

Thanks for the Church

I Thessalonians 1:1-4

Followers of the Lord

I Thessalonians 1:6-8

Entrusted with the Gospel

I Thessalonians 2:3, 4

Receiving the Word of God

I Thessalonians 2:13

God's Saints:

The Crown of Rejoicing

I Thessalonians 2:19, 20



Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Pastor of Pittsburgh

Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, PA

October 1, 2017 — No. 3900

October 29, 2017 — No. 3904

Reformed Witness Hour

(www.reformedwitnesshour.org)

Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KARI	Blaine, WA.....	550AM.....	8:00 P.M./Sunday
WPFM	Carlisle, PA.....	91.3FM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WYLL	Chicago, IL.....	1160AM.....	4:00 P.M./Sunday
KLTT	Denver, CO.....	670AM.....	1:30 P.M./Sunday
WFDL	Fond Du Lac, WI.....	1170AM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI.....	102.9FM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI.....	1570AM, 92.9FM ...	4:00 P.M./Sunday
Adonai	Islip, NY.....	540FM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
KGCE-LP	Modesto, CA.....	107.9FM.....	6:30 A.M./Sunday 12:30P.M./Sunday 2:00A.M./Monday
KTAC	Moses Lake, WA.....	93.9FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KCWN	Pella, IA.....	99.9FM.....	3:30 P.M./Sunday
KLOH	Pipestone, MN.....	1050AM.....	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WORD	Pittsburgh, PA.....	101.5FM.....	10:00 A.M./Sunday
KPRO	Riverside, CA.....	1570AM.....	11:30 A.M./Sunday
KDCR	Sioux Center, IA.....	88.5FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTRW	Spokane, WA.....	630AM.....	9:30 A.M./Sunday
KSPO	Spokane, WA.....	106.5FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KGDN	Tri-Cities Walla Walla, OR.....	101.3FM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTBI	Wenatchee/Moses Lake, WA.....	810AM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KYAK	Yakima, WA.....	930AM.....	5:00 P.M./Sunday
UK			
GOSPEL	Northern Ireland.....	846AM.....	8:30 A.M./Sunday
Canada			
CKNX	Wingham, ON.....	920 AM.....	7:00 A.M./Sunday

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 1, 2017
No. 3900

Thanks for the Church
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Christian greetings to you, the friends of the RWH. It is good to be with you again for the next several months sharing the Word of God. During the time I am with you, I've chosen to speak on a number of verses out of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. We begin with the first four verses of this epistle, in which Paul sends his greetings to this church. They read:

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

Through Paul's faithful labors during his second mission

journey, God planted a church in the city of Thessalonica. This city was an important seaport located on the Aegean Sea in the large region of Greece known as Macedonia. Paul had already labored in the neighboring city of Philippi establishing a church there. He now set his sights on Thessalonica because of its size and influence. After preaching three weeks in the synagogue there, Paul persuaded a few Jews of the gospel. But during this time mainly proselytes and a large number of Greeks were brought to faith. Paul had labored in this city for several months when the unbelieving Jews gathered together a mob of low life (or lewd) fellows to set the city in an uproar. This mob attacked the house of Jason, where Paul was staying, but Paul and Silas, being warned earlier, had escaped the city by night.

Paul labored for a short time in a small nearby city named Berea, but was again forced to leave and flee for his life to Athens. From Athens Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to minister to the saints in need there. Evidently, the few saints

in Thessalonica were suffering persecution for the sake of Christ. While Timothy returned to Thessalonica, Paul sailed to Corinth. Both of Paul's letters to the Thessalonian church were written while he labored in Corinth.

From verse 1 we learn Paul writes this letter on behalf of himself, Silvanus (which is another name for Silas), and Timothy. In the letter, the apostle Paul encourages and instructs these saints concerning their life and work in Thessalonica. As I mentioned, in the next several weeks we want to consider this first letter of Paul to the church there. It has many practical things to say to the church today. That begins already with the words of greeting we have before us. Already we find here a deep love for the church that ought to characterize every believer.

