

## Introduction:

- Does anyone remember the song, “Jesus Freak” by DC Talk? If you’re younger than me, you probably don’t know the song. There was also a book that DC Talk had put out called Jesus Freaks and it was a book that was filled with stories of people who, like it says in the title, “stood for Jesus.” I remember one story that was read here when I was in the youth group, it was about a young Chinese girl. I don’t remember the exact details, but the story tells of how there was a church or gathering in China and all of sudden soldiers storm into the meeting and had guns pointed at the people. They said that people could leave if they just spat on the Bible. So, one by one people did it reluctantly. Then the story turns to this young girl who went up to the bible and picked it up and began wiping off the spit. Well, the story ends with the soldiers shooting the young girl. And page after page, this book is filled with stories like this one. People who did not give in to persecution. Their stories were recorded and so many people were able to hear about it. Their love for Christ enabled them to stand in the face of death. There’s something about their faith that stands out to us. And we’re drawn to people with faith like this. We like hearing and reading stories like these.
- As I was reading through 1 Thessalonians 1 – I was reminded of the stories from the book. We see some of the similar things. The church in Thessalonica was going through some persecution and because of their response to the persecution – news about them began to spread. People began to hear about their faith in Christ. You can see from verse 7 and 8 that their faith was heard throughout Macedonia and Achaia. If you have like a study Bible, you’ll see that Thessalonica is in Macedonia and Achaia borders on the south. So, news about them traveled pretty far. They were an example to all Christians around them. And today, we want to look at what exactly about them made them an example to be followed. And if we follow their example, we can hope to take a step forward in the direction in growing as a flourishing church. Specifically, we’re going to look at 3 things about the church in Thessalonica and Paul lays them out in verse 3: work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. From this we get our outline: The Flourishing church has a faith that transforms, The Flourishing church has a Love that endures suffering, The Flourishing church has a hope that is better

### **The Flourishing church has a Faith that Transforms:**

[4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

- For the Thessalonians – They needed to understand that they were saved. Maybe there was some who doubted their salvation. They doubted that their faith alone was enough to save them and because of that, Paul writes them to encourage them. He’s saying, look at your life. Look at what you’re doing. You are different. You didn’t just hear what we preached and left it at that. But you received power. You’ve received the Spirit, and your heart has been changed because of that. How you’re living now is a result of your faith. Their work of faith.

- The Gospel came to them and was received in word AND in power AND in the Spirit with full conviction. So much is happening when you and I are saved. The Gospel is not just a ticket into heaven but there is a whole transformation inside and out. One thing we see here is that we receive the Spirit. We receive the Gospel in the Spirit. We're going to be completely different if the Spirit of God is within us.
- I'm reminded of the movie Space Jam. If you don't know what I'm talking about, don't worry, there's a Space Jam 2 coming out soon. In Space Jam – actually I forget the plot- but I remember there were these tiny little aliens who are supposed to play a basketball game against the other loony toon characters I believe. And what ends up happening is these aliens they go and steal the powers from NBA players. So they go from these tiny little aliens and transform into these huge monsters with the ability to play basketball.
- This is the transformation we should be picturing when we read that the Gospel comes to us in power and in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit within transforms us. Because of our faith - we are completely different people. Of course, we're not transformed physically, but rather what begins to happen is that as a believer, our connection with God is different. As a believer, our source of Joy is different. Our purpose in life is different.
- Look down at verse 9 with me: "For 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." Do you see what happened – The Spirit convicted the people of their idolatry. I want to point something out here when I say they were convicted of idolatry. I don't mean that the Spirit told them – "Hey, that's wrong, stop it." But when I say convicted of their idolatry, The Spirit reveals to them how weak and empty their idols are, and who God really is.
- What does Paul say happens – They turn and serve the living and true God. They see the world as fleeting and God as fulfilling. God is the living and true God. Our source of joy is no longer the emptiness of this world – but we've been transformed by the Spirit so we can pursue God. We can pursue life. John 10:10 – The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Everything from our hearts, our minds, our desires, and our wills should be different because of the Spirit. The Spirit saves and convicts.
- Recently, in one of my conversations with other Youth Pastors, one YP said that they felt this year of ministry was just a wash. Many times, throughout this pandemic, I could agree with what he said. It's almost as if I'm just waiting for us to get back into person so we can get back to "real" ministry. But that's not true is it? Real ministry can happen now. It's the Spirit that saves, changes, and ministers to the hearts of our students. I was reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2: *"And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."* How much we influence a student is not going to be based on how we do our ministry but who we do

ministry with. The Spirit transforms His people of faith. So, we see that the Thessalonians was a church that had a faith that transforms.

