

## A Church to be Thankful For- Part 2

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

27 Sep 09

Well, I invite you to take your Bible tonight and let's open to First Thessalonians chapter one. First Thessalonians chapter one, as we continue studying through this wonderful letter from the apostle Paul to the believers in the city of Thessalonica. And I want to begin tonight just by reading that again for us, the first chapter, First Thessalonians chapter one. It says, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."

Well, as you can see this letter was written to a specific church, the one in the city of Thessalonica. And that church described here for us, and what's true of all real churches, is that the church is an amazing entity. The church is made up of people who are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is not just a group of people who agree on some facts about God and Christ, it's made up of people who are united to God and to Christ. Believers are those who are in God and in Christ and God and Christ are in them. There's a spiritual union that exists described this way in Galatians 2:20, where Paul says "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." There he says what's true of him and true of every believer is that Christ lives within him. In Colossians chapter three verse three it's put this way, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." So now there it says that a believer is in God, hidden in Christ, hidden with Christ in God. And the union of believers with the Lord, I mean all by itself is enough for us to be continually offering up thanks to God that we are in union with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And before Paul does anything else in this letter he does exactly that; he expresses thanks for the church. And there is much for us to learn as we look at what Paul writes here in this opening chapter both about giving thanks and what he says about the church. And we want to just take our time and drink it all in as we look at what he says here.

So let me remind you of what we looked at last time and then we'll look at some more tonight. Last time we looked first of all, Paul's thanksgiving and we saw that it was comprehensive. Verse two he says, "We

give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers.” It’s comprehensive, you see those kind of words used there. It’s always, for all of you. Couldn’t be any more comprehensive than that. What he’s saying is that whenever Paul and Silas and Timothy would meet to pray they would offer thanks for this church in Thessalonica and that included all of them. We talked about that quite a bit last week because they are in God. Because they are in Christ there is always something to be thankful for, for all of them. And boy that provides quite a challenge and quite an example to all of us, doesn’t it? And our own prayer lives. Certainly provides a challenge to everybody in this church who is an elder and our commitment to praying for the whole church including everybody. It certainly is a challenge also for the deacons as they minister amongst the church to give thanks and to pray for all the members of the church. It certainly for Sunday school leaders to be thankful for and to pray for all of the people that they have the privilege of ministering to no matter what age they are. Certainly for home Bible study leaders, same thing. Anybody involved in any ministry has plenty of reason to give thanks all the time for all the people they are involved with. It is a privilege to be able to serve and to a part of God’s church and we should be thankful for that. Always for everybody that we the opportunity to serve.

We saw Paul’s thanksgiving was comprehensive. We also saw that Paul’s thanksgiving had content. In verse three he says, “Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.” Paul’s prayers were prompted by a constant reminder of the content of the lives of the Thessalonians. They had the marks of real Christianity. They had a faith that worked. Their works were motivated from a true faith. They had a love that labored. And they had a hope that was steadfast. In other words, they had a real faith, a real love, and a real hope. Their lives were focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. They lived as in the presence of God the Father. Paul’s thanksgiving for them was fueled by the kind of lives, the content of the character of the Thessalonians. We looked at that again carefully last time. Let’s move on now and see that his thanksgiving was built upon one more element.

And this starts in verse four and goes all the way to the end of the chapter and that is that there was a conviction behind Paul’s giving of thanks. A conviction. Verse four says, “Knowing, brethren, beloved by God, His choice of you.” All of this that Paul is saying here in chapter one is built upon what he knew as he says here in verse four. Paul knows something about these Thessalonians. Notice that he speaks about them and to them with affection. He refers to them as brethren. Paul loved these believers. Notice too that he calls them beloved by God. And the word beloved there is an intensive form of that word. It speaks of an abiding love that God has for these people. It’s a love that existed in the past, it’s a love that continues in the present, and that tells us that everybody in God’s family is intensely loved by God and we’re all related to each other as brethren.

