

“A model church”

When the Americans were preparing for the very first moon landing, they sent the astronauts to the desert to practice in what they thought were conditions that simulated the moon’s surface. On one such training exercise, they met two Apache’s: a grandfather and his grandson. The older Apache was intrigued and enquired through his grandson, what they were doing.

After they explained that they were going to be pioneers, the first men to land on the moon, the older Apache asked if they would take a message to any moon people they might meet. The astronauts agreed. The grandson wrote down the message. When the astronauts asked what it said, the younger Apache said he couldn’t tell them.

Later that night, when the astronauts were back at their hotel, they showed the note to an Apache waitress and asked what it said. She read it, smiled and nodded. She said she couldn’t repeat what it said, but that it was important that they took this message to the moon.

When the astronauts returned to base, they sent the note off to the department that dealt with Native American affairs and asked for an interpretation. The note was returned with the interpretation and it read, ‘To who it may concern. Don’t believe a word these men tell you. They’re here to steal your land!’

The very first Christian missionaries saw themselves as pioneers, out to take the land for God. The Apostle Paul had a passion to conquer the world that even exceeded that of Alexander the Great. When you read in **Acts** about Paul going to different cities and preaching he wasn’t just planting churches, he was establishing strategic beach heads in his battle to beat back the gates of hell and to take the land for his Lord Jesus Christ.

Planting churches is still God’s message and the church in Thessalonica is still a good model. Let’s look at how that church can inspire us and other churches today. Our reading today was, **1 Thessalonians 1:4-10**. Let’s begin with a simple observation that more important than we believe.

And that is, Paul was very excited about something. He was in fact over the moon that the Thessalonian church was being imitated. Don’t look at that too lightly. Ponder this for a moment. He was thrilled that a church was being copied.

He said in **1 Thessalonians 1:6** “You imitated us and the Lord”. Then in **verse 7** he says, “This way, you became a model for all the believers”. The imitators became the example. The followers have become the leaders and the church in Thessalonica, had become the talk of the city. All over Greece, people were saying, ‘have you heard about those new Christians in Thessalonica?’

Look what Paul says in **verse 8**, “From you the Lord’s word has spread out not only through the province of Macedonia and Greece but also to people everywhere who have heard about your faith in God. We don’t need to say a thing about it”. We don’t even have to say anything anymore. You have become the message.

Ask yourself this, **what is the role of talking about the church?** You see it becomes a thin line, when you talk more about the success of a church rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. And the theme of your church ends up in the area of pride or boasting. But it seems to me, that Paul was more comfortable than we are, with a church getting a lot of attention.

Look at **2 Thessalonians 1:4** “That’s why we brag in God’s churches about your endurance and faith in all the persecutions and suffering you are experiencing”. Paul says, ‘I love to brag about you guys.’ “I love to tell people what sort of church you are”.

Paul does not seem to have any problem with that. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with a church being well known, as long as it is for the right reasons. In fact, we need model churches today, to inspire other churches with the success they are having in trying to serve the Lord. Loved ones, we need model churches. We need to be a church just like the Thessalonians.

But what kind of model should we be? What do we want people to say about us? We couldn’t top what they said about the church in Thessalonica, because that church was the talk of the city. It was being noticed. Here are three things Paul said about them, that others should be saying about us.

1. It gets communicated when churches truly honour the Bible. Read what it says in 1 Thessalonians 1:5+6 “We know this because the Good News we brought came to you not only with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with complete certainty. In the same way you know what kind of people we were while we were with you and the good things we did for you”.

“You imitated us and the Lord. In spite of a lot of suffering, you welcomed God's word with the kind of joy that the Holy Spirit gives”. This is a church who held in high regard the Word of God. That same Apostolic, authoritative Word that Paul delivered to that church, the Holy Spirit has preserved for this church and for every church today.

But, sadly, in many churches, the Word of God is no longer held in the same high esteem, it was held in the church in Thessalonica. There are churches today, where the Word is simply ignored. You would never know from some preaching that the Word of God is important to who they are as a people. In some churches, the Word of God is not their only authority. It has to pass tests of history; tradition and church ecclesiology and it's not the sole authority of the church.

The worse aspect is the undermining by those churches, who deny the inspiration of the Word. There are churches all over the world today where the pulpits are filled by preachers who will preach this Bible and not believe it is really God's word any more. That's not an exaggeration, it's a severe cancer.

The Archbishop of Canterbury acknowledges that Jesus lived and that Jesus was crucified, but he says, “We cannot be sure that Jesus was actually raised from the dead, Such a thing is not a part of human experience and must be met with incredulity”. Here is a leader of a world-renowned church, telling the world that what the Bible says about Jesus being raised from the dead. It cannot be taken at face value. It's probably just a sweet myth and we go from there.

What happens when the Bible is attacked? When you miss confidence in God's Word, you miss life-transforming power. Paul says, ‘The Word of God was preached to you with the Spirit and conviction and the Holy Spirit gave you joy when you received it.’ In other words, when you have the confidence that the preacher is preaching God's Word and people have confidence that they are hearing God's Word. The Holy Spirit goes to work and conviction and joy is the result.

