

Sermon: Work by faith, labour (service) by love and endurance by hope

[Psalm 40:1-5](#) and [1 Thessalonians 1:1-10](#)

There is more. If there is one point that I would like you to take away from this message is that there is more to this life here and now.

The Corona virus pandemic that has swept the world since the beginning of this year has shattered the world view of what has become the norm.

I can do what I want when I want. I can travel whenever and to wherever I want. I can't work from home. Digital learning won't work. I must be in face-to-face meetings otherwise, nothing gets done. The list goes on.

It is a time that has caused the world to hit the pause button and to re-consider priorities. What is there to hold onto that remains true in these turbulent times of lockdown and restrictions? Times that raise fear from physical, emotional, financial and mental pressures.

What happens to my faith journey? How am I to live?

I've always been encouraged when I read about the life of David. David the unsuspecting shepherd, who became king, who became the head of a mighty army and did great things for his country and for his God. But at the same time David erred in things he did, including adultery and murder. And yet David was described as a "man after God's own heart".¹

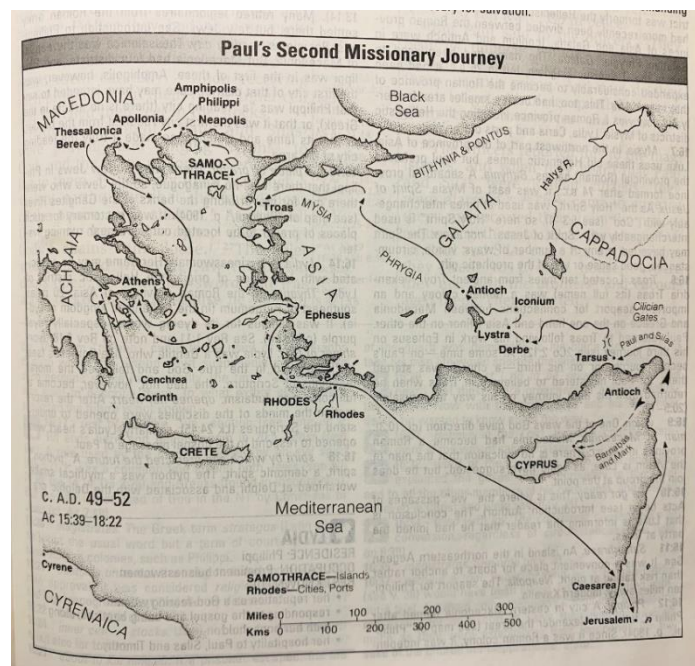
David repented fully as is reflected in Psalm 51, stating that he realised that he had sinned against God and against God alone. By grace forgiven and accepted.

Our first reading this morning was from Psalm 40 where David recounts how the Lord heard his cry, lifted him up, placed a song in his mouth and lets him tell that the wonders God has done, were too many to recount. And he wrote:

"Blessed is the one (man or woman) who trusts in the Lord, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods."

¹ The first time was by Samuel who anointed him as backslidden King Saul's successor, "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14, NKJV). The second time was by the Apostle Paul who recounted Israel's history, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will" (Ac. 13:22). For an article on this see: <https://mountaineagle.com/stories/was-david-really-a-man-after-gods-own-heart.24231>

Our second passage this morning is the first 10 verses of Paul's first letter to the believers in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas went there after they had been attacked and initially imprisoned in Philippi.² Although this appears as the 13th book in the New Testament it was the first letter that Paul wrote to believers at one of the churches established by him. He wrote this while in Corinth after spending time in Macedonia. Macedonia the northern portion of what is Greece today. The southern portion was known as Achaia. (U- kaai -ja). This was on Paul's second missionary journey.



Thessalonica was a bustling seaport and an important communication and trade centre. It had a population of some 200,000 people, making it the largest city in Macedonia. It was the capital of that province.³

There was a synagogue in Thessalonica, and Paul, as was his custom, went to the synagogue and "on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them the Scriptures."⁴ As a result of this preaching by Paul we read that "some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women."⁵

This was the founding of the church in Thessalonica. However, Paul and Silas were once again chased out of the town. A mob was formed and they rushed the house

² See [Acts 16:16-40](#)

³ Introduction to 1 Thessalonians-NIV Study Bible page 1821.

