

Faithful Thessalonians

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Date: 25 June 2000

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 25th of June 2000.

The preacher is Phil Muleman. His sermon is entitled Faithful Thessalonians and is from 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 1 to 10.

Please be seated. What is a faithful Christian?

What is a faithful Christian? Is it someone who seeks to do good in all that they do? Is it someone who keeps to themselves letting people believe what they want to believe and maintaining the status quo in life?

Is that a Christian? Is a faithful Christian someone who is well versed in the prayer book and knows how to recite all the creeds and the regular prayers that we see in it from time to time?

[1 : 08] Or is a faithful Christian someone who prospers in all that they do wearing fine clothes, drinking fine wines and eating exotic foods? Is that a faithful Christian?

In our world today, it is hard to say what a faithful Christian is just on the surface. I can recall when I was younger, a neighbour commenting on something a friend of mine did and I remember the words very clearly saying that that was a lovely Christian thing to do.

I'm not even sure if that friend of mine at that point in time was a Christian, let alone the neighbour. Yet what this neighbour said, what she said was that that was a lovely Christian thing to do.

What is a faithful Christian? To ask the question of what is a faithful Christian, I think it's best that we do what we do most weeks and look at what scripture says about it.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is a great place to start when we think of this question of what is a faithful Christian. And you may like to open it on page 959, the reading that was read to us by Alan this morning as we look at chapter 1 of this letter.

[2 : 27] Now, the Apostle Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had previously planted the Christian church in Thessalonica in their second missionary journey around about 49 AD, we think it is.

And the church of Thessalonica or the city of Thessalonica is found on European soil. The gospel has now gone out of Jerusalem and has gone east or west, sorry, through Asia and now finally it's landed on European soil.

First it's gone to Philippi and now down to Thessalonica. And the church that was started there by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy was a mix of Jewish converts that were within the town.

They'd come from the Jewish synagogue as well as some Greeks and some pagan Gentiles within the town who had converted to Christianity. And they converted to Christianity by the gospel message that the Apostle Paul had preached there.

Now, while Paul and the others were there, they were accused of causing trouble in the city by the religious authorities. So Paul and Silas, Timothy had left by this time I think, Paul and Silas had to be smuggled out of the town, thus leaving these young Thessalonian converts on their own and to survive as Christians on their own.

[3 : 47] And I would encourage you to read Acts chapter 17 over the next week or so because we're going to be preaching through Thessalonians over the next five weeks. Acts 17 gives you a bit of the background as to what happened in Thessalonica and so on.

Well, Paul is smuggled out of Thessalonica and he goes southwards down to Achaia and then he goes over to Athens eventually and Silas goes somewhere and Timothy has gone somewhere else as well.

But Timothy has gone back to Thessalonica to see what is going on with the Christians within that church there. And he's revisited them and eventually he meets up with the Apostle Paul, probably in Corinth, and that causes Paul to write to this church in Thessalonica.

And he writes to them about several matters which we will look at in the coming weeks. But he begins his letter today, as we see it this morning, with thanksgiving to God for their faith and for their example.

And so he begins his letter in verse 1 with the standard greeting for the ancient world. He announces who it is that is writing the letter and it's Paul that is writing his letter along with his companions Silvanus and Timothy as they were involved, as I said a moment ago, in the establishment of this church in Thessalonica.

[5 : 10] And so they too, as well as Paul, were well known to the congregation back in Thessalonica. So we see that it's Paul who's writing and then we see to whom it is he's writing to.

And he's writing to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and, by implication, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now Paul is not just writing to any group of people in Thessalonica, but to the specific assembly, to the church of the Thessalonian Christians that have their being in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And notice also in those first couple of verses that he is not writing to an individual but to a group of people. He is writing to a church. He is writing to an assembly of Christian believers who have the same purpose for their meeting.

Now these Christians probably don't meet in the sort of space that we meet in, which we often get mixed up for calling a church. This church of believers is meeting probably in a house or several houses around the city of Thessalonica and this letter comes to them and is read to them.

