

1/10/21 - 1 Thes. 1:1-5 - "A Distinguished Church" (PT 1)

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[0:00] words. I want you to consider a quote from a Greek philosopher named Aristotle. He mentions, happiness belongs to the self-sufficient. Happiness belongs to the self-sufficient.

So in other words, to truly experience happiness and all the things that flow from that, being blessed, being joyful in life, it would only be experienced through the means of self-sufficiency. Meaning that the extent of your sufficiency is solely reliant upon yourself, the limitations of your own will, the limitations of your determination and actions. So I can also assume that the reverse is also true. While Aristotle isn't here today to defend himself, I could assume that the reverse is true. That sadness belongs to those who are dependent.

Consider the American dream. The whole premise behind it is sort of tainted in this self-sufficiency, and not all of it is necessarily bad. It mentions the ideals of freedom and equal opportunity for prosperity and success. Those are great things. However, maybe this might be why biblical Christianity is less popular than maybe political Christianity, maybe cultural, or dare I say, American Christianity.

Do you think? I say this because the Bible provides a counter-cultural message that rubs against the grain of self-sufficiency because it places its dependency upon a source and means outside of ourselves.

And today we will begin to see in this new series. In one of the earliest letters written from Paul, it's debated between which came first, 1 Thessalonians or Galatians. I think that it is Galatians, but you can stone me later for that perspective. But the coming weeks will take us to ground zero, the very dirt that lay in Acts 17 when this church started. We're going to see the ground zero perspective of this newer growing church plant in Thessalonica. And this church plant is heavily populated with Gentiles. It's a very predominantly Gentile church. And Paul was forced to leave suddenly, prematurely, prematurely, in the midst of when they need him the most, the Jews have driven him out, as we saw in Acts 17. And you can imagine for a moment with the abrupt departure of the guy who started it all. He had those graphs and the charts and the plan and the, like, this is the first year plan, the second year plan, the third year plan. He's gone. You can imagine in such an abrupt departure, this new church was probably wondering, what does it mean to be a Christian from here forth? Sort of that seasonal wondering of what now that we often come into our lives asking.

[3:29] Well, 1 Thessalonians is a book that quickly captures the situations that Paul addresses with the Corinthian church. I kind of call it a condensed 1 Corinthians book. A lot of the situations are addressed within this short couple chapters in this letter. And we'll be tapping into, in the coming weeks, similar themes like what it means to be a healthy and a growing church, or pastoral elements of shepherding, the attitudes of that, the actions of that, the activities within that. And the book seems to capitalize upon an eschatological sense and importance of, like, the end times of what lies ahead in the future of the church. And also missionary elements that emphasize gospel proclamation. I pray this book will help us to grow in maturity as Christians. In our walk with Jesus Christ, understanding of how we as an assembled body of Christians known as the church, Ecclesia church, are called to be set apart and growing not in identity in anything else, but our identity in Jesus Christ, regardless of news headlines, regardless of what's going on around the world among us. And looking and growing into the image of Christ, which all rests, guess what, outside of ourselves. Let's pray as we get into verse 1, chapter 1 of the 1 Thessalonians. Join me in prayer. Father, thank you for your word, something that is so sure and steady, an anchor for our lives. Lord, we turn to you right now asking for help as we look through the pages of your word and considering the situations and circumstances that the church, this new church in Thessalonica faced, the uncertainty. But Father, help us just as you help them with solidifying, weighing the anchor of faith in their lives, regardless of what went around, what was going on around them. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The first section we're going to be looking at is in verse 1, and it brought to mind Mufasa and the Lion King. Remember who you are. Did I say that well enough? Maybe a little bit more bass in my voice.

Remember who you are. As the passage in Acts 17 that Pastor Rick read, Paul planted a church in Thessalonica. And it's not just another Jewish assembly that was going on in the synagogue. This is something new and different than what was occurring. He was debating them about the cross of Christ and the suffering. But this church that was birthed was distinguished.

It was distinguished. It was distinguished from the culture, the Jewish culture. It was distinguished from the political reins and powers. It was completely different. And what we have is division did happen.