### **The Flourishing church has a Love that endures through suffering.**

- “[6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, 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 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.
- We see a few things going on in this passage: First, The Thessalonians love for people was grounded in examples set out by Paul and Jesus Christ. We heard last week that Paul’s visit to the Thessalonians was cut short because of persecution but that did not stop Paul from proclaiming the Gospel first before he left. Paul also mentions that the church was an imitator of Christ, who is the perfect example of suffering for the sake of others. Christ is the perfect picture of love. A second thing we see in this passage is that news about the Thessalonians was spread not just by proclaiming the Gospel, but their living out the Gospel. In verse 8: not only has the Word of the Lord sounded forth from you, but their faith as well has gone out. To quote Paul – their work of faith. Also, in verse 3, Paul thanks God for their labor of love. I believe this labor of Love is what the people in Macedonia and Achaia saw in the Thessalonians. We see that the salvation of others is weightier than the suffering of our own situations. How is this possible? Again, going back to the transformation of the Spirit, there is Joy in the middle of affliction. There are some weightier things going on than our own suffering.
- Earlier this week we found out that one of our supported missionaries was in the Hospital for COVID. At one point they had to fly the husband over to Houston to receive treatment here. In one of their updates on caring bridge, the friend of the family wrote, as the helicopter was beginning to fly away, the wife was out on the helipad praying for other families in the waiting room. In the middle of her own suffering, her husband being flown away to another city, she was not only thinking about your own suffering but looked towards the suffering of others! Right when I read it, I was like, this is the picture seen here in Thessalonica. Laboring in love in the middle of affliction.
- You know, we’re not out of this pandemic yet and there are many people who are in need during this time. Or even if we were not in a pandemic, there will always be needs around us. And I’d like to ask if we are laboring in Love? Are we meeting the needs of those around us? I always ask the youth this question: Would anyone notice if HCC were to disappear from this community? What kind of impact are we making here that if we were gone, there would be a big need and hole to fill? Or would things be the same. It wouldn’t matter if we were gone. The church in Thessalonica made an impact in their community and to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. What kind of impact do we make?

### **The Flourishing church has a Hope that is better:**

- [9] For 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, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
- Earlier in the message, I mentioned how the Spirit turns us away from idols and towards the living and true God. What I did not point out is that when we turn away from the idols, we turn towards God to serve Him. We serve God as we wait for His Son. It reminds me of Philippians 1:21 – To live is Christ and to die is gain. When we pass (or when Jesus comes back) it's about Jesus. When we live – it's about Jesus. Dead or alive – Jesus is the pursuit. Paul uses the phrase, “steadfastness of Hope” in verse 3. When we have hope in something, not only does it affect our life in the future when we finally receive what we're hoping for, but it should affect us now as we wait.
- That's the message here in Thessalonians 1 – our future hope will change how we live now. It should. Can I ask you this? What does it mean to be ready for when Jesus comes back? The bible tells us to be ready, don't be caught off-guard when Jesus comes back. Have you thought about this? Should you and I be doing anything specific? Is it more of a heart thing like – Make sure you love Jesus? Is it – we hope that we're reading the bible at the moment Jesus comes? I think I'll try to answer it like this - We should pursue to see some of the future realities of our salvation now here in this life. Here in verse 10 – it says that we're waiting for Jesus, the one raised from the dead, the one who delivers us from wrath to come. This is the message we need to go forth and proclaim. We need to see or at least pursue salvation come to those around us!
- If you read verse 9 again – the people in Macedonia and Achaia report that they saw the Gospel message from the church in Thessalonica. They have heard and seen the proclamation of the Gospel. We go and preach that Christ died so that all who believe will be saved. We teach what is to come for the one who believes. Not only do we preach it with words, but we live it out in love. We labor in Love. Serving people. Showing kindness. Being generous. Seeking reconciliation and restoration. We must make an impact in the people and community around us as we bring the hope of future realities in our lives now.
- We may never have to experience the encounter like some of those in the Jesus Freak book, but we can still be an example when it comes to living out the Gospel in our lives. As we seek to grow as a flourishing church, may we seek out to become an example to others as we put on display our faith, love, and hope.