Well the first answer that we see then to the question of what is a faithful Christian is that to be in relationship with God means also to be in relationship with Jesus Christ.

[6 : 44] That's what it means to be a faithful Christian. You cannot have one without the other. Some people say I'm a Christian but they don't believe in God yet they believe in Jesus Christ. Well I'm sorry, you can't be a Christian if you don't believe in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there are other people who say well I believe in God but I don't believe in Jesus Christ. Well you can't have one without the other. And it is to this group of faithful Christians who believe in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul writes to.

And then he greets them and he extends to them grace and peace. God's peace is not just the absence of conflict which we so often associate with our thinking because of all the conflict and so on that we see going on in our world.

But God's peace also extends to the fullness of health and harmony through the reconciliation with him with God the Father through Jesus Christ and with each other.

And the God's grace that Paul talks about here is God's free, undeserved favour through Jesus Christ who bestows his peace upon us and sustains it.

[8 : 00] Well the second thing to note about being a faithful Christian here is that not only are they in relationship with God and Jesus Christ but they also belong in community with other Christians.

And Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians to the group of believers Christian believers in God the Father and in Jesus Christ these group of believers belong to a church.

Now today there are many people who claim Christian belief and faith yet do not meet regularly or do not belong in a Christian congregation.

And I don't believe that Christians are to be individuals and isolate themselves from others. That might be the way that our society is going the trend that our society has but we as Christians need to be counterculture to that.

We need to be in relationship with other Christians building one another up and encouraging one another to live out their lives as Christians. Christians belong in community with other Christians.

[9 : 13] Well after greeting these faithful Christians in Thessalonica Paul then tells them in verses 2 and 3 how he and his companions give thanks for them. He says, We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and his companions give thanks thanksgiving and prayers belong together.

Perhaps we need to pray and work for better memories for it is when we remember people that is their faces their names and their needs that we are prompted both to thank God and to pray for them.

Now that can happen at a set time each day such as using the prayer sheet that is published monthly for the needs of the parish here of Holy Trinity or you can use some other form of prayer diary and it can also happen on the run while you are on your way to work or on your way out to get some lunch or something like that.

We need to be praying and remembering using our memory and praying for others' needs as well. A third sign of a faithful Christian is one who prays constantly to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ as this letter begins with.

[11 : 04] And perhaps we may think that prayer doesn't work but maybe, just maybe it's due to our own spiritual laziness in prayer.

For example, do we pray constantly or just when we feel we need to pray? Do we pray for others' needs as well as our own needs? Do we give thanks for other Christians and do we pray that God will draw people to him?

These are all signs of a faithful Christian. Now in their prayers Paul remembers three things in particular about the Thessalonians.

First of all, their work of faith, their labour of love and their steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Look at what verse 3 says there.

The first phrase, their work of faith, sums up what must be also our response to the gospel. And that is, we are saved by grace through faith.

[12 : 10] All that is necessary has been done for us by grace, has been done for us by God's undeserved favour on us and the work that he has done is seen in Jesus Christ and the work that he's done on the cross.

We've been saved by grace through faith. And we take hold of our salvation through faith, that is, by putting our trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

We take hold of that salvation by putting our trust in him. And accordingly then, works, and that is our works, do not save us. But we are saved for works, specifically for good works which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life which is what Ephesians chapter 2 talks about.

We are saved not by works but we are saved by grace for good works. And these also are expressed in Jesus' commands, in the commands and Jesus' commands to love God and neighbour which we see in the gospels.

Now the apostle Paul could not conceive of a merely intellectual religion. something which is just all head knowledge. He also sees that faith must be demonstrated in action.

[13 : 30] And this seems to be the case here in the church in Thessalonica. And the second phrase in verse 3 talks about their labour of love.

It makes a similar point. These Thessalonians are making their Christian faith visible. And this phrase also draws attention to the nature of their relationship with God.

And their relationship with God and by implication with others is one of love. We love him because he first loved us. And the third phrase talks about their steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This characterises their purpose. Their steadfastness and purpose in living is rooted in none other than Jesus Christ. Their purpose has been born out of what God has done for them in Christ.

