

Evidence of True Salvation

1Thessalonians 1:5b-10

How many of you have heard of the 'Klondike Gold Rush' of the late 1890s?

It is a small piece of Canadian History that took place in the Yukon Territory.

By the early 1890s gold prospecting in the Yukon had been promoted by a small group of people for about twenty years and roughly 1600 had made their way there looking to strike it rich.

Things changed dramatically in 1896 when a significant discovery of gold in what would become known as Bonanza Creek opened the flood gates and over the course of the next few years about 100,000 people set out for the Yukon in search of gold.

It was not a trip for the faint of heart and on account of the rugged terrain and harsh conditions only about 30-40,000 people made it to actually do the work of prospecting.

Of all those people even the most generous estimates put the number of people who discovered gold at about 15000.

Of those 15000 only a few hundred actually became wealthy off of what they discovered.

Ironically, some of the people who made the most money in the gold rush made no attempt to find gold.

Joseph Laude for example instead of trying to stake out a claim for gold, acquired a huge amount of nearby swamp and pasture land, which he named Dawson city, and made a fortune selling lots and lumber to people to build shelters.

Most people though went up there endured very harsh conditions and walked away with little to nothing.

In fact it is estimated that if the gold that was discovered was divided among all the prospectors it would not have been enough to cover what they had invested.

As I thought about that I tried to wrap my mind around the disappointment of going to all that work, expense, and hardship and coming away with nothing.

I also couldn't help but think of the many people who discovered pyrite also known as fool's gold.

Pyrite looks a lot like real gold and I can only imagine the feeling of excitement those people would have had at seeing what they thought was gold only to have their hope shattered when they realized that what they found was actually totally worthless.

Talk about disappointment. The dangerous journey, the long months of bitter cold and darkness, and the hard work of prospecting all for nothing.

Because of that, prospectors learned how to tell the difference between pyrite and real gold.

One of the quickest ways to tell is by hitting it with a hammer.

Real gold can be hammered and it will only dent whereas pyrite will break and crumble.

If you know what to look for you can tell the difference real gold and fake gold.

[We can apply that lesson to our lives spiritually speaking. Genuine faith and imitation faith can sometimes look very similar, but the bible shows us how to distinguish between the two. In fact, the bible encourages and commands that we “examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith” (1Corinthians 13:5). That command is intended for our good and our encouragement. God wants His people to know that they possess the true gold of faith. That is the subject of the text before us this morning **1Thessalonians 1:5b-10**. These verses continue the thought of the previous ones. In verses 3-5a the apostle is telling these believers why he is giving thanks for them regularly and why he and his fellow gospel workers Silas and Timothy are convinced that they belong to the LORD. It is important to say that none of these things save us, none of these things are the means by which we belong to the LORD. That is only by grace alone through faith alone. These things give us some of the evidence of genuine faith. In the second part of verse five and into verse six we are given a powerful piece of evidence. In these verses the apostle shows us that...]

Point #1 – True Christians treasure the LORD and His word. (Verses 5b-6)

To one degree or another there is a cost for following Jesus and the genuine believer sees his/her Saviour as worth it.

The second half of verse five begins with the words ‘you know’.

The word ‘know’ here suggests something more than facts in the mind it suggests lived experience. **(Verse 5b)**

Many of these believers had first hand in person experience with Paul and his companions and from that they ‘know’ of their authenticity.

Paul is saying to them, ‘You guys saw firsthand how we lived.’

‘You know we are more than empty talkers who say one thing and do another.’

‘You know, you saw, you experienced our preaching in our living.’

Also, notice he says that this was ‘for your sake.’

They lived out their theology for the good of the Thessalonians and they saw it with their own eyes.

What did they see? Verse 6 tells us.

Besides experiencing the lived faith of Paul, Silas, and Timothy they ‘became imitators’.

Notice that by becoming imitators of these gospel servants they also ‘became imitators’ of the LORD.

Paul would be the first to tell you that he is following Jesus’ example by grace.

It shows great humility at work in his heart that he is putting his own ideas aside and following the example of Jesus.

The statement by itself is rather broad. Jesus said and did many things and His people are called to follow His example in everything, but the apostle has something in particular in mind here.

What he has in mind is their ‘receiving the word in ‘much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.’

When Paul and Silas showed up in Thessalonica they were almost certainly still marked by the beating they received while in Philippi.

Do you know what did after they were beaten with rods and thrown in jail? Acts 16:25 says they were ‘praying and singing hymns to God’.

The beating had not robbed them of their joy.

That is the example the LORD Jesus gave to us as well. I have often quoted Hebrews 12:2 that says, “for the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross.”

Not that the cross or the beating is joyful, but the joy that is in the glory of God is present through suffering and shame.

Joy in affliction is the joy of knowing that cost is worth it!

[Think back again to the gold rush in the Yukon. Why did so many people go through so much hardship and suffering? Because they were chasing something they believed to be extremely valuable. Now what if someone could know with 100% certainty that they would strike gold before they even left home. I imagine all the toil and pain would be endured with a thought something like, ‘This is hard but when I get my hands on that gold it is going be really good.’ The reward would bring joy in the hardship.]

