



“Let’s Rise Reassured”
I Thessalonians 1:1-10
August 8th, 2021

This morning we come to the final destination of our recent tour of New Testament churches. The title of the series that we have been in for the last several months has been called *O Church, Arise*. We have been looking at rich portions of New Testament ecclesiology, also known as The Doctrine of the Church.

We have been looking at these portions of Scripture to inform and inspire our life together as the body of Christ here at Bethel Grace in what has been an unusual year and a half. We want to come out of unusual circumstances still raised up in the vision of all that God intends His church to be.

So far we have spent some time with the church of Ephesus. Then we went to Corinth and spent some time with the church there. And this morning, we come to the final leg of the voyage. We come to Thessalonica.

You might think of the Thessalonian church as a direct contrast to the Corinthian church. If you were here with us last week, you will remember how we talked about how the Corinthians were kind of like Paul’s problem children. Last week we went into some detail talking about how dysfunctional that church in fact was and the way that Paul had to instruct them back to the most excellent way of Spirit-filled agape love.

Now we come to the Thessalonians and they were kind of on the other side of the spectrum. They were such a gust of fresh air and fresh wind in the heart of the Apostle Paul. In contrast to the Corinthians where Paul said, Ok, we need to get clear on what love is, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in Chapter 4 and Verse 9 that they didn’t need anybody to write to them about love because they had been taught by God to love one another. This was truly a remarkable church.

Paul said things about the Thessalonian church that he didn’t say about any of the other churches that he planted, at least as far as what is recorded in Scripture. As we will see this morning, Paul told the Thessalonians, You are an exemplary church. You are providing an example for all the churches in your region.

Then when we look at Paul’s opening comments in the book of Second Thessalonians, we see that Paul notched that up a little bit and said, I boast about you. When I’m going around visiting the churches and talking about God’s work in the lives of different people, I boast about the love and endurance that is coming forth from you, even as you are suffering and experiencing persecution as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was an elementary and boast-worthy church, according to what Paul had written about them.

However, brothers and sisters, here is the thing: We can tend to look at people who are doing well and who are growing in maturity in ways that are clear, seeing that the hand of the Lord is upon these people. They are bearing fruit and causing others joy. They are strong and steadfast by the work of the Holy Spirit within them.

So we contend to think of such Christians as immune to discouragement. We think that they have truly got all their ducks in a row. They are strong, steadfast, and they exude gladness of heart. We can think of them as those who never experience doubt or struggle of any kind.

We might become a little bit surprised when we find out that they too had a propensity to second guess things in their hearts. The truth is that human beings are human beings. We are all susceptible to discouragement. Questions fill the heart and the mind of any follower of Jesus Christ in any community of Christians.

Doubt has been one of Satan's chief tactics from the very beginning. Satan might even concentrate his efforts on those who are doing well. So that you might have people filled with the fruit of the Spirit, tenderhearted in the Lord, resolved in doctrine, growing in the qualities of graciousness, and they are being buffeted with all manner of mental and relational anguish as they are, by the work of the Spirit, pursuing Christ.

As you read through this short and wonderful book that we know as I Thessalonians, it becomes evident that the Thessalonians, this exemplary, boast-worthy church, were dealing with some doubt. There were some questions that were creeping in.

For one thing, this was a church that was experiencing the sorrow of bereavement. Brothers and sisters had died and their hearts were broken. That sorrow was compounded by the fact that they were a little bit unclear on their end-times eschatology about the return of Jesus. They had it in their minds that Jesus Christ was coming back so very quickly.

They thought it could be any time immediately and we hold that same faith. But when they had brothers and sisters die before Christ came back, they wondered what was going on and what would happen to them. They were truly in a place of some consternation about that.

In addition, they had some questions about the Apostle Paul. Paul had come and spent about a month and a half with them. It was such of a profoundly deep and caring pastoral ministry. Their time with Paul was cut short as he had to hasten off, because of some serious persecution that was directed against him.

Paul told them that he loved them and that he would be back. Weeks past. More weeks past. Months past. The Thessalonians wondered where he was and if he was still thinking about them. It is evident that they were having questions about how Paul was regarding them.