THANKS FOR THE CHURCH

I. *The Elect Church*

The opening verses of this letter may seem at first glance to be no more than a simple greeting. Paul addresses the church of Thessalonica on behalf of himself, Silas, and Timothy. He pronounces a blessing on the church, and then moves along. But this greeting contains a very plain and simple truth. That truth centers in

the term "church" itself. We do well to consider that truth in order that we may the more deeply appreciate membership in the church. You see, the term "church" means literally "called out." When used in the secular sense, this term denotes the calling out of the citizens of a kingdom into an assembly in order to conduct the affairs of state. Paul uses this term, however, in a highly spiritual sense. He uses it to describe the calling God's elect people receive from God by which they are called *out of* this world of darkness, and by which they are called *into* the assembly of the citizens of God's kingdom. Let's reflect on that a moment, because that has much to do with you and me, personally. Those who are members of the body of Christ in this world have been called. God powerfully and effectually called them.

Again, we must understand fully the common plight of all mankind due to the fall of our first parents in Paradise. It was then that the whole human race was plunged into the captivity and guilt of sin. As comprehended in Adam our head, all the world has become guilty before God and therefore stands under one common condemnation. All are worthy of death. As children of our father Adam the whole human race, every child born into this world, is conceived and born in sin and trespasses. We

will be the completion of Christ's labors to build His church. The day of judgment will be a glorious day for all those who labored to that end.

III. *The Reward*

It is then that God's servants will be openly rewarded for their labors. They will receive the crown: the ornament of honor—the prize that a man receives at the end of the race when the victory is won. This crown will be the crown of rejoicing, that is, the crown of boasting, the crown of glorying. That crown of boasting will be granted God's ambassadors. Of course, this does not mean any preacher can boast in himself. This crown of glorying or of rejoicing is not a glory found in the preacher himself. The preacher does not save. It is *the Word of God* He preaches that works effectually in the hearts of God's people. The rejoicing of which Paul speaks here is a rejoicing or a boasting found in another. The preacher may receive the crown, but the boasting, the glorying, is in the one who blessed the preacher's labors. It is in Jesus Christ alone! We preach and God gives the increase through the Spirit of the risen Lord. All boasting,

all honoring, all praising belongs to God and to the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb to receive all these things.

But that does not diminish the beauty of the crown that those who labor in the gospel will receive. They will indeed receive their reward. God will say unto them, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of my rest!" Now you understand why the faithful preacher labors the way he does. His reward awaits him in the day of days. If he builds on the foundation of the church hay and stubble, he shall receive his reward. If he builds upon it gold and silver he shall receive his reward too. Woe to that preacher who sees his labors as nothing more than a monotonous and drab work. But blessed is that man who labors with zeal and enthusiasm. When this happens, the reward in this life is that a pastor and his congregation rely on each other. There is a bond of love that develops there that is hard to break. God bless His church in this way. May all who faithfully attend to the church and her preaching someday stand in the presence of Christ together as a living testimony of God's power in the preaching.

same time, Christ will send forth His angels to gather His elect saints from the four corners of the earth. These will meet with those who are resurrected. After this, everyone will stand in the presence of Christ. Where? In judgment. The saints will be present in judgment in that day of our Lord. The saints of God from all ages and from every nation, tribe, and language of this world will be there! A multitude that cannot be numbered, great and glorious in her beauty—the royal bride of Christ. This is why God's saints are the crown of rejoicing. God's ambassadors labor in the Word of God with this hope, that in the day of days when they stand before God and must give account of all their labors, the very fruit of their labors will be standing there with them! How beautiful! Heartwarming! Those to whom was administered the gospel will be standing side by side with those who labor in the gospel! When the officebearers are called upon to give account of themselves before God, God's saints will be there too as a living testimony of the labors ministers and elders have performed in the church. That too is why you are their joy. God's saints give the greatest joy to

those who labor in the Word and gospel—the greatest of all joy! When those who labor in the gospel know that God's saints will stand with them in the end of time, they labor now joyfully, cheerfully, with enthusiasm and zeal.

