



LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 1

MAIN IDEA: Thriving churches are marked by faithful Christians, the gospel, full conviction, and evangelistic impact.

LEADERS:

- In the weeks leading up to Easter, we are observing Lent three ways:
 - Committing ourselves to fasting from sundown to sundown Sunday–Mondays.
 - Focusing on meditations sent out from Pastor Ryan each Monday. Make sure you're signed up on Emergence Connect to receive these.
 - Meeting Wednesdays, 3/30, 4/6, and 4/13, at 6:30 am in both Ringwood and Totowa for prayer and fellowship.
- SPRING FEST is right around the corner on April 9! Everyone still has the opportunity to sign up to help, but now we are focusing our attention on whom we'll invite. Be sure to start praying about this!
- Don't forget to mug your neighbor this week.
- Emergence is turning 10! On April 3, both campuses will gather in Totowa to celebrate. To God be the glory!!.
- Baptism is coming up, and everyone who calls Jesus Lord should do it! So if you haven't, see the digital bulletin for details.

GETTING STARTED:

- Watch this week's Community Extras Video.
- **Icebreaker:** As we reach our church's ten-year birthday, share with the group what or who brought you to Emergence.
- **Opener:** What is something that stood out to you from the sermon this week?

Thessalonica was a bustling city in the Roman province of Macedonia. After being ousted from Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy labored there to make the gospel known. Working in the synagogue, they had a good measure of success, but were strongly opposed by some of the religious leaders, who stirred up a mob and accused the evangelists of proclaiming that Jesus, not Caesar, was the true king.

*Things got so bad for Paul that he had to be snuck out of the city by night, fleeing to Berea, where he once again was able to lead many to Christ. However, those who opposed him in Thessalonica pursued him, and made it so difficult that he had to leave, traveling further south into Achaia (modern day Greece), where he reached Athens and finally Corinth. Silas and Timothy were dispatched back to Macedonia to strengthen the fledgling churches. The letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were composed during his time at Corinth, after Timothy returned to him, probably only a few months after the Apostle had planted the Thessalonian church. These letters were written to strengthen and encourage the church in Thessalonica, which had been birthed in the midst of much danger and opposition (for this background, **read 1 Thessalonians 3:1–6**).*



It is evident from the first few verses of this letter that Paul is thankful for the Thessalonian church and excited about the fruit he has seen there. In his opening words of thanksgiving, we find various characteristics of a thriving church.

Faithful Christians

Read I Thessalonians 1:1–3.

  The trifacta of faith, hope, and love is something we find elsewhere in Paul’s letters (e.g., I Corinthians 13:13; I Thessalonians 5:8). In your own words, what does each of these mean in the life of a Christian?

Notice that Paul doesn’t only mention these three virtues, but refers specifically to their “WORK of faith,” “LABOR of love,” and “STEADFASTNESS of hope.”

  What kind of work does faith produce? Where is this evident in your life, and where is it lacking?

  Why do you think Paul implies that love produces *labor*? How are you being challenged to labor for the sake of showing God’s love to others?

  What sort of things challenge our hope, requiring us to be steadfast?

Getting the Gospel Right

Read I Thessalonians 1:4–5.

  What is the gospel?

 What does it mean to proclaim the gospel “in power”? For help with this, see I Corinthians 2:1–5.

 How does confidence in the gospel as the power of God change the way you approach sharing your faith with others?

  In the sermon, Ryan shared the encouraging story about how God challenged him to simply preach the gospel, and how this made all the difference despite the earliest discouraging days when he first started pastoring Emergence. Why do you think it is so easy for churches to lose sight of the centrality of gospel preaching?

  What things are we tempted to replace the gospel with, and how can we guard against this?



Does this mean that a church should never do anything *but* tell people what they must do to be saved? Why or why not?

Evangelistic Impact

Read I Thessalonians 1:6–8.



What does Paul identify in these verses as evidence of the impact of his evangelistic efforts in the Thessalonian church?



Note that Paul makes a big deal about how the Thessalonians became “imitators” of him and his co-workers (Silas and Timothy). In what ways is your walk with Christ worth imitating, and in what ways can it improve in that respect?



In verse 6, Paul says that the Thessalonians “received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” Can you recall a time in your life when joy in the Lord eclipsed affliction?



Do you have any opportunities right now to testify to the gospel’s power to others by displaying joy in the midst of affliction?

Full Conviction

Read the end of the chapter, verses 9–10.

These verses tell us what the “full conviction,” mentioned in verse 5, looked like in the life of the Thessalonian church.



What is an idol?



Which idols does the gospel convict you to leave behind?



According to verse 9, full conviction does not result in merely saying *no* to idols, but to actually saying yes to serving God (“you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”). In what ways do you serve God? What are some other ways he is challenging you to serve him now?



Verse 10 says that as we serve God we “wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, who delivers us from the wrath to come.” How does an understanding of the wrath of God actually make us better (i.e., more faithful, more effective) at proclaiming the gospel?



Why are so many people tempted to remove the notion of wrath from the proclamation of the gospel?



PRAYER TIME

Pray for the Lord to give you full conviction, that would lead to effective sharing of your faith.

Thank the Lord for the examples of faithful Christians whom he has given you to imitate.

Continue to pray that our brothers and sisters in Ukraine might display fearless proclamation of the gospel in the midst of much affliction. Pray also for the church in Russia, that God would strengthen them to be a source of light for their neighbors.