And out of thanks they serve God now despite any afflictions or persecution as verse 6 talks about that they may endure now or in the future.

[14 : 36] And furthermore their steadfastness of hope or their sense of purpose is sustained by what still lay ahead what was in the future. Now it talks about their steadfastness of hope.

The New Testament understanding of the word hope is not merely wishful thinking as we think about it today like you know I hope that I will do well in my exams I hope that the swans will get to the finals and all those sorts of things.

That's merely wishful thinking. In fact I think it's hopeless thinking now even though they went last night. the Thessalonians hope the New Testament idea of the word hope is a hope which has a certainty and that is a certainty about the future and in this context here it is a certainty about the future based on the promises of God and more precisely again it is about the return of Jesus Christ and that is the content of the Thessalonians hope here.

and Paul here thanks God for their faith for their love and hope of these Thessalonians it is another sign of their faithfulness as Christians and faith love and hope are also characteristics of us as Christians in this modern day world.

now our work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ is described by John Calvin that great theologian reformer theologian described by him as a brief definition of true Christianity faith love and hope well Paul goes on and he writes in verse 4 or he says with a certainty that God has chosen them that he's elected them we know that God has chosen you now he's talking about election here these people have been elected and this is a totally and thoroughly biblical doctrine in the Old Testament we see the call of Abraham and later his choice of Israel to be his treasured possession God's choice and then that goes throughout the Old Testament and transfers across into the

[17 : 06] New Testament to the Christian community now it's not an arrogant statement by Paul to say that God has chosen them and I don't think that it's a statement by Paul which shows that he has some special inside knowledge he's able to say that God has chosen them I think for two reasons the first is seen in I'm going to read verse 5 and that relates to their evangelism let me read it to you he says our message of the gospel Paul came preaching the gospel to the people in Thessalonica our message of the gospel came to you not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction their preaching of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit had an effect on them and in a sense is God's choosing of them so it's related first of all to their evangelism and the second is seen back in verse 3 relating again to the

Thessalonians holiness as Christians and both were evidences here of the activity of the Holy Spirit first in Paul's as well as his companions preaching and secondly in the converts and we see the fruit of that in what's produced in them producing in the converts faith love and hope and as a result we know that they are chosen by God and when the doctrine of election is brought up it's a confusing issue for people and people can quickly think back to their childhood days where school teachers bagged it and all those sorts of things and they can quickly think that also that if God has already chosen his people then evangelism or that is the proclamation of the gospel is unnecessary why do we need to do that if God has already chosen us these verses show

I think quite clearly that far from making evangelism that is the gospel proclamation unnecessary it is indispensable for it is only through the faithful proclamation and receiving of the gospel as we see demonstrated here in Thessalonica that God's secret purpose comes to be revealed and known the apostle Paul himself look at his own life he was chosen by God and called to preach the gospel with a fervent zeal and along with his transformation as a Christian he did just that and we too who are chosen by God are called primarily to holiness and to the proclamation of the Christian gospel a faithful Christian is chosen by God well as faithful

Christians it's important that we have good role models people that is who live out their faith in their everyday life who live it out in word and in action people that is who know their scriptures and let scripture the bible they let that form their world view people who will stand firm even when testing times come along and so on now I have a mentor whom I see on a regular basis to talk through issues relating to ministry and someone who will hold me accountable as a Christian making sure that I am reading the bible making sure that I am praying making sure that my marriage to Barb is still going strong and all those sorts of things making sure that I'm spending appropriate time with my children and so on it is someone that I can also pray with and it is someone whom I look up to and I think is a model worth imitating because they themselves are imitators of the Lord

I imitate them so that my ministry will continue to be effective not just for today but in years to come so that I will stay strong as a Christian chiefly the person we should seek to imitate without a doubt is Jesus himself and the bible has plenty to teach us about to live as Christians how to live as Christians in holiness and so on but friends there is nothing at all wrong with having a Christian friend that you can imitate someone who is a true Christian and I wish that we could all as Christians meet regularly outside of this Sunday group with at least one other Christian for our own encouragement as well as the encouragement of others and as we do it helps us to endure the hard times and the persecution that comes our way both on a human level as well as a spiritual level another reason for the