⁴ [Acts 17:1-2.](#)

⁵ [Acts 17:4](#)

of Jason, where Paul and Silas were staying. Jason was forced to guarantee a peaceful, quiet community or he would face the confiscation of his properties, and perhaps even death, so at nightfall, Paul and Silas left for Berea.

Paul knew that the believers in the new church would face trials and persecution and so he sent Timothy to strengthen, and to encourage, them. It was after Timothy returned that Paul wrote this first letter to the Thessalonians.

It is a letter giving thanks, encouragement and guidance to the believers in regard to daily living, service to others, and endurance because of the hope of Christ returning.

While the thrust of 1 Thessalonians is varied, each chapter ends with a repeated reference to the second coming of Christ.

Written in approximately 51 A.D. to those in Thessalonica - it is also a letter of encouragement and guidance for us today.

The letter comes from Paul, Silas and Timothy greeting the believers in the church of the Thessalonians with the words "Grace and peace to you."

And then Paul tells the believers that he, Silas and Timothy always thank God for the believers and mention them in their prayers.

It is clear that Paul is greatly encouraged by the news that he received from Timothy in regard to the church, and so he writes to encourage the believers to continue in their faith journey.

He starts by recording in verse three "We continually remember before our God and Father:

- Your work produced by faith;
- your labour prompted by love; and
- your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

And it is these three actions that I want us to have a look at this morning – both as they applied to the Thessalonians, and as they apply to us today. There is more.

Paul then says: "For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God that he has chosen you." And he goes on in verses 5-10 to explain why he makes this statement.

He starts off by saying that he makes this statement because “our gospel”⁶ came to these believers, “not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction”.

What Paul is saying is, is that their conversion came not through their deeds or what they did, but through the empowering of the Holy Spirit in accordance with God's will.

The Holy Spirit at work in those preaching and in the believers.

Then Paul says that the new believers welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit in spite of severe suffering at the hands of those against the message of the gospel.

In Acts we read that when the mob gathered to chase Paul out of Thessalonica they told the city officials that Paul, Silas and Timothy had caused trouble all over the world, and that they were “defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another King, one called Jesus.”⁷

Paul then writes that despite the severe suffering the believers became “imitators of us and of the Lord”. Paul urged them to follow his example as he followed the example of Christ.⁸ This required the new believers not only to believe the gospel, but to ensure that their lives reflected their conviction in, and acceptance of, the gospel message. Paul commends them because he sees that this was done and he has heard how others have been influenced by the lives of these new believers.

He points out that the believers in Thessalonica “became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia”.

The gospel now spread to other towns and regions, not because Paul, Silas and Timothy had been there, but because those living in these towns and regions heard about the believers in Thessalonica.

⁶ “Our gospel.” – The gospel preached by Paul, Silas and Timothy, and that they themselves had received by faith. It is first of all, God the Father's (1 Thessalonians 2:8) because he originated it, and Christ's (1 Thessalonians 3:2) because it springs from his atoning death. Footnote NIV Study Bible page 1823.

⁷ [Acts 17:5-9](#)

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:1 – “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

So often actions speak far louder than words. The reports that Paul has received show that the impact of the gospel on those new believers and the way they were living, was in this case the message itself.

And Paul says that it was not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but it was “everywhere” where their faith in God had become known.

They tell how the believers in Thessalonica turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

It is more likely that the Gentile converts would have been worshipping idols before rather than the Jewish converts. But what makes the impact on those hearing of these new believers is that their lives were changed. Where idols may have been worshipped before, they now tell that they are serving the living and true God.

And they tell that not only have they changed and are serving the living and true God, but they are waiting in real hope for Jesus to come again. Jesus, raised from the dead who will rescue them from the coming wrath.

This brings us back to the three points mentioned in verse 3.

“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The first point is work produced by faith. We have discussed before the fact that Paul is at pains in his writings to stress that we are saved by grace through faith alone and not through works or anything that we do.⁹

What then does Paul mean by referring to the work produced by the believers? Note that this statement is that the believers are remembered for the work produced by faith. He is referring here to what the believers undertake as a result of their faith. In

⁹ Ephesians 2:8. " 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God".

other words, what they undertake in faith and in response to the gospel message in response to what has been done for them and to what is to come.