Further, God's people are the crown of rejoicing of those who labor in the gospel. They are

*When those who labor in the gospel
know that God's saints will stand
with them in the end of time,
they labor now joyfully, cheerfully,
with enthusiasm and zeal.*

their glory. God's saints are the honor, the praise, the excellence of those who labor in

the gospel. When the preacher stands in judgment before Christ, it will not be his earthly popularity that will be to his praise. Christ will not be interested in how large a congregation a man had in this life, or how well liked he was in this world. All worldly fame and fortune will perish when a man dies. These things do not impress Christ. What will praise a man is when Christ will look upon the excellence of a man's labors in the faces of God's saints who stand with him in glory among whom he labored in this life. This will be to his praise and glory. These saints will honor those who labored on their spiritual behalf. No wonder the preacher's calling is a high and lofty one. The last day, when Christ comes again,

are in bondage to sin and Satan. Unbelief has blinded our eyes. Fallen man hates God, refuses to believe on Jesus Christ, and tramples underfoot the ten commandments of our God. Into this world of darkness and unbelief everyone is born. No one escapes this condemnation. No one escapes the total corruption of sin. But by God's grace some were given by God to hear a call. It was the call of God. Oh, it is a call that more than definitely goes out into all the world. It is a call that is sent forth through all the nations commanding all men to turn from sin and unbelief and unto the living God. That call of God goes out in the preaching of the gospel. When the Scriptures are proclaimed in all their purity, then God is calling. And that objective call of God goes out to all who hear that preaching. That call says to everyone who hears: "repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved!"

Now, obviously that call is not an offer, that is, a well-meant offer on the part of God asking men to believe. It does not express a desire on the part of God to save every man. It does not place salvation into the hands of man. That call is the command of God to repent and believe. It is the demand that God places before the hearts of all men in order that no one who hears the preaching has an excuse not to believe. But that call of God in

the preaching goes out to accomplish one design and purpose of God: the salvation of His people. That objective call of God is accompanied by the internal call of God by His Spirit in the hearts of some. That is why we can say the call of God is powerful and effectual—it accomplishes that for which God intends it. When the call of God goes out, there are certain people in whom God works by His Spirit. These hear that command of the gospel and they are moved by God's grace to faith and repentance. This all-powerful call of God through the gospel is what saves us, and by means of that salvation we are grafted into the church of Jesus Christ in this world.

God has called us, first of all, *out of* this world of darkness and unbelief. That was not by any act of ours. We were lost—totally lost in the corruption of sin. But God called us out of that darkness of unbelief. By God's grace He has made us to see our sin and our need for the cross of Jesus Christ. He removed from us the blindness of unbelief and forgave us the guilt of our sin. He called us out of this wicked world. And He called us *into* the assembly of the church, the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. This is what Paul writes concerning the Thessalonian church in verse one of our text. Notice: "unto the church of the Thessalonians *in* God the Father, and *in* the

Lord Jesus Christ." God's people are called out of sin in order to be in Christ and in God. That is a unique privilege that God gives only to a few out of this world of sin and darkness. To these few God gives the blessing of being one with Him and His Son, standing together in this world as one body—the body of Christ. Christ the head, we His members receiving all the benefits and blessings of salvation that are found in Jesus Christ alone. We are those who belong to that assembly of God's people. We have been called unto faith and life. We have received the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the corruption of this world, and the promise of life eternal. We belong to God's covenant, that is, we are made to share in the blessing of His fellowship and favor.

Now, all this is the greatest reason for us to give thanks to God for what He has done in our lives. What a unique privilege is ours to belong to the church—to this assembly of God's people in this world! It ought to make us look at membership in the church with great gratitude! God has placed us here! And He has done so on the basis of election! On the basis of election we have been called out of this world. Paul writes, "We give thanks to God always for you" (then skip to v. 4) "knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." God did not call His

people out of this world of darkness because they deserved it any more than anyone else. Not at all! Believers are not members of Christ's church because they had something special in them by which they were able to accept some offered salvation by God. Then they would have earned their place in Christ's church. Believers are members of Christ's church because God has sovereignly chosen them to be a people unto Himself. From all eternity God chose a people unto Himself—before time began. They are numbered among the assembly of the elect in life eternal. That number of elect God has been calling out of this world since time began, and will until all the elect are gathered in. The church, then, is made up of the elect of God whom He calls to be a part of His visible church and kingdom in this world.