How do we get in to that family? Well he answers that question here. It’s because you were chosen by God. And that brings us to an important doctrine, the doctrine of sovereign election, the truth that God chooses those whom He will save. Now there are some questions that people have about that doctrine. But notice here that election or choosing is not some cold, harsh, mechanical thing. It precedes from God’s love. His choice precedes out of His love. God is righteous and holy and His choices made in election are made in love, the love that characterizes God. And His choices are completely free and uninfluenced by anything outside of Himself. They are His choices that He makes independent from

anybody else. Now, election is a basic element of Paul's understanding of the church. The church exists by God's choice. And God's choice for who is going to be in His church was made in eternity past. In Ephesians chapter one verse four it says, "He chose us in Him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world." Let that one sink in for a while. You're in the church by God's choice and that choice was made before the foundation of the world. And He chooses individuals to be a part of His church. Let me just read you a number of verses that highlight this. You might jot these down. John chapter 13 verse... well I wrote down the wrong verse. John 15 verse 16 Jesus says, "You did not choose Me but I chose you." He chose them and He chose them individually. In Romans chapter nine and verse 11 he says regarding the twins born to Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, "For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls." His point there is that before those twins were born He had made His choice regarding the two of them. It had nothing to do with anything those two did. It was done before they were born. Charles Spurgeon said he is quite certain he was chosen before he was born, because after he was born there wouldn't be any reason for God to choose him. Some people think that's not fair, it's not just. Well, Paul answers that a few verses later. Romans 9:14-15, "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" It's His choice. He gets to make the choice. This is highlighted in a number of other places. First Corinthians chapter one and verse 26, starting in verse 26, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let Him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" There, Paul just keeps highlighting the fact that God made the choice. In James chapter one verse 18 it says, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." It's by His will and by His work that a person is saved. In James chapter two verse five and interesting statement, "Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" Again, highlighting the fact that it is God who is doing the choosing. In Second Peter chapter one verse 10 it says, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you." Over and over again the New Testament makes it clear that God has made the choice who's going to be in the church. He made that choice in eternity past, and He chose particular individuals. God made a choice. He selects and some to save. And the Thessalonian church consisted of those whom God has chosen. Second Thessalonians he says this in chapter two verses 13 and 14, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." So there again he highlights the fact that the Thessalonian church came into existence because God made some choices. He chose some people and called them together to be a church.

And that calling, that choosing of God of a person's life affects the way that person lives. In Colossians chapter three verse 12 it says, "So, as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." All of those imperatives, all of those commands for how they were to live was based on the fact that they had been chosen by God. Chosen by God.

So that just is a quick summary of the doctrine, I don't want to really go into any great detail on it at this time, other than to say if you and I understand what the bible teaches about sin, and the effects of sin, if you understand the total depravity of mankind and the spiritual inability, total inability, of man then there must be election. There must be a sovereign choice made by God or absolutely nobody would ever be saved. We wouldn't choose Him if left to ourselves. He has to choose us. Now, notice something very interesting here regarding the Thessalonians. Paul had been in Thessalonica as we've said, maybe three to six months, not very long. Yet, here when he brings up this gigantic doctrine of God's sovereign choice which admittedly contains some unfathomable mysteries to it, Paul doesn't take any time to discuss it, or to explain it. He just mentions it. That indicates that the Thessalonians would have understood what he was talking about and that is amazing. Many today would say new believers shouldn't be taught a doctrine like this. Well, apparently Paul thought differently and apparently the Thessalonians were eager learners. And also we need to be assured, especially if you're facing persecution like the Thessalonians were, we need to be assured that our salvation rests completely upon what God has done. It's not dependent upon anything I have done. And when you're facing persecution you need assurance that God has saved you and He has saved you for good. So, Paul taught them about that.

Notice that Paul says there in verse four that he knows that the Thessalonians have been chosen by God. He knows it. That repudiates the thought that some have that you can never know who's the elect. Paul says I know. So how did he know? Well, he wasn't there in the divine counsel when God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit made the decision. Paul wasn't sitting in the room when those decisions were made. And Paul's not saying either that he receives some special revelation about all of this. The word knowing here in verse four is a word that speaks of knowing that's based upon perception or observation. It's a knowing that's arrived at by seeing or perceiving. It's known because the facts speak so clearly. Paul says I know that you are the chosen of God because of what I've observed and it is so crystal clear. Well, what was it the he observed? What were the facts that were so clear and indisputable? Well, that's what he gets into in verses five through 10.