It did not take long for large amounts of people in Thessalonica to oppose the gospel.

In fact Luke describes the city as being in an ‘uproar’ and a mob attacking the house of a believer dragging him in front of the city’s governing authorities.

Not exactly the kind of situation that we would normally think of as making people happy to become part of the church.

Any yet that is what happened. Despite the trouble and the threats these believers stuck with the Word of God with the ‘joy of the Holy Spirit.’

The work of the Holy Spirit is the only thing that could make this possible in their hearts.

What has happened in their hearts is that Jesus and His Word had become such a treasure to them that they are happy to pay the cost.

That is a powerful piece of evidence pointing to genuine faith.

[I’m guessing the majority of people here haven’t experienced a mob dragging friends and church leaders away, but even smaller afflictions can reveal the same heart. Do we still have joy in our treasuring of the glory of God when people don’t like us for it? Do we still have joy in our treasuring of the glory of God when things don’t go our way in life, or when we are sick and dying? It is good to say, “I have trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins!” Oh how I hope you have done that! Can we also say, “The Son of God is the treasure of my heart and He is worth giving up everything for”? If we can say that we can be confident in our salvation. Here is another powerful piece of evidence, that...]

Point #2 – True Christians turn from what is false towards what is true. (Verses 7-9)

While people remain dead in their sins they are slaves to a false worldview and to false idols, but when we are made alive in Christ by grace we are set free and begin to pursue what is right and good in God’s sight.

In verses 7-8 we are reminded that the effect of the gospel in our lives is something that becomes evident to those around us.

We only have a few sentences in the bible about the kind of things the Thessalonians went through, but it is enough of a big deal that it is easy to imagine it catching the attention of the people who witnessed it.

It is also helpful to know that Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia and the largest city in the area.

It was situated on the main Roman highway leading to the east.

Given its location and importance it makes sense that people from cities all over the region would show up there from time to time.

Some of them, no doubt, would have been believers and would have most likely sought out the fellowship of other Christians while they were in the city.

They saw with their own eyes the joy of these believers while they were dealing with affliction and when they returned to their own cities they told the believers there about what was happening.

The sense of what is said in verse 8 is that as Paul and his fellow workers are going from city to city meeting with believers, that they are telling him about what they have heard about the Thessalonians.

That is amazing! The effect of the gospel is evident to the point where people see it and make note of it. Now, let's look at what the testimony is. **(Verse 9)**

That is no small statement for the city in which these believers lived.

Greek culture was always polytheistic but through the philosophy and efforts of Alexander the Great a good bit of the false religions of other people groups had been incorporated into places like Thessalonica.

There was a god for everything and for the most part everyone recognized all the gods as legitimate.

Does that sound familiar to anyone? It is not all that different from the philosophy of our own society.

Into that environment the gospel is proclaimed.

There is an inescapable implication of preaching Jesus as The Way the Truth and The Life, proclaiming Him as the LORD of lords, proclaiming His as the One Who made all things, and that all things have been made for His glory alone.

The inescapable implication is that every other object of human worship is a false god.

Think about that. The gospel inherently called these believers to turn away from everything that they knew and believed.

In many cases it meant turning away from family, friends, and economic opportunity.

That is a big deal, but when your eyes are opened to the reality that the God of the Bible is the only true God the only course of action is to turn away from what is false and useless and towards what is real and alive.

[For years in our house we had pancakes on Saturday mornings. Are there any kids here this morning that like pancakes? Who can tell me what is the most common thing to put on pancakes? Syrup. Personally, I like the fake syrup. Give me a bottle and Aunt Jemima any day. I know many of you are thinking, "That is so bizarre, real Maple Syrup is where it is

at!” I get that makes me a bit odd and I’m comfortable with that, but I think we can all agree that it is easy to tell the difference between real maple syrup and a bottle of delicious liquid artificial sugar. Fake syrup and real syrup are tangibly different.]

Just like fake syrup there is a whole lot of fake religion in the world.

Lots of people buy into it and lots of people prefer it to the real thing, but no one can change the fact that it is fake.

The hard truth of that reality is that false gods can’t do anything good for you or anyone else in a lasting sense.

The only thing a false god accomplishes in someone’s life is eternal destruction.

It is not rude, unkind, or arrogant to say that, it is both humble and loving.

It is humble because it accepts what Jesus said to be true about Himself and it is loving because it is pointing people to salvation.