By the way, take note that the apostle Paul addresses the *entire Thessalonian congregation* as the elect, brethren beloved of God. In this letter Paul does not divide the congregation in two between elect and reprobate and then say, "I am writing this letter only to those of you in the congregation who are elect." No, no. Paul addresses this congregation in Thessalonica as a whole, as a body, organically. He is fully aware that they are not all Israel that are of Israel. There are verses in these two

labor to lead, guide, admonish, and instruct the saints—those for whom Christ gave His life's blood. That is our joy. On the other hand, we as saints in the church also have great reason for rejoicing. We are those whom God loves and cherishes. We are the reason God has ordained men into the work of the gospel ministry in the church. We are of such extreme value to our heavenly Father that He ordains men that will care for our souls. What a blessed truth we who are members of the church in this world have! What a wonderful way to view the church and the work of the ministry in the church! If only we could always keep that viewpoint before us!

II. The Reason

Now, the question still remains, of course: why? Why are God's saints the hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing of those who labor in the gospel? Why do ministers and elders wait for, long for, hope for the saints? Why do ministers have such great delight, such joy in the saints? And why are the saints the crown, the winning prize, in which ministers of the gospel find their glory or boast? The Word of God in our text answers these questions by placing before us another question: "are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" That is the answer to

the question "Why?" The saints are the minister's hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing because they are in the presence of Christ at His coming. This is where Paul begins, in this letter to the Thessalonians, instruction in the *parousia*, that is, the second coming of Christ. It is only mentioned here briefly, but already we receive instruction concerning Christ's second coming. First of all, we are taught that Christ does indeed return. He is coming again. He has already come in His advent, in His birth. But He is coming again. At present Christ is in heaven. He went there in His ascension. But Christ is returning. Notice that we speak of Christ's coming in the present tense. Not in the future. The Word of God does not speak of Christ's coming as merely a future event. We as God's saints *are* in the presence of Christ's coming. Christ comes, and already now God's saints are numbered according to God's sovereign purpose and good pleasure among the assembly of the elect that will stand in Christ's presence upon His return.

That is the second fact of Christ's return of which we learn here in these verses: we will *all* stand in Christ's presence when He returns. When Christ returns on the clouds of glory He is going to call aloud to the dead who will then be raised in the final resurrection. At the

crown of rejoicing, but *who* is our hope and joy and glory? Verse 20: "For *you* are our glory and joy!" You who are committed members of the church of Jesus Christ, you yourselves are the glory and joy of those who labor in the gospel! You are! The Word of God before us today implies that we must be members of the church as it is manifest in the world today in the church institute. Of course it does! A minister of the gospel and elders in the church do not take joy in a people who do not belong to their church! Paul speaks specifically to the members of the church institute established in the city of Thessalonica. You, members of the church, *you* are our glory and joy! It is not what you *give* to the preacher, it is not what the preacher gains by having you as members of the church. You *personally* are the joy and glory of those who labor in the ministry. And that joy is found in your very salvation. Paul adds in verse 19, "you are our hope." This means that God's saints in the church are the expectation of the those who labor in the gospel; they are that upon which the preachers of

the gospel wait anxiously. The ministers of the gospel find their joy, their blessedness, their happiness, not in external things, but in the lives of the saints. The saints are their crown of rejoicing. *They themselves* are the prize of honor in which those who labor in the gospel find their glorying. Every faithful preacher of the gospel and every elder that labors in the church can and should say that of the saints among whom they labor in their churches.

