

September 10, 2020

Words of encouragement for today; be blessed!

After people accept Jesus and become Christians, that is Jesus' disciples, they incur the responsibility to sound the word of the Lord wherever they go. Many Christians do not do this in any fashion. Christians are often lazy regarding their responsibilities under grace. Read with me today from 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

*1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.*

All Christians are to be excellent examples of what it is to follow Jesus. As we live following Jesus fully, that is without shame; we proclaim the

word of the Lord. Our proclamation of the word of the Lord is made everywhere.

First Thessalonians is Paul's first known writing and considered by many to be the first written book of the New Testament. This letter was written in response to a report from Timothy regarding the condition of the Thessalonian church. There are at least three purposes undergirding this letter; first, to express gratitude for the healthy spiritual condition of the church; second, to refute false accusations against Paul and his ministry associates, and third, to suggest specific ways the Christians of Thessalonica could improve.

The people of Thessalonica imitated Paul and his companions and the Lord as they matured spiritually. The first exemplars of Christianity the Thessalonians encountered were Paul and his companions. This was the example they followed. This soon led them to follow the example of Jesus.

We are called to be both imitators of Christ's example and exemplars to the world of what it means to be Jesus' disciple. Jesus teaches, "I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:15). Peter also admonishes Christians when he reminds us, "[that we] have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example for us to follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

In the conduct of our lives we imitate Jesus. We love God with our whole heart; we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We are not unfairly critical of others. We share God with those we encounter. As we do these things we become the exemplar that the world needs so they may find Jesus through our example.

One of the major things we do as Jesus' disciple is to sound the word of the Lord. The Thessalonian Christians by their example and testimony

sounded the word of the Lord throughout the region of Macedonia and in other parts of the Roman Empire. Wherever their testimony was heard, and according to Paul it was heard everywhere, their faith in God was manifest.

The power of testimony can never be understated. Whenever a Christian speaks the Good News the power of the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those who hear it. Isaiah the prophet speaking the word of God declares, "As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

In your life who or what are you imitating? Are you following good examples that will build you up in Christ? Or do you follow examples that are killing your soul and sapping your energy?

Is the example that we are giving to our family, friends, and community an example that glorifies the Lord? Is the way in which we live as individuals and as a church pointing others to Jesus so that they can receive God's precious gift of salvation? Is the word of the Lord being sounded loudly and clearly wherever our faith in God reaches?

We are called to be imitators of Jesus. But we are also called to be exemplars of Christian faith, unity, and discipleship in our families, to our friends, and in our communities. As we follow Jesus wholeheartedly and without shame our example and testimony will point the way to Jesus, the Christ. Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, help each of us become the positive examples You desire that we become so that we may glorify You through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, amen.*

It is true that you can make a louder proclamation for Jesus with your actions rather than your words.

Until the nets are full