But, let's just stop for a minute and say that this doctrine of divine choice is the ultimate reason for Paul's thanksgiving. He gives a lot of other reasons here. This is the bottom line. This is the ultimate reason for Paul's thanksgiving, and it is for us individually as well. This is the ultimate source of thanksgiving. You and I as believers should be greatly humbled and constantly thankful that God has

chosen us. We were unworthy. We were undeserving. We didn't even have a desire to be chosen. Left to ourselves, if God and Satan were picking teams, we'd want to be on Satan's team. Left to ourselves, that's the side we would choose. If it was up to us, the Bible says we were enemies of God, we were hostile towards God. We didn't want to be on His team. Yet, in love He chose us. And He did it before the foundation of the world. And in time He called us to Himself. And I don't know how the Lord worked in your life. He made that abundantly obvious to me because I had no knowledge of Him, I was totally ignorant of Him, I had no interest in Him, and He came and got me. And He chose us collectively, Believer's Fellowship, to be a place where individuals that He has chosen can meet together and worship and learn, fellowship and pray, serve and be a witness for Him. It's all by His choice. That's something to be profoundly and perpetually thankful for. We're not here if God doesn't choose it to be this way.

Now, how did Paul know the Thessalonians had been chosen by God? He makes that statement. Back it up Paul, how do you know? Well, what was it that he had observed that led to this conviction the he had that prompted so much thanksgiving. Well, he gives two sides in his answer. The first side of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and then he gives the side from the Thessalonians themselves. Let's look at verse five where he gives how he knows this based on kind of his side, the side of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. He says, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." This is how Paul knows that they're saved because of what happened with Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And here you see that God works out His electing purposes through the means of preaching the gospel. And we learn a lot about preaching from this one verse. Notice that Paul refers to it as our gospel. When he says our gospel he's not saying we made this thing up. He's saying we are totally and personally committed to this message. We are totally and personally committed to the gospel ourselves. And you can't effectively and powerfully deliver a message to that you are not totally committed to yourself. The gospel was something personal to Paul. And then he says our gospel did not come to you in word only. Here you see that he's talking about the gospel came to them. Here you see the messages placed front and center. The messengers are in the background. It's all about the message. That's what takes priority. It's the message that should get the foremost attention, not the one giving the message. And then he says our gospel did not come to you in word only. You know it's helpful if a message is well communicated. That's helpful. But its effectiveness, at least the effectiveness of the gospel message, is not dependent upon the messengers eloquence. Or his erudition. If you even know what that means. Or his compelling logic. Or his soaring rhetoric.

It's not word only, it also came in power. It came in power. That speaks of a spiritual dynamic. Paul, Silas, Timothy, they were aware of a supernatural power that was behind their words. And the power here isn't speaking of miraculous manifestations, then it would have been a plural. But it's speaking of a dynamic that was experienced in their preaching. They knew something was going on in their preaching. A power was at work and that power is in the Holy Spirit as he says there in verse five. This message that he brought was given in the power of the Holy Spirit, not the power of the messenger. There was a power far greater than the messengers at work in this situation. It was the power of the Holy Spirit Himself. And he says this message came in full conviction. Full conviction. The Spirit, the same Spirit, that provided the power to the message, provided the conviction to the messengers. That speaks of an

inner assurance, an inner confidence. It's a subjective thing, no doubt about it, but it's based on being filled with the spirit. It's preaching in submission to the Holy Spirit. And again, to quote Charles Spurgeon, it's said that as he used to walk up to the pulpit to preach he would repeat to himself, I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit. That's the power behind effective preaching. And as a result of all of this at work, Paul had no doubt of a positive outcome, a positive result. Because of the power and conviction that Paul experienced in the preaching of the word, he was confident that the response that he saw in the Thessalonians was a work of God which revealed His choice of them. One writer said, "The messengers worked in a Spirit wrought conviction and certainty as to the validity of their message and an unshaken confidence in its ultimate triumph."

But it's not just the Spirit's work of power evident in the preaching, but also in the lives of the preachers as he says there at the end of verse five, "Just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." What kind of men, it speaks of their conduct and their character, and that tells you something important about preaching. The message is what gets the foremost attention. The messengers are in the background. But it is the whole man who preaches. It's the whole man who preaches, and their message would have been totally undermined if they didn't live consistent with the message. It's the message that gets the attention. The message needs to be foremost, not the messengers. But the messengers can certainly undermine the message if they don't live consistent with it. So, the Thessalonians, they not only heard the gospel but they saw the power of it in the lives of the messengers. And all of that worked together to confirm to Paul that the response of the Thessalonians was evidence of God's choice in their lives. Now that kind of experience that he's describing there, that doesn't happen all the time. But Paul was a man who ministered under the power and the direction of the Spirit. In fact, he had known the restraint of the Spirit in certain situations. You can read Acts 16 and Paul is traveling around and the Spirit won't allow him to go here, the Spirit won't let he go there. The Spirit's directing him and the Spirit's doing that by restraining him from doing certain things. He'd known the restraint of the Spirit and he had also known the Spirit's power in his preaching. That convinced Paul that these Thessalonians, they were chosen by God. Because God worked through him through the preaching in a way that was obvious to Paul. God's doing something here. This message is going to be effective.

But it wasn't just his experience that convinces him. But also the response or the way in which the Thessalonians responded provided evidence of their election. There was a definite observable change which became evident in the lives of these new believers. They started pursuing a completely different lifestyle. They had received new life from God, and we're told that they looked to the messengers as a pattern for how to live out that new life. It says in verse six, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit." They became imitators, mimics, literally is what the word is there. They naturally look to those who brought them the message to provide a pattern that they could imitate for how to live out this new life that they had received from God. They imitated Paul and Silas and Timothy. Salvation starts the work of sanctification in the life of the believer. Their life is changed. It's headed in a new direction. It's becoming more like Christ now. And to help them in that new life, they followed the pattern, they imitated the messengers. But in following them they were also following the ultimate pattern for Christian life which is the Lord

Himself. "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord." The apostle Paul constantly called upon believers to follow his example and he said if you follow my example then you will be following the Lord. He said that in First Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." Paul says I'm imitating Christ, I'm following Christ. You imitate me, you'll be following Christ. If the new believers would imitate his example then they would be imitating his Master also. Paul certainly taught them about the Lord. He taught them about the Lord's life, His death, His resurrection. But the example of Paul's life helped them in ultimately following the pattern of the Lord. The Lord provides people, other believers, to help us in following the Lord to provide a pattern that we can imitate. These people picked up on that and imitated Paul.

Now, again what was the cause of this change in their life? We're told here in verse six they had received the word. They had received the message. They had received the gospel. They had received it and the results were readily and rapidly apparent. They received it. That speaks of a voluntary willing action on their part. They personally welcomed and appropriated the word in their lives. They received it. That's just another way of saying they exercised faith. And their faith was genuine. And the reception of the word and the living out of the new life that they had received, following the pattern of the messengers, they followed the messengers and they followed the Lord Himself. And we're told that this had a somewhat paradoxical and double experience in their lives. They received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Now those two things don't normally go together. Tribulation and joy? They don't normally go together. They received the word in much tribulation. Tribulation for the sake of the faith was taken for granted by New Testament believers. They understood that following Christ, that meant suffering. They took that for granted. In Act chapter 14 verse 22 Paul is returning to some cities where he's just preached and made disciples. These are still new believers and he says in Acts 14:22, he was "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith." And here's what he said to do that, here's how he encouraged them. "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Huh? He's just telling them this is the way it is. The pathway to the kingdom of God is one of suffering. They took it for granted. Thessalonians, they certainly understood this. They understood it right from the very beginning because Paul came to Thessalonica, he preached the gospel, people started believing, and here's what happened. Acts 17:5, "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people." They were looking for Paul, and Silas, and Timothy. "When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason [which is apparently where they were staying] and some brethren before the city authorities shouting, 'these men who have upset the world have come also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.' They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the other, they released them." Paul and his team have to sneak out of town. Thessalonians certainly understood that following Christ, this is a dangerous proposition. And here Paul says in First Thessalonians that they received it in the midst of much tribulation. The word tribulation there is a word that speaks of pressure, an intense and severe pressure. To follow Christ was courageous because it inevitably led to opposition. To come to Christ, they understood demanded vigorous self-denial, a willingness to surrender personal comfort and honor and prosperity and perhaps even their own lives.

They understood that coming to Christ meant suffering of one kind or another. We find that hard to relate to in our country. But this is still very common in other places of our world.

America is really a very hard place to be a pastor. It's persecution that separates the phony from the real. Pastors in countries where there is real persecution, they at least know that the people that they are ministering to, they must be for real, otherwise why would they identify with this? And pastors in those parts of the world look at churches in America and say how in the world do you pastor there? You don't know who's for real and who's not. Thessalonians, they were for real. They were obviously chosen by God because they courageously received the word in the face of tribulation and they did it in the joy of the Holy Spirit. They did it in the joy of the Holy Spirit. That joy Paul takes as a token of their election. This joy is something that defies natural explanation. This joy is something that testifies to the power of the gospel and that power was at work in the lives of the Thessalonians. Paul and Silas, they had demonstrated that kind of joy right before they go to Thessalonica. They were in the city of Philippi and there in Philippi they were thrown in jail. Well, first they were beaten and then they were thrown in jail. They were unfairly treated. Unjustly treated. Thrown in jail. We're told in Acts 16:25 that about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. That's a supernatural kind of joy that defies any kind of natural explanation. And so when Paul and Silas saw that same kind of joy in the Thessalonian converts they knew these people, they must be chosen by God. This joy were told here was produced by the Holy Spirit. Same spirit that was working in the preachers was working in those who received the word and it produced within them a supernatural joy.

