

Last week we went over the introduction of Paul and the church in Thessalonica. We saw how Paul and his team regularly prayed for this church. They were especially grateful for their *work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul expressed his conviction that these new believers were truly loved by God.

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 1 Thessalonians 1:4 We looked at the first half of this verse last week. Today I would like to begin by focusing on the last half of the verse, “*he has chosen you.*” We know that God selected certain people for salvation before creation began. That is clearly evident from other passages (Ephesians 1:4). The difference in theological perspectives is the reason behind the choice. Some believe that no one would choose Christ unless He chose them first and caused their hearts to accept salvation in Jesus. They base that on the fact that man is fallen and in our present condition we would never choose what is holy.

One side says we are predestined to believe, and others believe that God foreknew those who would choose to receive Christ and so ordained the details of their lives to come to that decision (Romans 8:29ⁱ; 1 Peter 1:1,2ⁱⁱ). One side would say it must be all God and not simply our freewill choice because man is utterly depraved (Psalm 14:1ⁱⁱⁱ; John 15:16^{iv}). The other side would say that grace goes out to all and enables all to choose Him, but they have the freewill to choose (Titus 2:11^v; John 1:16^{vi}). and the other side say the predestination was because of God’s foreknowledge (Romans 8:29; The two sides go back and forth with Scripture and reasoning. The argument began with Augustine and Pelagius long ago. The issue will not be resolved in this life, though many believe they have resolved it in their own minds.

If you have trusted Christ, no matter which camp you fall into, you can say you were chosen by God. You can say He called you to Himself, convicted you of sin, and enabled you to receive His salvation. For that we should be extremely grateful and know that we are secure in Him (John 6:37^{vii}; Philippians 1:6^{viii}). Paul was assuring the Thessalonians who had seen some of their members die that though there is pain and loss in this life, we who are in Christ are chosen by God. Nothing can separate us from His love. We call that the assurance of salvation.

Assurance of salvation is knowing that Christ is yours and you are His. You have new affections. You want to know the Word of God. Your life is increasingly exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit. There is an abiding joy in your heart. You increasingly see your old desires fade into the background. I can say to each of you who have that assurance that you are loved by God, and that He has chosen you. That should put a smile on your face, peace in your heart, and a desire to love and serve your Savior. And if you do not have it, cry out to God for that transformation in your soul. Read the Gospels. Talk to Jesus in prayer and ask for that assurance. When we ask according to His will, He hears us (1 John 5:14^{ix}). God does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9^x).

Someone once asked why so few are chosen and then explained that it is because so few choose to be chosen (Joshua 24:15^{xi}; John 1:9^{xii}; Acts 2:21^{xiii}; Acts 10:34,35^{xiv}). God’s gift of free will is a double-edged sword. Enabled by the conviction of the Holy Spirit we can choose life in Christ or choose to reject His grace. To everyone is given a measure of faith to make that decision (Romans 12:3^{xv}). What have you chosen when the

Holy Spirit convicts you of sin (John 16:8^{xvi})? Have you turned to God and found forgiveness in Christ or gone your own way unchanged? Has your decision resulted in *work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*. This was the evidence in the lives of the Thessalonians that caused Paul to rejoice, for it was evidence they were indeed born-again. Their faith in Jesus produced labors of love and steadfastness of hope in Jesus. This was their assurance that they were chosen.

⁵ because 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. 1 Thessalonians 1:5a Paul knew they were loved of God and chosen, because of what he experienced as he preached. The Holy Spirit was obviously at work in the way they wholeheartedly received the Word. He sensed the power as he spoke. This may also refer to miraculous signs that were given. Calvin wrote that ... *It is the living voice of God, inseparable from its effect, as compared with the empty and lifeless eloquence of men.*”

Years ago, I preached the same sermon twice on some Sunday mornings. Sometimes it felt the same to me. But many times in one service or the other I could tell the power of the Spirit was more active than the other. I was no different, but the attendees were different. I believe the difference was that they came ready to hear God speak to their hearts and that they were fully convinced it was the very Word of God. Faith in the preacher connects with faith in the hearer enabling the power in God’s Word to move the heart and mind. Surely there were some in both groups who were loved and chosen by God, but one group had more of God’s chosen than the other. One group had more of those who were going through the routine than hungering for God to speak to their hearts. The hunger for God to speak is lightning rod for the Holy Spirit power to flow. The Spirit is the power not the one who proclaims. And where there are receptive hearts the Spirit’s power will flow.

When people make a profession of faith, one evidence of conversion that I watch for is their hunger for the Word of God. If they find it drudgery to read the Bible, it makes me wonder if they are a new creation in Christ. If they cannot get enough of the Bible and are eager to learn more about God’s Word, desiring to understand it better, in most cases that is a sign the Holy Spirit is at work in them to transform their heart and mind. That is what Paul saw in the Thessalonian congregation. He could tell the Holy Spirit was at work by the power and the assurance in his preaching which gave the Thessalonians assurance that it was indeed the Word of God.

As human beings we tend to get into routines. We sit in the same space each week. We get up and get ready at a certain time. We try to park in the same general area. But if hearing the Word becomes a routine, we leave priceless treasures laying in the pew, as if they were just the weekly bulletin. But if we read the text before we leave our home and ask God to illuminate the text to us and speak to our hearts, and then come with expectation, we are much more likely to take those treasures with us not only to our home but in our hearts and on to heaven with us. That is why we review the sermon in the Bible study the following Sunday. I want you to retain the treasures presented the week before from God’s Word. The Word of God is priceless. Whoever is preaching, whatever their style, the Word should be proclaimed with the Spirit’s power and conviction. The preacher should know that God wants to feed His sheep with His priceless Word.

How special is His Word? ² *I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.* Psalm 138:2 God has exalted above all things His name and His Word! His name is the sum of His attributes, and His Word is the declaration of those attributes. God exalts above all things holiness, righteousness, truth, justice, mercy, grace love, faithfulness, goodness, and kindness, and where do we find all these beautiful things? We find them in His Word and the life of Jesus. These are the most important things. This world has many other things to offer, but these attributes are what God has set forth as the most important of all. We learn of them in the Word of God. That is why the psalmist said His Word is more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10^{xvii}).

When we come on Sunday morning to hear the Word expounded, we come to hear what God has exalted above all things. We hear how He works in the world, His motivations, and His heart. We read of His righteousness and His grace. Here in this passage we are reading of how He works in the hearts of mankind to receive with full assurance the declarations of who He is and what He has done for us. The verse calls it “our gospel.” That is our good news. He loves us. He has chosen us. He works in our hearts to give us the assurance that His Word is truth. Jesus said, “I am the truth!” because He is the Word incarnate (John 14:6^{xviii}; 1:14^{xix}).

^{5b} *You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*

1 Thessalonians 1:5b The thought changes mid-verse. Paul reminds them of the example his team set among them. In the next chapter he will remind them their behavior was holy, blameless, and righteous while they were with them (2:10^{xx}). In his second letter to them he reminds them how his team worked to pay for their needs (2 Thessalonians 3:7,8^{xxi}). They even paid for any food that they ate in anyone’s home. He wrote that they worked night and day. In other letters Paul encourages and honors the financial support the churches sent to him (Philippians 4:15,16^{xxii}). He even says that elders are worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17^{xxiii}), which in the Greek implied remuneration. But the Spirit led him to pay his own way through working while here and in another city where we find out later in this letter that laziness was a problem (5:14a^{xxiv}; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12^{xxv}).

Paul was living up to his own teaching that we set aside our freedoms so that we do not stumble the weak believer. The Spirit knew they needed a model of diligence and self-control which they saw in Paul and his team. At this point in Paul’s life he is an older man around 60 years of age when the life expectancy in the first century was on 30 to 35 years. Some people did live into their 60s and longer, but very few. Priests retired at the age of 50. This makes his example even more meaningful.