[22 : 21] Thessalonian Christians faithfulness is due to the fact that they imitate Paul and his companions Silvanus and Timothy let me read to you verses 6 to 8 it says you became imitators of us and of the Lord for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit they imitated Paul so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia which is to the north of Thessalonica and in Achaia which is down to the south and as they imitated Paul we see in verse 8 that the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you all another way to translate is that the word of the Lord has rained out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place your faith in God has become known so that we have no need to speak about it faithful

Christians imitate other Christians just as the Thessalonian Christians did and faithful Christians speak God's word just as Paul and his companions did as well and let me ask you a question do people in this area know about the faith of the Christians here at Holy Trinity is it our faith in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that has gone out from beyond these walls or is it some other message that we are going out and espousing that's certainly not the case here in the church in Thessalonica Paul writes in verse 9 how the people of those regions report that they turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God these Thessalonians these Christians here in Thessalonica had a sound conversion and they had turned away useless idols to serve the living

God and while many around them within the city of Thessalonica continued to worship idols and manufacture them as well these Thessalonian Christians here that Paul writes to had to turn to the one true living God and as a result their lives were transformed but what are the idols in our world today that consume us do we have idols in our world today some people are eaten up with a selfish ambition for money for power or fame others are obsessed with their work or with sport or with TV or they're infatuated with a person or they're addicted to gambling to the internet to food to alcohol to drugs or sex or they're into and immorality and greed are pronounced by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians as forms of idolatry because the reason he says that is because they demand an allegiance which is due to

God alone are you obsessed with any of those things that I've just mentioned or something else other than the one true and living God if you are then give over let God deal with it and let him become the number one priority in your life as these Thessalonian Christians did and as they turned to the living God the spell of their bondage was broken and they were freed up to serve Jesus Christ now I hope and pray that Hansi Cronje has been truly freed up from the bondage of his love for money to serve the one true living God faithful Christians serve the one true and living God found only in the Lord Jesus Christ why do we serve the living God verse 10 gives us the answer it is because we wait we wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead

Jesus who rescues us from the wrath of God that is coming we serve the living God God because we wait the goal for all faithful Christians is to look for the return of Jesus Christ again the Bible is quite clear about the return of Jesus and on that day when he does return we don't know the day or the hour but on that day when he does return he will be the judge of all human beings he will be the judge of you and me those who serve him as Lord he will welcome into his kingdom and those who reject him as the Lord he will reject them from his kingdom and while we wait for his return he calls for us to patiently serve him growing in our own faith and godliness as well as telling others about him as these

[27 : 50] Thessalonian Christians did and drawing his people into his kingdom now we're called to work and serve him but in the process as we work and serve God it doesn't mean that we will ever build the perfect world here on earth as much as we'd like to think that we could and there are many people that think that's what we're doing we can never do that as Christians we can only ever improve society we can never ever perfect it and we'll never ever never build a utopia here on earth for that we will have to wait for Jesus to come back and there'll be more on those sorts of things in the weeks ahead as we talk about Christ's return in this letter faithful Christians wait for Christ's return as he promised he will so what is a faithful

Christian a faithful Christian is someone in relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ a faithful Christian belongs to a Christian community where there is faith in God and Jesus Christ a faithful Christian prays constantly a faithful Christian has faith love and hope in Jesus Christ Christ a faithful Christian is one who is chosen by God a faithful Christian is one who imitates other Christians one who speaks God's word one who serves the true and living God found in Jesus Christ and one who waits for Jesus return let's pray our loving God we praise and thank you that you have sent your son Jesus we thank you that through him we know that we can have a relationship with you

Lord help us to understand what it means to be a faithful Christian to have faith to have love and to have hope Lord help us to be your servants here on this earth while we wait for your return help us to seek you as the number one priority help us to build one another up and encourage one another as Christians and Lord we do look forward to that day where you return where we are made perfect where you restore your world and where Lord everyone worships you as Lord and King Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen