

The Simplicity of the Faith

First Things

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles in the New Testament to the book of 1 Thessalonians. Now you may be with us today as a guest or a visitor and I want to welcome you to a journey not just through a specific book of the Bible but a very strategic book of the Bible, what we know as 1 Thessalonians.

Now before I explain the strategy therein, please understand the Bible says that all scripture is inspired by God so there is nothing that is more elevated than another, however the reason that 1 Thessalonians should be so critical in our lives is that chronologically it was the very first communication that the Lord gave the early church some 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the reason this is important because 2,000 years later you and I live in a world as far as Christianity as an umbrella is concerned, there is a multitude of creeds and confessions and convictions which often leads to discussion, debate and division. And so as we walk through 1 Thessalonians, one of the things that we're doing is just looking back, okay, what were the first things that God gave the church? What's the first information he gave us? And as we discover that many of the things that are dealt with with other passages in the New Testament is because man as individuals and as entities, began to incorporate or infuse their own perspectives, their own preferences, whatever it may be. And so basically what we're doing is kind of recapturing what is it that we, the church, the believers in Jesus Christ, who were we designed to be.

As we turn to 1 Thessalonians 1:5, today we're going to talk about the simplicity of the faith, the simplicity of the gospel. Now before we read these verses, let me remind you that 1 Thessalonians was penned about the time of Acts 17 when it says they had turned the whole world upside down, but what you may not know is that the Apostle Paul was actually in the city of Corinth when he wrote it. Now why is that important? Because later in 2 Corinthians 11, the Apostle Paul said to that church, "I marvel that you're so soon removed from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." In a world of complexity and confusion, today beginning in verse 5 of chapter 1, let us have simplicity and clarity. It says,

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men

we were among you for your sake. 6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: 7 So that ye were [examples] ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. 9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; 10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Now as we walk through these simplistic verses today, one of the things that I want to begin or establish is this: verse 5 gives some very important parameters of the faith, you might even say these are the pillars of the faith, the tenets of the faith, and these three things deal with an event of the past, the reality of the present, and the hope for the future.

Let's begin with the past. It says, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power." Now our word today for power in days gone by is actually the word that oftentimes we refer to as dynamite. It is that which is able to take an obstruction and to remove it out of the way. And today as we've worshiped corporately together, how many times have we heard that word sin mentioned? How many times have we heard it sung? Because sin is that immovable object that you don't have the authority, you don't have the power to remove from your life. But in Philippians 3:10, it says speaking of Jesus Christ, that we might know the power of his resurrection. Later in 1 Corinthians 15, it says if Jesus Christ did not raise from the dead, our faith is in vain. The reason you set an alarm this morning, the reason you arrived on this campus, the reason you're watching online, the reason you sung the songs, and the reason you opened your Bible is based on the simple fact that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and if we make any other thing about Christianity our foundation, we have a false foundation that is under us. He said we didn't just come in word, we didn't just bring information, we didn't just set a series of data points, basically he's saying you need to understand that the promised prophesied Messiah not only came and he lived and died a sacrificial death, he has power over the grave. So today when we talk about the simplicity of the faith, if we build on any other foundation other than the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is shaking shifting sand, as Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7.

So what about the present reality? What does that do for today? We acknowledge that as a fact. We know that it occurred. It is reality. Notice it says we came not only with power but in the Holy Ghost. Now this is an interesting designation and I know there are those of you out there that for a variety of reasons have a multitude of different, what we might call, English translations but that term, that phrase Holy Ghost, I know it sounds a little archaic at times, I know it sounds a little outdated at times, maybe a little "old school," so to speak, but let me share with you an important designation: that phrase or that concept in the Bible that we refer to as the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit, it is the description of the one whom Jesus prophesied would come. Remember in John 16 he said, "It's actually

expedient, it's good that I depart from you because when I do so the Holy Spirit will come unto you." In fact, John the Baptist in Matthew 3 when Jesus comes to the river Jordan to be baptized, he obviously makes the declaration that, "I am not worthy to even unlace your shoes, much less do this." Jesus said, "Oh, the scriptures must be fulfilled." And do you remember what was stated in verse 11? "I baptize with water but this one will baptize you with the Holy Ghost." Why the importance of the designation? Because when you see that phrase Holy Ghost, it's more than just power, it's more than just presence, it's more than just authority, what that phrase means by Holy Ghost is saying that it's just as if he is right there with you.