In addition to this, the Thessalonians were being harassed and afflicted, both by the Jewish synagogue and by the pagans for their faith in Jesus Christ. This persecution was going on unabated. It was wearing them down. They were both physically and emotionally becoming tired and worn out, just like we can imagine any of us would be.

In the midst of all of this, we have this wonderful church continuing to grow in love and spread the Gospel, but they were relationally and mentally getting exhausted and they had questions in their minds. Questions were starting to seep in and Satan was seeking to aggravate and make things worse.

Paul heard about what was happening from Timotheus and Silas, and he wrote this letter to reassure the Thessalonians. He wrote this letter to breathe life into them and to convey love. He reminded them of his love for them.

Even more importantly, even in the midst of all they were going through, Paul assured them of God's love for them. Paul also wrote to let them know that they needed to understand how the testimony of their church was spreading; how their story was being told; how they were doing so many lives good. Paul wanted them to know the extent of it.

Paul wrote these words to reassure them, so let's see what is here. It is a beautiful portion of Scripture and just the beginning of all that Paul had to say to them. Let's see how Paul sought to encourage that church in I Thessalonians, Chapter 1. Let us receive it for what it is. It is the Word of the Lord, even for us today.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

**To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace:**

²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because 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. ⁶And you became imitators of us and the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has the word of the 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. ⁹For 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, ¹⁰and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

This is just the beginning of the outpouring of love and reassurance that Paul provided to this Thessalonian church. It is so interesting to see what Paul came to in that section of Scripture, because he would typically go and report to the various churches his ministry and missionary activities.

Paul would go to churches but he did not go and report to those churches what happened in Thessalonica, instead those churches gave Paul the report of what was happening in

Thessalonica. That is how what was happening in Thessalonica sounded forth throughout that whole Greek region.

However, Paul was seeking to reassure the Thessalonians of the genuineness of their faith and importance that they carried in his heart and in God's heart. He took his reassurance to even a deeper and more profound level. He brought it to the Doctrine of Election.

He said, You, Thessalonians, you church in Thessalonica, you have been chosen by God and the evidence of it is just so very crystal-clear. The Doctrine of Election is the teaching that God has in fact chosen His church and that God has predestined people to be saved and to be a part of His church.

Before time, God chose us in Christ. He has chosen us who believe according to the unsearchable wisdom of His amazing and infinite heart and mind. He has chosen according to His love as an outpouring of grace. So Paul said:

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

He has chosen you. He loves you. He is upholding you, and He is seeing you through.

Then throughout this opening portion, Paul went on to tell them about how he could be so certain about these things; how he knew that this church was comprised of God's elect. It is a beautiful reassuring portion of Scripture.

As we look at what is here in this text, we see that there are a whole number of things that Paul pointed to, but, once again, I am seeing three evidences that Paul pointed to about the fact that they were chosen in Christ.

He gave them three reasons, and each one of them is based upon the ministry of the Word which is synonymous in this text with the Gospel of Jesus, His crucifixion, and His resurrection from the grave for sinners. Paul sought to help them to be assured and vitalized in their faith.

This morning we are going to look at the first two reasons. Next week we will pick it up with the third, because there is an awesome story to be told toward the end of this passage, which I think is going to be a very fitting conclusion to a series titled *O Church, Arise*.

There are three levels of reassurance that Paul pointed the Thessalonians to and to us to as well. First, reassurance comes when we remember the way the Word was delivered. Paul reminded them of that. Then we see that reassurance comes as we remember how the Word has been received in the lives of those who are alive in Christ.

The third part which we will save for next is that Paul reassured them of the fact of their salvation by the way that the Word of the Lord went forth through them. These are the three aspects of this. Reassurance comes as we remember the way the Word was delivered to us; the way the Word was received by us by the grace of God, and the way that it has gone forth through us.

Let's take a look at how Paul instructed the Thessalonians first.

Reassurance comes as we remember:

1. The way the word was delivered (1:4-5)

Look at how Paul impressed this upon the Thessalonians. Verse 4:

⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because 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.

