

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5a

I'd like to start out our sermon this morning a little differently by asking you to open your hymnals to Hymn #405 ... Follow along with me as I read the 6 stanzas of this hymn. *“Oh, for a **faith** that will not **shrink** though pressed by many a foe, that will not **tremble** on the brink of poverty or woe; that will not **murmur** nor **complain** beneath the chast'ning rod, but in the hour of **grief** or **pain** can lean upon its **God**; a faith that shines more **bright** and **clear** when **tempests** rage without, that, when in **danger**, knows no **fear**, in **darkness** feels no **doubt**; that bears unmoved the world's dread **frown** nor heeds its **scornful** smile, that sin's wild ocean cannot **drown** nor Satan's arts **beguile**; a faith that keeps the **narrow** way till life's last spark is fled, and with a pure and heav'nly ray lights up the **dying** bed. Lord, **give** us such a faith as this, and then, whate'er may come, we'll taste e'en now the hallowed bliss of an **eternal home**.”* Wouldn't you like to have a faith like that - a faith which wouldn't **doubt** or **waver**? It sounds like wishful thinking, doesn't it? But it's **not** just wishful thinking. The Lord has **given us** such a faith as this - a faith that will not **shrink**, a faith that will not **murmur**, a faith that **shines**, and a faith that **endures**.

In regard to his faith, the Apostle Paul told the Romans, *“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Because of his **faith**, Paul was convinced that **nothing** could separate him from the love of God. And nothing can separate **us** from the love of God **either**, as long as we have faith in **Jesus**. So, **Thank God For Your Faith**. It is a faith which produces **works**, and it is a faith which has made us **brothers**.

Our sermon text today is the introductory portion of Paul's first letter to the **Thessalonians**. Who **were** these people? What were they **like**? How was Paul **acquainted** with them? Answering these questions will help us to understand why Paul wrote to them the way he did. The city of Thessalonica was located on a highly traveled **trade route**. It was a city of **commerce** - a **cosmopolitan** city which attracted people from all over, because there were many excellent opportunities for establishing successful **business**, and making lots of **money**.

Most people are **interested** in potentially “money making” employment and business opportunities. However, it should be clear to us that not **all** people are equally **successful** in such endeavors, and that has **always** been the case. It

appears that those who were having “a **rough** go of it” in Thessalonica were primarily the ones who were attracted to **Paul’s message**. There were some notable **exceptions**, including a man named **Jason**, who provided a place to stay for Paul, Silas, and Timothy; and there were also a rather large number of **prominent women**. Nevertheless, Paul established his own **tent** making business so as not to become a financial **burden** to the Thessalonians.

Unfortunately, Paul couldn’t **stay** for very long. He was only able to preach the Word of God to the Thessalonians for about **3 weeks**. At that time, a group of bad characters got together and stirred up **trouble** which forced Paul, Silas, and Timothy to **leave** the city. Paul was greatly concerned that the **shortness** of his stay, coupled with the **persecution** by these bad characters, might lead the Thessalonians to **fall away** from their newly acquired, Christian beliefs. Although Paul wanted to return to them **personally** in order to bring them encouragement, that was not possible. So, he did the next best thing. He sent **Timothy** to find out how things were going, and to **report back** to him.

Timothy’s report was a **good** one. The Thessalonians had **not** lost their faith. In fact, their faith was getting **stronger** daily. Paul was happy to hear that his worries had been in **vain**. He now realized that their faith did not hinge on **him**, or on how **long** or **short** he was able to preach to them, or on whether or not he could ever return to them in **person**. Their faith rested in the hands of **God** - in the miraculous working of the **Holy Spirit**. The faith of the Thessalonians was a **true** faith - a **saving** faith - a faith which recognized **Jesus Christ** as their Savior, and their Lord.

Paul presented the evidence that their faith was **true**, in that it was also **active** - producing **works**. Therefore, Paul gave thanks to the Lord writing, “*We continually remember before our God and Father your **work** produced by **faith**, your **labor** prompted by **love**, and your **endurance** inspired by **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.*” What exactly **was** this work which was produced by their faith? Paul goes on to say, “*You **turned to God** from idols, to serve the **living and true** God, and to wait for **His Son** from heaven, whom He **raised** from the dead - **Jesus**, who **rescues** us from the coming **wrath**.*” When the Thessalonians **turned away** from idols, and **served** the true God with their lives, **that** was the visible fruit of their **faith** in Jesus.