Now most of us know 1 Corinthians 6 says as a believer in Jesus Christ we are the temple, we are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, but have you ever had those times, have you ever had those moments in life where you really questioned if God even knows you exist? Have you ever questioned is he even there? Can he hear me? Does he not see what is happening in my life? When it says here that it came in power but in the Holy Ghost, what it's stating there, and this is a parameter, this is a pillar of the faith, that as a believer in Jesus Christ it doesn't matter where you go, it doesn't matter what you experience, it doesn't matter how high the high or how low the low, he is with you every step of the way. In fact, he said in Matthew 28, "I will never leave you." Sometimes we feel like he has. "I will never forsake you." Sometimes we feel like he has. He says, "But I will be with you to the end of the age."

So what the Apostle Paul is saying in the very first paragraph of the very first communication is that our faith is built on nothing less than the powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we believed upon him, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, is with us in any and all circumstances. And notice the third thing about the future: and in much assurance. Not just some assurance but much. I know that many of you are familiar that, at least here on our campus, on Wednesday nights our large group, adult Bible study that I have the privilege of leading is composed primarily of questions that you and others ask and then we take those questions and we go to the word of God and say, okay, what does the Bible say about this issue, this concern, whatever it may be. I've had the privilege of answering Bible questions for over 20 years now and some of you are familiar with this but if you take all the questions that I've ever been asked by all ages, all stages, all places, and you categorize them by their subject matter, the number 1 by far, by leaps and bounds subject is regards to our assurance of our faith, the security of our relationship with Jesus Christ. And those questions can be asked a myriad of different ways. But notice what it says, not only did it come in power, not only the presence of the Holy Ghost, but in much assurance. In fact, Jesus addressed this in John 10 when people were questioning his authority about what he was saying. He says, "When somebody is in my hand, there is no thing and there is no person that can ever pluck them out." Later you get to 1 John 5, it says, "I've written these things so that you might know," not that you might hope so or think, "that you might know that you have eternal life."

So here are the parameters that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in days past, we can have much assurance in days future because his Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, walks with us every step of the way. Those are the parameters of our faith. Let's talk

about the persons, and when I use the word persons what I mean by that is that there's a whole lot of life that we navigate between those parameters. There's a lot of decisions that we need to make. There's a lot of opportunities that we have to discern. There are struggles that we have to walk through. Beginning in verse 6, he addresses the three types of people or persons that every one of us need in our life to navigate this thing that we call Christianity. The first is the aspect of the past. It says, "And you became followers of us." Here's why that statement is important. What the Apostle Paul is recognizing in their lives and what we need to recognize in our life today, is that every single one of us, every one of us, we need people in our life who've walked further with Jesus than we have. We need people in our life who hopefully are more mature in their faith than we are, more understanding, more knowledgeable of their faith than we are.

And let me address this in two aspects, both the corporate and the individual. That is why in the book of Jeremiah 3, the Lord says, "And I will bring unto you pastors, I will bring unto you shepherds that will guide you, that will direct you and they will instruct you." Now I understand that I'm trading on thin ice because I'm speaking about that which I currently possess and stand in front of you, but because I am one, allow me to go there for just a moment. Notice what Paul said, "You're followers of us." Never follow a pastor who doesn't line up his life with the Apostle Paul. I'll give you a little warning: anytime you see a pastor get up and say, "The gospel is Jesus plus," run away. If it's "Jesus and," run away.

You see, what's the parameter? It is Jesus and Christ alone, and we need Paul's in our life who will guide us, who will direct us and instruct us, and that's on a corporate level, but let's speak about individually. All of us need persons in our life, I know the world calls them mentors, life coaches, whatever it may be, do you know what the Bible calls them? Disciplers, people that say, "Hey, in that situation here's what God has taught me. Here is what he has walked me through." Every one of us on a corporate level and on a personal level, we need people in our lives who are Paul's, who have walked at a greater depth, a longer distance, who we can go to and, listen, not go to them so they can rubber stamp whatever it is you want to get away with but they will look at you in the eye and say, "I know what you want but the word of God says this."

When he says you became followers of us, he was saying you did everything you knew how to do to line up your life to follow directly in the will of God for your life. Then the second thing regarding the present, it says "in much affliction and with joy." Are those not two descriptors of everything that happens in your life? It's either affliction or it's joy. It's either bad news or it's good news. In fact, it's much like a railroad track where you have these two rails that are running side-by-side of each other that never actually cross. I mean, most of the times in life you don't experience affliction and joy all at the same time, it's either one or the other. There's either a mountain or there's a valley, and though it's not specifically stated in this passage, the Apostle Paul who was leading those at Thessalonica had an individual that comforted him, encouraged him, and his name was Barnabas. We all need some Barnabas's in life. We need people who will cry with us when we're crying and laugh with us when we laugh.

You say, "Well, how does that take place?" I know I'm preaching to the choir, you go to church. Fellow believers. Those that believe as you do who can struggle with you and walk with you and cry with you and laugh with you. That is why Hebrews 10 says do not forsake the gathering of the saints, the gathering of the believers. That is why the Bible talks about iron sharpening iron and so one man strengthens another. It's not just about having somebody who is wiser and more seasoned than us, but as we go through the joys of life, as we go through the afflictions of life, we need those on our side, those that are walking the same paths. And by the way, I know that we're not legalistic and we're not overly strict about this, but if you've gotten plugged into one of our Bible studies, our Sunday school classes here at First Baptist, there's a reason that they're age and stage graded in life because hopefully you're all crying about the same thing. Hopefully you're all laughing about the same thing. You're kind of at that age in life where, you know, this is what's happening or not happening, this is what's working or not working, or whatever it may be, and you've got a bunch of Barnabas's around you to live life.

And then there's the future. You know, it's been said that Christianity is but one generation away from extinction. Notice what it says here in verse 7, "you were examples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia," and then it goes on to say even beyond that. It wasn't just about who can I sit under and learn from. It wasn't just about who can I live life alongside of. Timothy was that young man who Paul poured his life unto. He shared with him his struggles and his successes. He was the one that was teaching those coming behind him.

Now when we talk about that next generation, I know we naturally and there's nothing wrong with this because we naturally think of preschool and kids and student and college ministry and rightfully so, but do you realize that for some of you that life has allowed a little bit of snow to gather on the top of your proverbial mountain, your Timothy may be middle-aged. Your Timothy. It doesn't just have to be kids, although we need all the help we can get raising this generation for Christ, but understand that we were designed not just to absorb information, we were not just designed to watch those that are ahead of us, we were designed to take what God has done and pour it into somebody who is behind us. Whether they are multiple generations or just one generation, we were designed the persons. We all need a Paul. We all need Barnabas's. And if we're going to be who we're designed to be, we need some Timothy's that we are pouring into the next "generation."

Then we get to verse 9 and, boy, it gets personal here. Allow me to draw that distinction. Notice what it said in verse 5, "For our gospel." He's just stating facts. He is stating the parameters Jesus Christ is risen from the grave, the Holy Spirit can be a part of your life, and there is much assurance in your faith. But when you get to verse 9 it says this, "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how you turned from idols to serve the living God." So let's talk about our past for just a moment. If you're here this morning and you say, "I'm a believer in Jesus Christ. I am as Acts 11:26 says, I am a 'Christian,'" what is your testimony? Your testimony is verse 9. There was a time in your life whether you were 7 or 70, it doesn't matter, there was a time in your life where you were an idolater. Now some of you are thinking, "Well, I've never, you know, burned incense, I've never bowed to an inanimate object." But let me give you

a biblical definition of an idol is something that takes the place in your life that should rightfully be occupied by God. For some of you it was a fleshly desire. For others it was a rebellious spirit. For other folks it was this, it was that. If there was anything that garnered our attention, that sought our affection, the Bible calls it sin. That's why Romans 3:23 says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And so what happened is you recognized that you had a sin condition. You recognized that you had transgressed, you had trespassed, you had gone contrary to the way, the will, and the word of God, so what did you do? You did what Romans 10:13 says, you called on the name of the Lord to be saved. When it says here that you turned from your idols, it basically is communicating what you and I know as this very simple message that we recognize that we are sinners, Jesus is the only one who can save, and we call out to him to do so in our lives.

It says they turned, you turned from idols, but notice that next statement, to serve. Now this is where it's going to get interesting because according to 1 Corinthians 12 when you became a believer in Jesus Christ, when I became a believer, when we became believers the Lord in his supernatural means, he orchestrated us into what he calls the body of Christ, the church. Now you know and I know that if the body is not in motion and/or moving, it becomes stale, stagnant and doesn't operate very effectively. In fact, just think of illustrations such as a pool of water that has no current. A couple of days from now you don't want to drink from there, do you? How about a car? Now in the car world we call them a barn find. It's one of these cars that has been laid up in somebody's barn for about 20 or 25 years, got dust all over it. Try starting one of those and see how well it goes. It takes a long time to get one of those going because it has not been moving. You and I as believers, we were not designed to just believe and sit and wait. We were designed to believe and what does it say? To serve the living God, to put our faith in motion. That's why Romans 12:1-2 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present yourself a living sacrifice, not being conformed to this world: but being transformed by the renewing of your mind, which is the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

We are designed to put our faith in motion which is interesting because verse 10 talks about the future. "And to wait." Now I know what some of you are thinking. "Whoa, time out. You say we're not supposed to just believe and sit, we're supposed to believe and serve, but what are we waiting on?" "To wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Two quick things there. 1. You have much assurance in the parameters of the faith that if you've called upon Jesus you never for one second have to darken the doors of hell. In fact, in Matthew 25:41 Jesus speaking of judgment, he talked about those who went to the lake of fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels. You have been delivered from the wrath that is to come, but what does it say? To wait for his Son.