Mark Dever may have put it perfect in his little red book called The Church, where he says, correct division should be preferred over corrupt unity. And Paul begins his letter in this new church plan. He says, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace. Just as it was planted, this church was planted in Paul's second missionary journey. And what we saw in Acts 17, Paul and Silvanus, along with Timothy, joining their pastoral team, they offered a quick collective reminder to this church.

[7:38] And this reminder would remind them who they are. Very quickly, in verse 1, we see something vital in that passage. We see two words to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father. How refreshing it can be to our souls in times of doubt, in times of oppression, to be reminded of who we are and who we belong to.

You can imagine that when this Jewish synagogue started picking up on word of this thing happening, they were probably very upset, probably rumors, and they were probably sending out false teachers to infiltrate the walls of this church. You can imagine gossip flying and doubts closing in of their assurance of faith. And sometimes all we need is a reminder from a close pastor or a friend.

And Paul gives them a clear reminder. That may have been read something like this even in our day-to-day to the church of Youngstown Metro, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

How great a reminder that is when we are reminded of who we belong to. And can you imagine, considering the oppression of their day, can you imagine the opposition they were in and the weight that this letter held on their lives and in their faith?

Now, it's interesting because this would upset the Jews of this time. To say that a Gentile is in God would probably get them wound up very quickly, coming from a nation that's chosen by God.

[9:35] And now Paul doesn't make explicit references to the Old Testament in this letter, which is probably due because this is a primarily Gentile church. They wouldn't understand aspects of the Exodus, of this redemptive plan that the Jews knew very well.

But what he chose to do, linguistically speaking, semantically speaking, is that those outside of this chosen nation of Israel are now grafted into the grace of God and all the beneficiaries that derive therefrom, of the promise of God's salvation.

This would surely cause great, great oppression in this Thessalonica city. And so we see the second section of the passage is a cause for gratitude.

They say that we give thanks to God always for you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers. Paul is credited to authoring 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament.

And within many of them, he begins with thanksgiving. He begins with prayer, mentioning prayer. And we'll catch this.

[10:51] If you could imagine 1 Thessalonians, sort of like musical lines, the staves of music, we're going to catch various notes of that as we go through this book of little hints of thanksgiving and prayer.

Well, that's huge within this passage, this letter to this Thessalonian church. And it's very important. And I want us to think of it like this. Because from my kids' perspective, it's one thing for my kids to hear from me that I'm proud of them, that I'm praying for them, that I'm thankful for my kids.

And it's a whole other weight that's attached to that when not only they realize that I am, but my wife and I. When we verbalize that to our kids, we're proud of you.

The weight that that has and the significance that that bears. Even looking at ministry and being a church, how great it is for you to know that when you're going through dark valleys that happen in life or possibly bound up in a hospital bed, to know that, yeah, I'm praying for you, but not only me, but a pastoral team is praying for you.

That a leadership team is praying for you. Not even that, a church could very well be praying for you. That means a lot. And so we see that in this.

[12:25] Notice the plurality of this gratitude. Notice that we give thanks to God always for you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers.

You see this plurality of thanksgiving. And actually this book contains 88 times of plural first person references. This is a very collaborative message of encouragement and direction and instruction for this new church.

If the apostolic fathers of the church believed in expressing thanksgiving and prayer to others, how can we be so swift to neglect such a thing that we so vitally need in our lives?

It's not, it didn't take too long to turn on the news, to open social media, to see that there's chaos, there's odd censorship going on that has never been experienced in this country before.

And these are difficult days to find hope in anything in this world. But maybe this should be a wake-up call to the church.

[13:33] Honestly, if we as a church are not compelled to pray now, I don't know what else it would cause us to drop to our knees and pray.

Maybe the immediate threat of fear or maybe danger or death that's looming for us in the near future. But if the early church fathers believed Christians should pray daily and not only just say, God, I give this to you, I don't have to utter anything because you make sense of anything anyhow, so you fatalistically just say, on with my day, the Lord knows my thoughts, and I don't utter a word to him.

Yeah, that's not healthy. These early church fathers were called to pray and not only pray, but for extended periods of time, as we see in verse 2.

Always thanking God. Always. Who do we think we are, church? The people within your networks don't necessarily need your opinion all the time and your take on what's going on in the world.

They got enough of that. They need the truth. They need the truth about God. They need the truth about man. And at the center of it is Jesus Christ.

[14:59] They need the truth about Jesus. The darker the world is, the more radiant that light becomes, right? It's time for the church to wake up and begin to pray with apostolic fervency in that same dedication that the apostolic fathers had in the church.

What excuse can we provide to God in our comfy Western Christian lives? Because compared to threatened countries, it is very comfy to exclude the persistent conviction of intercession for the salvation of maybe even leaders in the world that you might not agree with.

Is God too small to change the heart of those that you don't agree with? Or has the narrative of hatred completely filled your mind, church?

If you're a Christian today, your knees better hit the floor before they hit a keyboard. You are all witnesses and ministers of the gospel, and you are accountable to God for your gossip, for buying into false narratives that the media throws out there.

And even maybe naivety of any problems being in the world that you're just going to be a Christian hobbit of self-preservative isolation. Both sides of that pendulum have dangers and risks.

[16:27] Section three of this passage, which happens to be verse three, we see a case of health we see that their identity in point one is in Christ, remembering who they are.

The second point of being a case for gratitude. And now they're remembering something. It says in verse three, remembering before our God and Father three things, your work of faith, your labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's important to note, we can sometimes falsely take credit that's only due to God the Father. We're prone to do that very often. While Paul, Silas, Timothy have gratitude in God's working through them, they wouldn't be the first ones to necessarily boast that everything that they do and everything they are and their capabilities are due to them.

They know where the source comes from. And it's a fine line that many of us falter at often when we receive praise of others. Well, this pastoral team is thankful for something outside of themselves and also outside of this Thessalonian church.

this pastoral team makes it clear that the object of their thanksgiving, the object of their prayer, always is called upon this three triad reoccurring theme in Paul's writing of faith, hope, and love.

[18:09] And in here, we see that it's actually faith, love, and hope. And I think that's for chronological emphasis, as we'll see. But it's the object of that which is only due to God.

Last week, for example, Pastor Rick left all of us with a sharp and convicting nugget of truth. He said, if we truly desire to grow in godliness, we should be using meeting together as an excuse to escape the world rather than the world as an excuse to be meeting together.

And in that statement, we were charged to evaluate our biblical command and conviction of meeting together. And no, this stretches far.

If meeting together is Sunday morning, this stretches far from just meeting together Sunday morning. It is very important to gather now. But it's talking about the other six days of the week as well.

Because if the world is at war with God, the world will often try to appear more faithful to God.

[19:20] Faithful to us than God. The world will try to appear more hopeful to us than God and more loving than God.

For this Thessalonian church, they are commended for having great witness of momentous gospel proclamation of which manifested in their attitudes, motives, and actions, specifically in these three focuses, their work of faith, their labor of love, and the steadfastness of hope, all attributes that were derived from something outside of themselves.

This is the activity that was going on in the church and the source of them remembering to remind this church who they are. Considering a work of faith, this is an interesting concept, right?

Makes the Arminian and the Calvinist draw swords, right? Work of faith. But what is being said here is that faith is not simply by itself simply a creed or a belief, but it's an action exposed in this Thessalonica church's faith or their work.

Their faith, I'm sorry, let me clarify. What is being expressed here is that their faith isn't simply a creed, but it's being expressed and verified through their work, a work of faith.

[20:54] And we also see labor of love. This is then a chronological second attribute among the three, which expresses not just their work being just work, we go out and work, that's what we're supposed to do.

But it's the quality found within their work. It's not just a skill or a craft that they're really good at carpentry, so they just go make chairs or something.

But it's the purity of their attitude within whatever work that they are doing. I think I've worked long enough in the secular realms in various institutions, from pushing carts at a local farm at age 16 to being promoted to pushing carts at a local home improvement store, which was quite a pat on the back, right?

I don't think it takes long for us working in the secular realms of this world to be able to recognize those who are in Christ and those who just don't know Jesus, right?

You know very soon, very quickly, who is who. It's not profiling, it's just something that comes out in attitudes and actions. And this passage brings about a certain quality of working and labor.

[22:12] Because you can be the hardest worker, but be the worst gospel witness. You understand that? It makes me recall folks who really work hard that I've worked with in the past.

And maybe even, they might even do good things for other people. They might even help people. But all the while, they're complaining and grumbling along the way. Maybe grumbling about the work or maybe grumbling about other people amidst the work or maybe grumbling about what they read in the newspaper.

all the while in the midst of their laboring. This church is not a labor of love. That is not a labor of love.

If your work is derived and stems from your faith and then the labor within that work is defined by love, the quality of that which you work needs to be defined in love.

not complaining, not grumbling, not talking about things that don't build other people up. And then finally, we see that steadfastness of hope.

[23 : 26] Hope that's not bound to necessarily a title or position or a salary range or awards or performance. But their hope in Thessalonica is greater than any of this.

anything that can be found in this world. And church, this is why we too can live in this world but not of this world.

This is quite an alien philosophy, pun intended. And this is a great reminder. Is your faith driving your work?

Is your love driving your labor? And is your hope driving the steadfastness to endure in whatever work and laboring God has called you to here and now?

And you can imagine for this young church in the midst of opposition and hostility, they were probably doubting at times. What does it mean to be a Christian?

[24 : 31] Our lead church planner has vanished. They want to kill him. What do we do? Well, the triad of Christianity, the faith, hope, and love, as Paul reveals, is a great place to start and evaluate our lives.

When those qualities take root in our lives, we live in a new way. We live as if we belong to someone else. We live as if our status is not here on earth but somewhere else.

And that is the point, church. It is clear that this triad of living had significant impact upon Thessalonica, a great reminder for this pastoral team, and the same is true for us today.

Now, I trust the Holy Spirit is speaking to all of our individual lives. I don't necessarily have to recall each and every job that everybody's involved with and start nitpicking from the stage, all of our faults and failures, because guess what?

I'm guilty as well too. I'm guilty. So I'm preaching to myself in my work, in my labor, and in my steadfastness.

[25 : 48] But are you an active participant in that? What do you do with the other six days of the week that the church so dearly needs these reminders?

Man, if we could gather every day of the week, right now would probably be a good time to remember who we are as a church. A healthy church is branded not only by the quality of its gospel devotion, but the quality of its gospel expression.

That we are hearers, but not hearers only, but doers of the word. The engine that propels the church through the darkest days is found only in the power of God, which originates from outside of the church.

The church is dependent on God, not man. man. And then the last section, as we close up, we see that the source, we see the source of this validity in verse four and five.

We see, for now, for we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you. Let's stop there real quick, because Paul makes profound statements of God's election of these Gentile believers in their faith.

[27 : 15] I'm not talking about any more elections, and that's not the election I'm referring to either. But this type of message would probably upset, very thoroughly, cut right to the heart, any Jewish believer.

because what Paul is saying, he's not quoting Exodus, he's not quoting the deliverance of God's people all through Joshua's leadership, through Moses' leadership.

He's saying essentially that God has chosen these Gentiles, just as God elected the nation of Israel and chose them, the same God has adopted Gentiles to enter into the promises that previously weren't theirs.

Obviously, this would cause quite an uproar, if you could imagine a Jewish culture back then. And we see that adoption by the meaning, the expression of brothers, and even some translations say brothers and sisters.

One of the most precise metaphors of God's grace exposed is through the idea of adoption, of choosing to extend a hand of grace, a hand of mercy to those outside of his covenant.

[28:37] And far from a universal or pluralistic love of God, like everybody's one in God and just, you know, be a good person and things like that. No, this is precise.

This is love so precise and reaches through the cosmos of the universe. And today stretches through the billions of people to find your name and your name and your name.

by your faith. How? Verse 5 brings about the verification of the message and the messenger and it's guess what church?

It's also found outside of itself. Look in verse 5, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

and you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. Now, they're not saying that they could have just sat idly by, put on CNN or put on Fox News or maybe even the Sports Center channel and just sat back and just said, you know, God, you're sovereign.

[29:49] I believe in you. Go make disciples. You have the power. I trust you. You know, let's watch another game. Now, this isn't a fatalistic approach, church.

Human agents were used, but it wasn't just about them because he says our gospel came to you, but not only in word, meaning that it's not just our words that we're saying.

It's not just our intellect. Paul was a great apologetic man. He'd probably own every one of us in a debate. It's not just about that.

Paul couldn't have done it without the power of God and the Holy Spirit outside of himself. And it's clear that this passage indicates that this is simply not the craftiness of man's word, but the quality of the message within the gospel message.

And it is the power and of the Holy Spirit. And in all of this, we understand something because we're seeing sort of like a working and a laboring.

[30:54] And not only that, but a quality within that, and not only that, but all the power of what we do, the object, the fuel that runs the engine of all that we do comes not by our best chances of trying to do things out of our own power.

It comes from outside of our self. love. So works of faith, labor of love, steadfastness and hope, message of power, preaching the gospel, even the message of the gospel and the power of the gospel originate outside of itself too.

And as we mine the pages, sort of looking for what's all this mean, the reoccurring overwhelming theme of all of this is this.

When we are adopted by God, it is not anything that we can do. There's not anything that we can do to achieve this grace, but rather it is the transaction that begins outside of ourselves and initiated only in God's grace by God's grace.

grace. Remember, for grace, you have been saved through faith. And it's not of your own doing.

[32:19] It's a gift of God so that no one may boast. If the essence of God's grace occurs outside of ourselves, this is good news, church, because then we can fully be assured that nothing can take that away.

which God has given to us. And as we come to a close today, I hope we understand that this idea is imperative.

The identity of the church, the attitudes of the church, and when I say church, it stems far away from this building. The church is you and you and you all assembled together.

The church is people. the identity of the church, the attitudes, the motives, and the actions, or even the message in and of itself of that church will find no origin stemming from within, but marked only by the quality from that which is outside of itself.

So the very grace of God, God's adoption of these Gentile believers occurred outside of themselves. They couldn't have achieved such a feat. The very essence of their work of faith, labor love, steadfastness of hope, can only be found outside of themselves.

[33 : 42] The power of the message only manifested outside of itself. If this is true for the Thessalonian church, the same is true for us today, church. When we are thankful and prayerful, we are thankful and prayerful for something outside of ourselves and outside of others.

Yes, others will often fail us at times, even our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we're thankful for them outside of themselves because of who they are adopted in Christ.

Regardless of even some things that we have or don't have, our earthly lack or gain, regardless, even if others deserve it. Church, when we realize all we are literally is attributed to things outside of ourselves, we begin to understand that everything in our lives is truly a gift of God.

It's a gift of God, even our very conversion, and we're going to see that next week as a passage as chapter one comes to a close. But I want you to hear me today, church.

In a time like we're in, come what may, we don't need a building. We don't need rights. It doesn't change anything. We have the gospel of truth.

[34 : 59] We don't need all these things. We are distinguished. His church is distinguished. Come what may, the foundation forming, faith forging reality of this message does not change.

And in all of this, I hope that we're compelled to great works of faith, dedicated labor and love, and secured in steadfastness and hope, heralding this message of Christ.

And unlike mistaken Aristotle, in a society built upon self-sufficiency of do it your own way, may we be reminded of where our priorities do lay.

And nothing can take that away from us, church, regardless of threat, persecution, or oppression. Nothing can take away that which is within, which was divinely placed there by grace, only from force of outside of ourselves.

Let's pray. Father, remember, who nh■ that was king, shall I desire to liken it to our sin pleasure.

[36 : 16] And to over the the of the ex who are watching■■ there bycando where inm all c