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,* 1 Thessalonians 1:6 The message of media and advertising is that if you will imitate this person, or buy these things, or do what this person does, then you will be fulfilled. Whether it is social media or television or billboards or books the world is calling us to find success by imitation. Even in the Christian world we fall into that trap. There are conferences to teach how to grow a church like some mega-church did. There are books that have so many steps to spiritual maturity or successful marriages or how to raise godly children. The problem is that what one church, marriage, or family was led to do by the Holy Spirit may not be what the

Holy Spirit would lead you to do. I think someone needs to write a book with the title How to be Fulfilled and Satisfied. Inside is print on only one page and it reads, “Study God’s Word. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Trust in Jesus. Take up your cross and follow Him!” So why does Paul ask us to imitate Him?

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul asked the Corinthians to ¹ *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*. I always thought that sounded somewhat boastful. But the preceding verse gives it context. ³² *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,* ³³ *just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.* 1 Corinthians 10:32,33 Verse 6 says, “you became imitators of us,” meaning Paul, Silas, and Timothy. They set an example of humility and following the leading of the Spirit, proclaiming the Word, and loving the brothers. If you or I set such an amazing example, if in everything we did we sought not our own advantage but the salvation of many, then we could say it as well. That is what he wanted them to imitate, for he was following the Lord’s example who did not seek His own advantage but that of many that we might be saved. It was Jesus’ whole focus. It became Paul’s whole focus. I think the more it becomes our focus, the more fruitful we are and the more we find true joy in our Savior.

Paul writes that they were imitating them because they received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. Persecution arose for these new believers in a matter of weeks. They barely knew anything but the simple gospel, and yet they joyfully received the Word despite the persecution. That is evidence of a genuine conversion and the reason for Paul’s joy. When a new believer faces their first trials with joy, you are assured that the conversion is genuine. They value the Word and their relationship with Jesus above this physical world.

⁷ *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.* 1 Thessalonians 1:7 Just as Paul followed Jesus’ example of putting others first and by doing so was an example for them to follow, they followed Paul’s example and became examples to followers of Jesus in the entire surrounding area. This is the pattern of discipleship. Jesus called disciples and showed them how to live. We should do the same. We know we have been successful when they do the same.

The Thessalonians exemplified how to receive the Word of God with joy in the midst of persecution. According to Morris, the verb form of this Greek word was to crush grapes. It was intense pressure forcing the juice from the grapes. It became a metaphor for any intense outside pressure. Persecution is to be expected if we follow Jesus (1 Peter 4:12^{xxvi}). Peter wrote, ²¹ *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* 1 Peter 2:21 Their fellow believers in surrounding cities were being persecuted as well. Perhaps they did not respond with joy and appreciation for God’s Word. They needed the example the Thessalonians had become.

Believers look to the example of more mature believers to see how to live out their faith. We ask which Scriptures they rely on in certain situations. We see how they are joyful even when they are facing adversity. We watch their humble responses to those who oppose them. We learn from their steadfast faith exhibited when everything seems to be going against them. You were chosen to be an example to others so that they might imitate your faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we do what we think God wants us to do and find the only result is hardship. We know we should be joyful because our treasure is not here (James 1:2^{xxvii}). Prophets were persecuted (Matthew 5:12^{xxviii}). Jesus was persecuted (John 15:20^{xxix}). So why would we not be? Someone can encourage us that in our suffering we have laid up treasure in heaven and it is an honor to suffer for our Lord. But unless we are open to receiving God's grace in that moment, we cannot say we are joyful. The Thessalonians' joy was obvious as it was with Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:23-25^{xxx}). That is why it was such an example to others, and to us. The world can only wonder at the joyful response to suffering.

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.

1 Thessalonians 1:8 The Word sounded forth and their faith in God has gone forth everywhere. The example of the Thessalonians was talked about in the surrounding provinces. The word of how they had joy in the midst of affliction was a powerful testimony of their new life in Christ. When Paul went to other cities, he did not need to tell them the testimony of the Thessalonians, as word of their faithful example had spread. I want to encourage you that this is true of this little church. Thousands read our devotions and sermons. People in this town talk about Wayside in a positive way. We help support 20 worldwide outreaches. Our own disciples are at work in Thailand, Kenya, Uganda, and Israel. I have heard people from Flagstaff and Queen Creek say, "We heard about your church." Some of our guests tell us that someone told them to be sure and attend Wayside Bible Chapel when they are in Sedona. Be encouraged and keep on keeping on. God is at work because you receive His Word.