Let us take a moment to remind ourselves of this blessed truth. Pastors and elders do well to remind themselves repeatedly of this Word of God. All our labors on behalf of the church—all of them, without exception—

*It is not what you give
to the preacher, it is not what
the preacher gains
by having you as members
of the church.
You personally are the joy
and glory of those who labor
in the ministry.*

must be for the saints. We may not labor for any other reason. We do not hold office in the church because we like the power and prestige it gives us. When we receive a call as a minister or when we are elected as officebearers it is not a popularity contest! When we labor in the church it is not in order to get people to like us and boast in us. We labor in the church for the benefit of the souls of God's people. We

letters that indicate that Paul is aware that there are unbelievers in this congregation too. Nevertheless, Paul speaks to this elect body of Jesus Christ, and he calls them brethren, beloved of God. So must every preacher address his congregation.

II. *Unceasing Thankfulness*

But there is more for which Paul gave thanks to God as regards the Thessalonian church. There are three things mentioned in verse 3 that Paul remembers and for which he gives thanks: her work of faith, her labor of love, and her patience of hope. Three beautiful phrases that describe the life of this congregation.

There will be sins and weaknesses that Paul addresses in this letter to the church. But he wants this congregation to know immediately that there are definitely commendable qualities about her as a congregation. There is, first of all, her work of faith. The term "work" here refers to toil, hard labor. The term calls to mind one who sweats and strains to accomplish his task. This labor or work of the Thessalonians, however, was a labor of *faith*, i.e., a steady, strenuous labor in the *gospel*—the truth as she was given it. In other words, this congregation was busy in her witness of the faith given her by

Paul. Her members labored in the gospel, by witnessing to others, speaking of the wonderful truths of salvation. The elders fought to maintain the faith in spite of those who opposed. This church labored with the zeal of those who were recently converted.

But there were not-so-pleasant consequences to her toil of love—the saints were persecuted for their faith. And for that reason, Paul commends this congregation for her labor of love as well. Literally, this phrase should read, "your weariness of love." Unceasingly these saints labored in this city. Repeatedly they met with mockery and opposition. So much so that the saints had grown weary. Yet, they had continued. Why? Because they loved the gospel! They loved God, they loved His Son who had died to deliver them from sin. They loved the church of which they were a member. Because of this love they labored though often weary with their struggles.

For this reason, too, Paul adds the third phrase: "patience of hope." "Patience" here means "endurance" or "perseverance." And the idea expressed here is: the saints were enduring all things because of the hope that was in them. Paul had preached to them of the second coming of Jesus Christ. He had warned them that Christ was coming

soon. And in that hope, they waited for and longed for the coming of Christ. That was their hope. And in that hope, they endured, they were patient and bore the afflictions that came upon them for the gospel's sake. So, Paul commends them for all this.

Then Paul gives these saints the greatest encouragement when in verse 2 he writes that he, Silas, and Timothy thank God for them, making mention of them every time they pray. Notice how often this thanks is given: "always" and "without ceasing." Paul remembers unceasingly the labors of this church, he knows her election, and for this reason he constantly gives thanks to God for her in his prayers. Paul recognizes the work of God in the midst of His people in this congregation. He thanks God—not this church, mind you, but God—for what God works through her members. That is the thanks Paul brings—not because this congregation is performing work above her duty to perform. He gives God thanks exactly because she was doing the work of those who are called out.

Two questions arise in this connection. First, do the works of the Thessalonian church characterize us in the churches where we are members? As we said, her work was not a unique labor. It was exactly the labor

the church is called to do. It was done by her members with zeal and diligence. Does that same zeal characterize us? Will we as individual members of the church be remembered for our work of faith? Not only the elders and minister—although they too must be zealous in their labors in the gospel. But are we as members zealous in those labors? Do we live a godly life and then speak to those who are about us of the salvation we have received in Christ? Do we wear our faith for others to see it? Are we willing as saints in the church of Thessalonica to suffer mockery and opposition because of our deep love for the gospel? How much do we love the truth the church of Christ is called to maintain? How much do we love our place in the church? And then too, how patient are we in hope? Do we look for and long for the coming of Jesus Christ? If all these things characterize us, then there is reason to rejoice, because we are living, vibrant members of the church! But to the degree that these lack in the church, and in our lives, to that same degree there is reason for sadness. Certainly, then, we would not be thankful before God. Let the labors of the Thessalonian church characterize us, fellow believers.