Now when we get to chapter 4, we're going to get to more of the details of what that looks like and what that means, but in verse 13 of chapter 4 it says, "I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that if we believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, then those who have gone with him he will bring back and we

will meet them in the air to ever be with him." But today as I close, I want to clarify a real practical part of what we call the Second Coming because anytime we place an emphasis on, anytime we talk about there is this tendency to take verse 10 overly literally meaning, "Well, I'm just gonna wait so I'm gonna go find me a place in the middle of nowhere and I'm just gonna sit until Jesus comes back."

Some years ago, I had the opportunity of meeting with what I would call a Paul in my life, someone who was twice my age, he was a seasoned minister. He had graduated from the same school that I was currently attending at the time as a Junior. That's important to the story. And as we met and as we talked and as we shared, he asked me a very important strategic question. Here was the question. He said, "Jeff, if you knew that Jesus Christ was gonna come back one year from today, how would you respond?" Now I thought I was being spiritual. I said, "Well, if he's coming back a year from today, what use is college? I guess I'm gonna drop out and knock on every door and tell them about Jesus." He looked at me and he said, "Wrong answer, son." I said, "Well, how is that not the right answer?" And he said, "You're a Junior, right?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "If Jesus comes back a year from today, he expects to find you in Waco, Texas in the library studying for your midterms." And do you know what? That Paul in my life taught me something every one of us needs to learn. We always talk about the return of Jesus and that future, how do we prepare. Let me tell you how you prepare: you be doing what God has called you to do when he shows up for you. Whatever that may be. But you say, "But you don't understand, pastor, I just do this." If that's what he's called you to do, then that's how you honor him when you do it.

And so we're the body, right, and sometimes you say, "Well, I'm just an elbow, I'm just a pinkie toe." Guess what? When Jesus comes back, pinkie toe, he does not expect you to be in a fight with the knee about who's more important. He expects you to be a pinkie toe and when he comes back he says, "Well done, good and faithful pinkie toe." I'm just giving you the New Revised Jeff version of that passage from scripture. The personalization is it's a personal faith that is active in our lives and we – listen – we stay serving until he comes for us, whatever that looks like.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning you're that individual who maybe today the information, you've heard it before not just once, not just twice, maybe you've heard it your whole life, but today is the day where the Spirit of God took the word of God and it became personal and you realized that all the facts about Jesus need to be a part of your life personally. That verse that I recited earlier in Romans 10:13, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, maybe you're that whoever today. If you're that person, it doesn't matter the age or stage of life, it doesn't matter if you're in this room or watching on a different continent, it doesn't matter the things that have happened days past, what matters is right now that you call out. It's not about the words you say, it's not about doing it out loud or silently. It's not about checking a box or crossing a t or dotting an i, it's about calling on the name of the Lord and maybe today you're that one who needs to cry out and call. If it is, maybe your cry would go a little something like this. "God, today I'm coming clean, I'm gonna be transparent about what you already know about me. God, I've got a sin problem. I've been places I should have

never been. God, I've done things I should have never done. God, I've used words I should have never spoken. I've had thoughts I should have never entertained. And your word, your Bible says the wages or the result of my sin is death but it also says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, today I believe that when they nailed him to the cross he was bearing the pain and the punishment of my sin. And God, today I believe that when Jesus Christ rose from the grave three days later, like we read in 1 Thessalonians today, he gave the power for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. So God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and the problems of this life but there's one thing I know, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who cried out to Jesus. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing together. We just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We have a team set aside, a room set aside, we would love just to hear your story, to pray with you, pray for you, and more importantly to celebrate with you. Maybe today you say, "Well, I'm already a believer." Maybe you need to follow in believer's baptism. Maybe the Lord has said this is your family of faith, this is your church. Or maybe today you say, "You know, I just am struggling with this or that. I need somebody to spend some time praying with me and over me." Or maybe today as we enter this time of decision, it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe it's about stepping out of this room, going to Bible study, going to Sunday school, going wherever on this campus and realizing the gravity of the simplicity of faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, thank you that we didn't have to get multiple academic degrees to garner the doors of heaven. Thank you, God, that we did not have to figure out complex formulas but just to simply believe what you told us to believe. God, today may we exercise the simplicity of the faith. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.