This is very interesting because Paul was talking to them about their confidence in their election and he based this not only on what he saw in them, but he also based it on what he experienced in himself while he was preaching to the Thessalonians.

Paul said, We know that God was doing something in you because He was doing something in us while we were delivering the Gospel to you. That is what Paul said here in this text. The Word came with power and we had a sense of how the living and active nature of God's word was doing things in your lives and hearts.

It came with the working of the Holy Spirit and Paul said, It came not with partial conviction but with full conviction. We had this certainty of how God was working in your midst. I think this certainty that Paul spoke of may have had some of its source in that vision that he had. We read about it in Acts Chapter 14 or 15.

Before Paul went into the Macedonia region where this church was situated, that text says that Paul was trying to go into Asia but there were barriers that were put in the way. He was trying to go to another place called Bithynia. Nope! Paul said that the Holy Spirit would not let them.

Then Paul had a vision of the man from Macedonia saying come and help us. Come help us and, directed by that vision, they could not wait to get there. They had the strength of conviction as they were serving the Lord.

By the way, as we think about this, pray, pray, pray for the teachers and the preachers that God sends that we won't be people of partial conviction but of full conviction of what the power of God's Word does in the hearts of those who are being called into the Kingdom.

But here we see that Paul was saying to them that there was full conviction. Paul said something interesting. Based on this, Paul said:

⁵...You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

He expanded upon this a little bit later in I Thessalonians Chapter 2, where he gave one of the most beautiful portraits of Christian leadership to be found in the pages of Scripture. He said,

We came into your midst and we didn't come as those peddling the word for profit. We came into your midst and we didn't come as people pleasers, but of those who were fully commissioned by God with the Gospel.

Then Paul said, We were in your midst and were gentle among you, just like a nursing mother providing for her child. Paul was saying, We were there amongst you and we were feeding you from our very souls, from our very life, the Word of the Living God. Then he said, We were strong amongst you. We were like fathers encouraging and strengthening His children.

In all of this, as the Thessalonians who were flagging a bit in their assurance, Paul was saying just think about how God has sent His messengers into your life for your good; for your salvation; for your growth in the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul was saying, Just think about what God sent to you because He chose you and because He loves you.

Likewise, brothers and sisters in the Lord, there may be times when you come into circumstances in life where you become discouraged and downhearted in your faith and you might be wondering what you are doing and what is going on with the Christian faith of yours.

We can all be prone to discouragement and when those times of discouragement come, you would do well to call to your remembrance the people that the Lord has sent into your life with the Gospel and to nurture the Gospel because He chose you and because He loves you.

When you become downhearted and discouraged, assemble in your mind the spiritual genealogy God has provided for you to nurture you and to grow you in the faith. He placed them specifically in your life and He determined it before time even began.

Who are the people that have spoken words of life into you? For different people, there will be different people. For some of you, you might think back to parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. But not everybody received the word of grace through family members.

It may be that you heard the word of the Lord through neighbors, through co-workers, through total strangers that approached you with a track. God has sent people into your life to give you the Word of God and to nurture you up in it. It won't take too much reflection to see that such people have in fact been in your life by divine appointment. Think about them. Call them to memory. They have been there by the gracious hand of God.

It could be that some of these people are people that you have never even met before, but you feel like you know them because you have spent so much time reading their writings; listening to their podcasts; watching their videos; listening to their CDs and maybe even listening to their cassette tapes.

You have listened to them so much that you feel like you know them, although you have never met them. Whether or not you meet them ever in this life, you will get to meet them in the life to come. God has provided them for you. None of them are perfect. Don't get into the business of comparing the ones God has sent to you to the ones that God has sent to someone else.

They may have twenty. You may have two, but God has been faithful to you. Whenever you have questions, just think about how God, by His sovereign grace has caused people to approach you and to pray for you and to invest in you. He has done this because He loves you.

Be someone who keeps a journal. Dig that journal out and write down that you are going to remember those God has put in your life. The Living God has in fact surrounded you with a cloud of witnesses to speak life to you; to mature you; to encourage you in the faith. They have been there all along and God designed to do this before the foundation of the world because His heart to you is full of grace and mercy in Christ.

Reassurance comes when we remember the way that God has been faithful to deliver His truth into our lives. We continue and we see another way. As Paul spoke it to them, we can also consider it as it is applied to us.

Reassurance comes as we remember:

2. The way of the word was received (1:6-7)

Let's see what it says here continuing in Verses 6 and 7. It is all coming out grammatically from the same root:

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

⁶And you became imitators of us and the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

They received the Word of the Lord, the message about Jesus, with a strange combination of experiences. These experiences were an odd couple indeed, for they received the Gospel in the midst of much affliction and with an upwelling of joy.

That is an interesting tandem, is it not? Because we tend to think of those two experiences as mutually exclusive of one another. If there is affliction, there isn't any joy. But there is something that is very remarkable that happens in the lives of God's people.

Even when there are hard things that are being faced, the Holy Spirit has a way of bearing the fruit of joy, giving us even greater intimacy with the Lord who has saved us and who is sustaining us. That is what was happening with these Thessalonians.

⁶for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit

This is so interesting because there are so many in this world who turn to their concept of God, seeking a remedy for the problems of life. Maybe seeking a power source for some upward mobility in life; just to get things in life the way that they want things to be.

The Thessalonians came to Christ knowing that turning to Jesus from Judaism or from paganism would introduce a whole new series of difficulties and problems into their world. They knew that these men who were sharing Christ were persecuted men who were telling the story a crucified Messiah. That is a strange message indeed and the stigma of crucifixion was much more pronounced in their day than it is in ours.

Paul was still carrying bruises on his body. The Thessalonians had eyes to see that the path of following Jesus is not necessarily going to be a path of cushions and bon bons. They could see that there was going to be some difficulty in the path that they were being called to.

Yet, brothers and sisters, they had ears to hear how this Christ, this Messiah, died as a substitute; died as a sacrifice; died to solve the problem of their guilt before the Maker, the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Judge of all humanity. Christ was God's loving provision for the cleansing and the forgiveness of sin before the holiness of the One Living God of all creation.

The Thessalonians saw these men with fresh wounds on their bodies and they heard the message they proclaimed and the message of a King who was resurrected from the grave. That message resonated in their hearts and they could hear the voice of the Alpha and the Omega summoning them into His Eternal and Everlasting Kingdom.

They were given eyes to see the treasure that Jesus is, and their hearts believed, no matter how their families and friends and neighbors might have reacted to their faith. They realized the treasure that was entering into their lives through the Majestic King Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners.

So we have a set of scales. The sufferings of this world that come as a result of following Jesus are on one side of the scale. Then Jesus Himself is on the other side of the scale. Which outweighs the other? By the working of the Spirit, the side of the scale with Jesus rise infinitely higher. Which outweighed the other? Jesus!

So the hearts of the Thessalonians came to faith in Jesus. As our hearts are understanding the purity of the true Gospel, we understand that on the one hand it does not solve all the problems that we face in this world. In fact, it introduces new ones.

Then on the other hand, we come to understand that it solves the greatest problem that we will ever face and that is our need for righteousness before the sight of the holiness of God. So, all of the hardships that might be introduced get tossed aside because Jesus is entering into our lives. We see the Prince of Peace, the King of kings, the Lord of lords!

We see the hand that has given every good thing that this world possesses and we say that we get to be a part of His Kingdom forevermore. Delivered from the curse. Delivered from sin into something that will never spoil or fade. And faith comes. When questions creep in, we can think back to how God has given us resolved faith.

I will be honest, sometimes it is a struggle. That is what we are talking about here. Sometimes we have questions but we will see how God has been faithful to reveal to us the surpassing value

of knowing Jesus Christ, even when people in our lives might respond in a negative way to the treasure that we are receiving. That is a work of God's grace.

I was reading this and I was thinking about my dear, precious wife and how she came to faith about twenty-five-years ago, knowing full well that any decision to follow Jesus Christ in the way of evangelical Christianity would introduce some significant conflict with somebody that she was very, very close to.