Where did the Thessalonians get the **courage** to stand up against God’s **foes**

who were (at least from a **human** standpoint) **wealthier** and more **influential**? Paul clearly states the answer, “*Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the **Holy Spirit**, and with **deep conviction**.*” I’d like to focus for a moment on the phrase “*with deep conviction*.” Did you ever notice that people **talk** about the things in which they deeply **believe**? They **also** talk about the things which **excite** them. I’m sure you could find any number of people around here who would be happy to talk about the Green Bay **Packers** anytime - even if they’re not off to such a great start!

Now, the question is, what excites **you**? What do **you** talk about? What do you deeply **believe** in? We’re not so **different** from anybody else. I dare say if people listened to most of our conversations they would get the impression that we have some very deep feelings about certain **sports teams**, or the changeability of our Wisconsin **weather**, or about the importance of **wages** and **vacations**. But I wonder how many of them would realize that our **deepest** feelings center around our **Savior**, Jesus Christ? How often do we readily **talk** about Him? Or what about some of those **other** things that are vitally important in our lives? How often do we talk about the **husband/wife** relationship with our spouse? How often do we talk about the importance of **family devotions**, and **prayer**, and **Bible reading**, and **Christian education**? Do you see what I’m saying? If we truly **believe** in these things, and we **do**, then those convictions must be more than **unspoken** beliefs - they are things we need to freely **express** and **talk about**.

One way we can **do** that is through our **worship**. The word worship is derived from an old English word “**worthship**.” In other words, the way in which we choose to **worship** God, is an expression of how much **God** and His **blessings** are **worth** to us! If you’ve never thought about worship that way **before**, then maybe it’s time you do so **now**. How much is God **worth** to us? Is He worth an **hour** or **two** every Sunday morning? Is He worth an extra **percent** or **two** of our income? Is He worth a little more **time** each week for **devotions**, **Bible study**, and **prayer**? Is He worth the **best** of our time, talents, and treasure? He was to the **Thessalonians**. They endured many **hardships** and **persecutions** - they made many **sacrifices** - all because of the **faith** which God had given to them. The faith which God has given to us is equally as **strong**, and it will continue to get **stronger** too, as we diligently focus our attention on hearing **God’s Word**, and receiving His **sacraments**. **Thank God For Your Faith**. Thank Him by making your faith an **active** one.

But Paul also points to the **ultimate** reason to **Thank God For Your Faith** - namely, our eternal **election**. He writes, "*Brothers, loved by God, we know that He has **chosen** you.*" The phrase "*chosen by God*" reminds us of our **baptism**, and the **power** which is found in that sacrament. In baptism, the Holy Spirit works a **miracle**. He takes a child who by nature was conceived and born in **sin**, who **hates** God, and who has no inclination whatsoever of getting **closer** to God; and through **water** combined with **God's Word**, He gives that child a saving **faith**.

That faith has made us all **brothers** - members of one **family** - members of **God's** family - people who are **loved** by Him. God has **shown** His love for us in **innumerable** ways: giving us our **life itself**, our **time**, our **possessions**, our **families**, our **friends**, our **children**, our **health** - providing us with all our **needs** in this life - **redeeming** us from the power of sin and Satan - giving us our **faith**, and keeping that faith **strong**, so that we can inherit **eternal life**. As family members we join together and unite around our **faith**, to help each other overcome our **problems** and **weaknesses**, and to encourage each other in making the most of our God-given **talents** and **abilities**.

My friends, it's **hard** to believe, and it's **impossible** to understand, but God has **chosen us**. Out of all the sinners in the world, He has chosen **us** to receive His **grace** and **peace**. That is the **ultimate** reason to **Thank God For Your Faith**. Thank Him by making Him the **Lord** of your worship - both **in** church and **out** of church. After all, God is **worth** it. Amen.