Maybe we don't know that kind of joy, or know so little of that kind of joy because our Christianity costs us so little. Or maybe we don't know this kind of joy because we don't know as much about the ministry of the Holy Spirit as they did. It's too easy for us to depend upon our own resources. Our money, our education, our abilities, whatever else we have. People who don't have anything and have to depend totally on the Holy Spirit, they know some things we don't know. We don't know enough about what it means to lean on the Spirit and live totally under His influence because we don't feel like we need to. We've got our resources. We can trust in those things.

But you need to notice that the supernatural spirit produced joy in the midst of this intense tribulation, that's something that drew the attention of other people. In fact, that was one of the causes for the rapid spread of Christianity in the Roman world is that people looked at these Christians who were following this new message and they were being persecuted for it and yet they were so happy about it. That attracted people's attention. What is it that these people have? What is it that they are believing? What can this be? What's the explanation? That's what fueled the rapid spread of Christianity in the early years. It was a powerful message that brought about dramatic and obvious change in the lives of those who received it. Work of God in Thessalonica had a deep impact with a widespread result. Look at verse seven. "So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." They were so active in their faith that they were used by God to literally shape the lives of all the other believers in Greece, Macedonia being the northern section where Philippi and Thessalonica are, and Achaia being the southern section where Corinth was. They became it says, you became an example. A definite result, a consequence of the lives that they were living is that they became an example for other believers. They became a pattern that other believers could follow. And notice they started off as imitators and

they became examples. They became examples of Christian character for others, other believers, to follow. And remember, at the point that Paul's writing this letter, they had been believers less than a year. So them becoming examples, well it wasn't something that was achieved over time. It wasn't just because they had been believers for a long time that they became examples. No, it was the outcome of a vital, real, inner experience with Christ which was consistently expressed in exemplary Christian living. That's what made them an example. The fact is, you can be a Christian for 50 years and still not be a good example for others to follow. These people in less than a year became an example for everybody else in their country. No other New Testament is called a model like this church. They were examples in their living, and in their suffering for the gospel. Just one other little note there. They became an example to all the believers. Believers is always presented in a present tense like this, it's an ongoing thing. Those who are chosen by God, they are believers from that point out. Paul was convinced that the Thessalonians were chosen by God. The message had come to them in the power of the Spirit and the Spirit worked in them turning their lives around, giving them a supernatural joy that was having an impact on everybody around them.

In fact, let me just show you one way in which they were becoming an example. You can look at this in Second Corinthians chapter eight. Second Corinthians chapter eight. As Paul writes to the Corinthians here he's addressing an issue, a topic, with them. He had planted a number of gentile churches and he was going around to those churches and taking an offering of money that he intended to take back to Jerusalem to assist the poor believers there in Jerusalem and to show love and solidarity between the gentile believers and the Jewish believers. So he's traveling around collecting money from the churches and apparently the Corinthians said, we're in on that. We want to give big time to that project. Well, they were a little slow in delivering on their promise and so Paul is having to write to exhort them, encourage them, to follow through on their promise and here's one way he encourages them. Second Corinthians eight verse one. "Now, brethren," and remember Corinth is in Achaia. This is a place where Paul says the Thessalonians have had an impact, they are an example, so he is going to use that example here. It says, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia." That would include the Thessalonians. "That in a great ordeal of affliction [so there he's talking about their tribulation, a great ordeal of affliction] their abundance of joy [so there again we're referred to their joy, they are experiencing great affliction but also an abundance of joy. Here's something else we didn't know about them: their deep poverty.] and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." Well he's one way that these people were an example. They were in great affliction, they were in deep poverty, but they wanted to give to this project. In fact they begged Paul, hey let us, and they gave way beyond their means. Just one way in which they became an example.