Paul repeatedly points out that believers are not merely to sit back, because of their salvation on the basis that God will do all for them. In chapter 4. He writes: *"make it your ambition... to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders, and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."*¹⁰

We see this elsewhere as well. In 2 Thessalonians Paul warns against idleness. He reminds the believers that: *"We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary we worked night and day, labouring and toiling, so that we would not be a burden to any of you."* He points out that he did this as a model for the believers to follow and he goes on to urge those who are idle to settle down and to earn the bread they eat.¹¹

Paul is saying that what we do between the Sabbath days is important. We so easily divide our lives into the sacred-our Sunday worship, and the secular-everything else that we do. And this applies to all we do, whether a formal job, as a student, an informal job, raising a family, being a friend or what we do in retirement. A W Tozer wrote this:¹²

"It is not what a woman does that determines whether her work is sacred or secular; it is why she does it. The motive is everything. Let a woman sanctify the Lord God in her heart and she can thereafter do no common act."

"It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular; it is why he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no common act."

The second point is labour or service prompted by love.

Matthew records¹³ that when Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, he replied:

¹⁰ [2 Thessalonians 3:6-12](#)

¹¹ See: [2 Thessalonians 3:6-12](#), [Acts 20:33-35](#) and [1 Thessalonians 4:11-12](#)

¹²A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine.

¹³ [Matthew 22: 37-39](#)

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself."

The new commandment given by Jesus to his disciples, echoes this:

"34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."¹⁴

Paul commends those at Thessalonica for doing just this. And he encourages them to continue and to build on what they are already doing. In chapter 4 he writes this:

"9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,"

The fact that those in the church at Thessalonica had become followers of Christ was revealed to those around them by their actions, by the way they loved and cared for their fellow believers and their "neighbours" in their community.

The third point is that the believers were commended for their endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Endurance could be defined as "the ability to endure an unpleasant or difficult process or situation without giving way." What is important for us is that we are looking at faith, love and endurance, not just as general psychological or emotional forces.

"When Paul speaks of faith giving rise to work and love giving rise to labor and hope giving rise to endurance, he has in mind some very definite Christian, spiritual transactions between us and God — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."¹⁵

Verse 3 starts off with Paul, saying that they remember "before our God and Father your work... your labour... your endurance. This is faith, love and hope flowing from a relationship with God the Father.

Verse 3 ends with the words "... In our Lord Jesus Christ". This is faith, love and hope 'in our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹⁴¹⁴ [John 13: 34-35](#). See also Colossians 3:12-14: "12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

¹⁵ Extract from a sermon by John Piper: The Fruit of Hope: Endurance found here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-fruit-of-hope-endurance>

And then in verses 4 and 5 Paul says that it was clear that the gospel came to the believers with power through the Holy Spirit, who welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand that the hope referred to here that inspires endurance, perseverance, is not just wishful thinking, but is based on the firm confidence in Jesus and his return.¹⁶

Those at Thessalonica were sticking to their faith, notwithstanding the obstacles placed in their way and the persecution that they were suffering. And Paul commends them for this and encourages them to continue.

Paul is reminding these believers, as he reminds us, that our journey of faith is one that requires stamina and perseverance, despite what this life throws at us or the obstacles that are placed in our way.

Paul himself, is the epitome, of a Christ follower who continued with his faith journey despite immense obstacles and hardships.¹⁷

David lived in turbulent times. Paul lived in turbulent times. We live in turbulent times.

In the midst of unprecedented and rapid changes and challenges the gospel message remains unaltered and true.

When David's life was in turmoil God heard his cry and set his feet on a rock and gave him a firm place to stand.

He will do the same for us as we call out to Him and follow the example of the believers in Thessalonica. As we:

- carry out all we do fashioned by faith with thanks and in response to what has been done for us;
- serve others around us prompted by love; and
- we live with endurance, not with gritted teeth, but inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, risen and to come again.

Jesus said: I came so that you can have real and eternal life, more and better life than you ever dreamed of.¹⁸

There is more.

Gordon Hay - Trinity 18 October 2020

¹⁶ This is confirmed in verse 10: "they tell how you... Wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath." See also Hebrews 6:18-20 and Colossians 1:5.

¹⁷ [2 Corinthians 11:23-30](#)

¹⁸ John 10:10 from The Message.