Yet, the conviction that Jesus is the answer was registering so powerfully in her heart. The certainty rose up, so she followed Jesus and she came to living faith in Him. And, yes, there was some ridicule and there was scorn in the midst of her relationship with that person. It was serious!

And she is born again and alive in the faith, despite the disapproval of some people that were very important to her. That is the way that Jesus puts faith in our hearts, even in the midst of the challenges in this life.

In view of this, this week I have been thinking about Bethel Grace and how this church is filled with people who have been enduring suffering even with ongoing joyful worship in the Lord by the Spirit. I can think of all kinds of situations in this church.

Some of you have been abandoned by family members, yet your faith still holds. Some of you have been villainized or shunned for your doctrine and biblical world view, and your faith still holds. A number of you have had your hearts broken by the apostasy of people that are dear to you, and your faith still holds. Some of you have been through chronic, ongoing, severe bodily ailments, and your faith still holds. Some of you have been through financial collapse and unemployment and instead of being bitter toward God, the Holy Spirit continues to work in your heart and life, and your faith still holds.

In the midst of these different experiences of life, faith still rises up and we keep worshiping the Lord, not because we are the ones who are so resolutely holding on to our faith but because we are being held fast by the graciousness and the love of the Lord, who has chosen us; who sees us; who cares for us and has compassion for us. He surrounds and envelops us and He holds us up and sees us through the trials of this life. So we need to think about the Lord and how He has sustained us.

We see here how Paul pointed to this as an evidence of the Thessalonians salvation and he also pointed to this as a way in which they were being exemplary. The fact that they were being troubled and harassed because of their faith and worship of the Lord through those things, this was being very, very helpful to other churches going through similar persecutions as they watched on.

So they were being an example in the midst of endurance in their faith. This is important for us to think about because your life is going to be something that helps and inspires other followers of Jesus Christ. This even gets the attention of unbelievers in this world. Your life is going to be helpful.

But it is not when all of your problems in life suddenly vanish so that suddenly you have health, wealth, and prosperity and all the troubles of this life melt away and there are no more difficulties. People see that in your life and they will think that you are so very lucky.

But the fact of the matter is that we are living in a fallen and cursed world and life is a grind. This is such a rebuke against the false prosperity gospel that is infecting so many places. Paul was saying to the Thessalonians, You are not exemplary in that suddenly all of your problems have vanished now that you are following Christ.

Rather Paul was saying, You are exemplary and being helpful in the fact that even in the midst of the troubles you are going through, the Holy Spirit is bringing forth a fount of joy. So with this we say, Lord, do Your work in me. Do Your work in us. Let it be the working of Your grace. Let it be something supernatural, so that this well of worship continues to spring forth and that others can drink of it and be refreshed and encouraged by it.

This is a work of God's grace. It is the work of God's grace to have the ongoing experience of joy in affliction rather than gripping and grumbling and moaning and complaining because that is what remains natural to us. Left to myself I can be the biggest grumbler and complainer you have ever seen, even though I am only five-foot-six inches tall.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and it is in the midst of the hard things we face that the Spirit is gripping us and flowing from us. Jesus said:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:36 and 37)

By this, He meant the Spirit who was to be given.

So Paul pointed the Thessalonians back saying that the way they have endured with work and the fruit of the Holy Spirit that was produced in their lives was beautiful and remarkable.

There is one more aspect of this. Reassurance comes as we remember:

3. The way the word went forward (1:8-10)

When you get it in midst of the context of their witness in how the Word went forward, it was so countercultural. It was so against the grain that it is something that was so very powerful.

We are going to look forward to exploring the context and how that makes vivid what we read about how their faith and the Gospel was sounding forth. It was reverberating from them. It is so amazing when you understand the city that they lived in and how their faith in Christ was that pronounced.

Bethel Grace, I was thinking through the ways that the Word has been sounding forth from the people of this church and it has encouraged my heart. I will tell you a little bit more about that next week.

With this, let's go before the Lord, asking Him to be at work in our lives bearing such fruit in us and thanking Him that while we are weak, He is so very strong. All of this is His work in us and through us.

Please join me in a word of prayer.