All of this that we're looking at here in First Thessalonians and this church in Thessalonica, it speaks of a depth of ministry that was totally dependent upon God. A depth of ministry, an intensity to ministry, but a ministry that was totally dependent upon God. The message was clear, the message was presented in the power of the Spirit, so that those who were chosen responded. And they followed the humble yet

powerful example of the messengers and the power and the Spirit filled joy in their lives became an example to everybody else around them. This is a church to be thankful for. You can see why Paul all the time is giving thanks for all of them because of what's happening in this church. This church is a pattern for us to follow as well. And one thing we can learn just from these early verses is the importance of going in to depth in our ministry. Depth in our pursuit of the Lord. Depth in our dependence upon the Lord. Depth in our understanding of scripture. He's teaching new Christians the doctrine of election so when he writes a letter back all he has to do is mention it in one part of a sentence with the assumption that, they know what I'm talking about because I already explained it to them. That says something about a depth of ministry. That depth is necessary if we're going to be an example to others, and wouldn't it be nice if God could use us to be an example to other churches, even just in San Antonio? I think that would be helpful. I received things in the mail probably just like you do. Recently I've received postcards in the mail from a couple churches in my area. One is a church that has had a traditional service, as they call it, at 11:00 on a Sunday, but now they are adding a contemporary service called Amplified. We're going to jack it up for this contemporary service. It's amplified. Really? Well, what's going to go on at this new amplified service? Well, we got a relaxed atmosphere, that's the first thing they list. Whatever that means. I guess you can bring your breakfast tacos in, I don't know. They got a great, even if they say so themselves, a great modern worship band. Alright. They're going to amplify it, they're going to jack it up man. They got a children's ministries you kids will love. They have taken it to a higher level here man. It's amplified. They got an awesome youth ministry, even if they do say so themselves. Last on their little list is relevant teaching. It's significant that the last word in their list is teaching. But they want to make sure that you understand that it's going to be relevant teaching, as if accurately, clearly, passionately preaching the truth of God's word could be anything other than relevant. That's what this church is doing. They're getting amplified.

The other one I just received yesterday. The main point here is 'you got game'. You got game. Come to their church, discover God's game plan for your life, with the assurance that 'you got game when God is your head coach.' Okay. And we want you to stick around immediately after the service because we're going to be giving away a Troy Aikman mini helmet and a Tony Romo autographed mini helmet. We've got free food and a football punt contest and bounce games for the kids. Now, you know, no disrespect to Troy Aikman or Tony Romo, but how about if we introduce people to Jesus Christ. There's something seriously wrong. The Thessalonian church, we're not told anything about their kid's ministry, about their youth group, about what kind of band they had. We're told that they were chosen by God. And they lived lives in the power of the Holy Spirit that had an impact in their whole country. And we're going to see next time that their impact even went outside of their country. This little church in Thessalonica, less than a year old, living in deep poverty, having an impact all over their country and outside of their country with no mention of their youth ministry or music ministry. Just some people chosen by God, experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Living lives that were so dramatically changed and so obviously supernaturally affected because they were having joy in the midst of tribulation that they didn't need to have a bounce house for kids because people took note of what was going on in their lives and they were attracted to that.

So many churches today trying to produce a superficial spiritless joy. If they could see real, supernatural joy in us, that is an obvious manifestation of God's working in our lives and our trust in Him, perhaps they would take notice. But his doesn't just happen. It happens because there's a depth and a commitment to ministry and an absolute dependence upon the power of the Spirit of God. There's an old saying that if you take care of the depth of your ministry, God will take care of the breadth of it. The Thessalonians were a living example of that. There obviously was a depth of ministry, a reality to ministry in that place that God used to spread all around the world at that time. And that's the kind of ministry that produces thanks to God because it's so obvious that He did it. People's lives were affected because the Holy Spirit was at work, not because they came to get an autographed mini helmet.

When I started off as a new pastor in a little church while I was still in seminary, one of the traditions of that church was once a year they had Bagel Sunday. This was their major outreach effort of the year. They canvassed the whole city inviting everybody, come to Bagel Sunday. Because we're going to have tons of bagels and we're going to have every kind of topping you can imagine. Come to Bagel Sunday. They thought that was huge. This was like a major outreach effort. When I got there they said, do you want to continue Bagel Sunday? I said, I have nothing against bagels, I like bagels, but how about if we invite people to come and partake of the bread of life? We're serving that up every single Sunday. It's the bread of life. And we can give them bagels too. But let's invite them to come and partake of the bread of life. That's what makes the difference, not a bagel. Let's follow the example of the ministry in Thessalonica. God's Spirit is pointing this church out and saying this is an exemplary church. Let's learn from them. That's the kind of church to be thankful for. Let's pray.