[Anyone who tries to make Jesus one among many or tries to mix Christianity with false religions is NOT a Christian. I have witnessed so called church leaders say that Allah and the God of the Bible are the same, that is false. I have witnessed so called church leaders attempt to mix in idolatrous indigenous spirituality with Christianity and that too is false. You are not a Christian if you believe Jesus is One among many because you are denying Who He truly is. Now, it needs to be said that we cannot force someone to accept this reality. We cannot threaten or coerce someone to believe because that is NOT genuine faith and that doesn’t do anyone any good either. What we see here in the example of the apostle is that he said what was true, the Thessalonians believed it and were genuinely saved and because of their genuine faith they turned from false gods. That is what true faith does. Does that mean every Christian knows the ins and outs of every doctrine of Christianity? Not at all. It does mean that at whatever level we may find ourselves we are believing what is true and turning away from what is false. That can be costly and create some hardship for the believer. Paul knows that and so in his preaching to these believers he was sure to tell them about our hope as believers. The testimony that he has heard about the Thessalonians gives him the confidence that these folks have their hope in the right place. We can see that in verse 10 and it shows us that...]

Point #3 – True Christians have their hope in the return of Jesus. (Verse 10)

While it is certainly true that the state of this present world is one of brokenness, we do not despair nor are we to be satisfied with merely escaping it. Instead, we are looking forward to when Christ shall come and make all things new.

Verse 10 begins with the word 'and' which tells us this is in addition to the Thessalonians turning away from false gods.

So they have turned to God from idols "and..." **verse 10.**

There are three big things that we are told in this verse.

First we are told the believers are waiting for "God's Son from heaven".

The kind of waiting here is important. The sense of the original language is an eager or expectant kind of waiting.

Has anybody here ever had to wait in line at the MTO.

How many people are usually eager to do that?

How many of you have ever had to wait in line at an all you can eat buffet of your favourite food?

That is a different kind of waiting isn't it?

There is a difference between waiting and waiting expectantly.

What are they waiting for? For God's Son to come 'from heaven.'

We know from the New Testament that the apostolic doctrine of Jesus being at the right hand of the Father in heaven is about Christ reigning over the entirety of the universe and sustaining all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3).

It is wrong to think of Jesus currently being in heaven as though He is letting His people fend for themselves until He comes.

Waiting for His coming means waiting for His return to bring judgment against all the persistent rebellion against His rule, to do away with the present order of this fallen world, and to make all things new completely free from the power and presence of sin.

That is what these believers are waiting for and I put it to you that this is the hope of every genuine believer.

The hope of the Christian is NOT to escape this world.

The hope of the Christian is the renewal of this world under the visible reign of King Jesus.

Why is it that believers ought to eagerly wait for this? That is the second big thing of this verse. We can anticipate Jesus' coming because God 'raised Him from the dead.'

This is the absolute bedrock of the Christian faith. Jesus in His genuine humanity died in the place of sinners like us.

His genuine human body really died and was laid lifeless in a new tomb in which no one else had ever been laid.

Despite the best efforts of His enemies to seal that grave, God because He is completely satisfied with the perfection of His

Son gave the command on that Passover Sunday and breathed life back into the physical body of Christ.

As He sits in heaven right now He has that same body in which He still bears the marks of His sacrifice for us.

A permanent sign of the eternal redemption of every believer.

To minimize or deny that in any way is a complete rejection of the Christian faith.

It is only faith in a risen and living Saviour that accomplishes what the end of verse 10 teaches.

It is precisely because Jesus is alive that He can ‘deliver us from the wrath to come.’

A very good question to ask here is, “Whose wrath?”

Some folks mistakenly think that Jesus saves people from the devil.

Actually, what Jesus saves us from is the fate of the devil and all that follow his example of rebellion.

The wrath referred to here is the wrath of God poured out on every act of evil.

That is the only way to remove the consequences of sin from creation.

Either Jesus pays the bill and you are saved or a person suffers the consequence of their offenses against an infinitely glorious God.

The one who belongs to Jesus is saved from God’s wrath and therefore is eagerly waiting for Jesus to come and make things right.

[The Old Testament gives us an account of a king of Judah named Hezekiah. One day the Bible tells us in the book of 2Kings, the prophet Isaiah came to see him and told him about the future destruction of Jerusalem that would come after his lifetime. Hezekiah responded with this, he said, “*The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.*” For he thought, “*Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?*” (2Kings 20:19) He was ok with the destruction of the city and his people as long as it was good with him.]

I get why he would think along those lines and I get why we would be tempted to think along those lines.

Our default is to concern ourselves with ourselves, but the hope of the church calls us to something higher.

The hope of the church calls us to be concerned primarily with the glory of God being magnified throughout all of creation.

If you can genuinely feel that to some degree you have a huge piece of evidence that you have been made alive in Christ.

There is no greater treasure than that.

Many people in the world are just like many of those who went chasing riches in the Yukon gold rush over a hundred years ago.

They went in search of gold but either found nothing or fool's gold.

I can't help but wonder how many people are doing that spiritually?

They have contented themselves with a fool's gold kind of faith that in the end will prove worthless.

Let's strive for something better. Let's be people who heed the biblical call to examine ourselves.

Let's be people who desire the evidence of true salvation in our lives.

Do you love Jesus this morning? If you lost everything in this world but still had Christ would that be enough for you?

Do you love His word today? Are you turning from what is false towards what is true?

What is your hope in? A life of ease or a future where Christ comes and everything is made new?

None of those things save us, but if we see those things rightly we can be confident that we are saved.