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,

1 Thessalonians 1:9 The surrounding regions pass on the testimony of how the Thessalonians took to heart Paul's proclamation of the gospel and how they turned away from the idols they once worshiped to serve the living and true God. To turn away is the another way to describe repentance. The Thessalonians repented of their past idol worship. They forsook it.

Mount Olympus, the home of the Greek gods was just 50 miles from Thessalonica. Every kind of god was worshiped in that city. It was a way of life. To forsake it was to break from culture and be marked as the cause of any calamities that the city experienced.

It really is not much different today. We turn away from what our culture worships; fame, money, entertainment, sex, drugs, and whatever the world lives for. We turn to the living and true God. He is all we want, the purpose of our lives, the reason we exist. In much of the world the leads to persecution. Even here in the USA, we can face persecution of various kinds because Jesus is first in our lives. At the same time we should always be praying for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world that face much harsher responses to their godly lives.

We worship the living and true God! He is not some inanimate object that cannot hear our pleas. He is alive forevermore and hears us when we call. He is not something that we can attain and hope to maintain. He is the living God who maintains us. And He is true, true life, true fulfillment, truth embodied. Everything else that promises satisfaction and fulfillment is a lie.

¹⁰ *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* 1 Thessalonians 1:10 The region also learned from the testimony of the Thessalonians that their hope was on the return of God's Son from heaven. They lived for that day, not this passing fallen world. True believers live in expectation and the hope of Jesus' return. God raised Jesus and He will raise us too. The living Christ delivers us from the wrath to come. That is not the wrath of the tribulation period, but the wrath of God that is justly poured out on the wicked. (See 5:1-3.) Is your hope in that day that Christ descends from heaven with a shout and raises our bodies transformed into His likeness (4:16^{xxx}; Philippians 3:21^{xxxii})? The more we grow in our love for the Lord, the more we long for His return.

Verses 9 and 10 are the testimony of the Thessalonians that had spread throughout the region. They took note of it because it was an example to follow. Receive the Word as the very Word of God. Live a life of service out of the love of God in your heart. Turn from all that the world worships and grow in your love for Jesus so that you are longing for His return. By the grace of God may this be our testimony as well.

Questions:

- 1 What are the two interpretations of "chosen"?
- 2 How can we be assured of our salvation?
- 3 How did Paul know they were loved and chosen by God?
- 4 What ensures the message will come with power?
- 5 What has God exalted above all things?
- 6 What was the example set by Paul's team?
- 7 What was the result of the Thessalonians imitating them?
- 8 What was the Thessalonians' testimony?
- 9 How does that apply to us?
- 10 What were they waiting for? Why?

ⁱ **Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

ⁱⁱ **1 Peter 1:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Psalms 14:1 (ESV)**

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

^{iv} **John 15:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

^v **Titus 2:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

^{vi} **John 1:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

^{vii} **John 6:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

^{viii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{ix} **1 John 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

^x **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{xi} **Joshua 24:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

^{xii} **John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

^{xiii} **Acts 2:21 (ESV)**

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

^{xiv} **Acts 10:34-35 (ESV)**

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

^{xv} **Romans 12:3 (ESV)**

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

^{xvi} **John 16:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

^{xvii} **Psalms 19:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

^{xviii} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xix} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{xx} **1 Thessalonians 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

^{xxi} **2 Thessalonians 3:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you,

⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.

^{xxii} **Philippians 4:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

^{xxiii} **1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

^{xxiv} **1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle,

^{xxv} **2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 (ESV)**

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.

⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

^{xxvi} **1 Peter 4:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange

were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

^{xxvii} **James 1:2 (ESV)**

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

^{xxviii} **Matthew 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

^{xxix} **John 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

^{xxx} **Acts 16:23-25 (ESV)**

²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

^{xxxi} **1 Thessalonians 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

^{xxxii} **Philippians 3:21 (ESV)**

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.