Have you never seen that happen? When the Holy Spirit takes over and convicts people of sin? The power is in the Word and not in any eloquent speaker. When the speaker believes in the Word and the hearer thinks it's the Word, then the Holy Spirit goes to work and does something bigger than the both of them.

Look again at what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 “We know this because the Good News we brought came to you not only with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with complete certainty. In the same way you know what kind of people we were while we were with you and the good things we did for you”. The Bible doesn't just tell us about power: it releases power in churches where it is honoured. And a model church is not going to keep that power to itself.

The second thing they said about that church, it's a church that not only honoured the Word, but that the Word really gets communicated when churches trumpet the Gospel. In Acts 17, when Paul left Philippi, he went past two towns Amphipolis and Apollonia. Why didn't he stop and preach there? Weren't these people good enough to hear the gospel? No! It was part of Paul's overall strategy to plant beachhead churches in major cities and if that church becomes healthy, it will send out people to the other cities and take the land for God!

Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:8 “From you the Lord's word has spread out not only through the province of Macedonia and Greece but also to people everywhere who have heard about your faith in God”. From the very beginning, the church in Thessalonica functioned as a missionary church. The receivers, very quickly became the transmitters. Because of them, the message of the Gospel spread throughout the hills and valleys of Greece. It says so in verse 8, “From you the Lord's word has spread out not only through the province of Macedonia and Greece”.

There will always be a need for churches to model God's heart for the world. It's very easy in church life to get provincial, to dwell on our problems and our needs and our way to spend money on ourselves. While what we need are churches that will model to all the churches. We must look out to the world. The gospel must ring out here to all over England, just as they did in Thessalonica. That's what we need to do.

We need churches that the mission is to let the gospel ring out beyond your borders.

God commissions us, He judges, we rescue by taking the Gospel to those who need to hear it. We don't decide who deserves to be saved we are just to ring out the message to the entire world as **Mark 16:16** tells us. It is every Christian's birthright to be a reproducer. Churches that want to plant the seed are going to inspire other churches and receive attention from the world, because the world will want what we have. People will talk, when others change their walk.

The **third point** Paul would like to raise is this, it's going to get communicated when churches fully convert the people. Look again at **1 Thessalonians 1:9+10**, "They talk about how you welcomed us when we arrived. They even report how you turned away from false gods to serve the real, living God and to wait for his Son to come from heaven. His Son is Jesus, whom he brought back to life. Jesus is the one who rescues us from God's coming anger."

The church is a fellowship of turned around people. **Verse 4** of this chapter tells us that God chose you. Whomever God chooses, He changes. Here is a reason why most churches are not modelled, it's because they are full of unconverted people. Paul tells us in three words what it means to be a turned around person. He says the first thing about a really converted person, "They have made a decisive break with idols".

You see from the city of Thessalonica you could see the top of Mount Olympus, the place where the Greeks said all the gods lived. Now what he said has become known all over Greece. Even though they can see the reputed home of the gods, they have turned their back on those gods, in order to serve the real God. Now don't think that we don't have idols today.

The ancient Greeks had the idols of lust, war, and money. All the idols have done is change their names to seduce us in new hi-tech ways. A converted person is going to find a thing that competes in his heart for allegiance and then turn his back on it. **What's your thing?** Some guys have love affairs with their cars.

It was reported that an American tried to marry his car. He didn't get caught when he said his fiancée was born in Detroit or that the father's name was Henry Ford! No! He got caught when he wrote for blood type, 10w40! That guy identified what he cared more about and a converted person will do the same. A converted person will inspect and then ruthlessly, eliminate anything that is competing for their allegiance to God. That's a converted person. He tears down his idols and he actively serves his Lord Jesus Christ. He turns away from one thing, to pursue something else.

That's how we wait for Christ's return. We serve Him now in the things He wants us to pursue. These are the things of a converted person, they will turn; they will serve and they will wait. They will live as though Jesus' return is imminent and Paul grounds that expectation in the resurrection. We wait for the Son from heaven, who was raised up from the dead and that's where the **Archbishop of Canterbury** has messed it up.

You take out the resurrection. You take out the hope. And our hope is this, the tomb is empty and because it's empty, we can confidently believe that not only is Jesus coming to this world, but we've got a deliverer coming, that's what Paul says. A converted person is absolutely persuaded, a deliverer is coming, to save them from the coming wrath.

In other words, conversion is a complete re-orientation of your lives. In **Galatians 2:20** Paul says, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live by believing in God's Son, who loved me and took the punishment for my sins."

A church full of people like that, will have an impact. Let's not run away from the role of a model church. Let's run towards it. The role of the model church should be to introduce people to Jesus Christ. Remember it was in Antioch that people were first called Christians. They saw their lives and lifestyles and realised they were modelling themselves on Christ.

You couldn't miss the pattern because of the way they modelled. It was that church the Holy Spirit wanted to reproduce, because he took two of its preachers and said go all over the world and plant churches like this. Let us follow their example church and model Christ to the world.