practical Question:

What gives you more joy? being loved by God or being appreciated at work, reaching your dreams, getting holidays

If you die today what will make God receive you into heaven, is it you are good enough or is it we say my hope is still on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.