That brings us to a second question: how committed are we to the church of Jesus Christ? Do we join that church that

and was risen again to break the power and dominion of sin in our lives, to make us holy before God. This work that Christ has performed for His people makes sinners saints. Being cleansed in the blood of Christ they are righteous and holy. Paul then calls our attention to another name of Jesus, that is, Christ. This name refers to the manner Christ has performed our salvation and deliverance from sin, that is, as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Christ was ordained and anointed to this threefold office. Through His work as our divine officebearer Christ has sacrificed Himself for us, works in us by His Holy Spirit that we might know the things of the kingdom of heaven, and reigns in us that we might live a life of godliness. God's people as a result of this threefold labor of Christ have become saints, a holy and peculiar people who are set apart from the world and are consecrated unto the service of their Lord. Their Lord. This third name of our Savior speaks of Christ's rule and headship in the lives of His people. He is Master, we are His servants to do His will. As Christ rules in God's people they live a life of servitude to God and His commandments. They live a life of thankfulness. That then is the one group to which our text refers.

As we mentioned in previous broadcasts, the other group

of men alluded to in our text is that of the preachers of the gospel. This group included Paul, Silas, and Timothy. This group includes every faithful preacher of the gospel today. We might add additional men to this group, the elders of the church, those who have rule and oversight of the church. These men, when they labor in the office of elder, concern themselves with the preaching of the gospel too. They are extremely interested in the spiritual welfare of the church, because they are called to take oversight of the preaching. So we include as well those who busy themselves in the preaching of the Word. These constitute the second group of people to which this Word of God refers.

Now, let us ask the question of us today: "What is the hope, the joy, and the crown of rejoicing of those who are called to labor in the preaching of the gospel?" Is it prominence, power, influence in this present world and society? Is that the minister's hope, joy, and glory? Is it? Is that what Paul and his colleagues boasted in? Is it earthly riches, or the fact that the preacher was able through his ministry to amass to himself the goods and the security of this present life? Was that Paul's joy in the work of the ministry? What is the answer Paul gives to this question in verse 19? This: it is not *what* is our hope, joy, and

or accusations of these unbelievers. They might say that Paul had come to Thessalonica to gain to himself a following for the sake of power or money, for some selfish reason, and when the pressure was on, he ran away and was no longer interested in this church in Thessalonica. Paul meets such accusations head on. First, he tells the saints that it was his earnest desire to return to Thessalonica, but he could not, since Satan hindered him. Second, he tells the saints in the verses we consider today that he indeed looked for gain in his labors, but the gain he sought was the Thessalonian saints themselves! *They* are his joy and boast. We are going to contemplate that beautiful claim of Paul today: the bond of love that exists between a minister of the gospel and the members of his church.

GOD'S SAINTS: THE CROWN OF REJOICING

I. *The Meaning*

There are two groups of people referred to in this Word of God before us. The first is the "our" mentioned at the outset in our text: "For what is *our* hope or joy?" This group includes Paul himself. The other group is the "ye" he mentions in the next phrase of our text: "Are not even *ye* in the presence of our Lord." It's not hard to ascertain who these groups

were. The "our" refers to Paul, Silas, and Timothy: those who preached in Thessalonica. The "ye" refers to the saints in the church institute established in Thessalonica. This is obvious enough. But we are interested in examining these members of the church from the viewpoint of the verses we consider. Paul writes this concerning the members of the church in Thessalonica: are not you in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? It is important for the proper interpretation of this phrase to understand that these saints would not stand as condemned in the presence of Christ when He returns. The members of the church of Jesus Christ belong to their faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has accomplished their salvation. They are in the presence of Christ at His second coming as the redeemed of God. This is evident in the three names Paul uses here: Lord, Jesus, and Christ. These are Christ's chief names. These names of our Savior reveal to us the work Christ has performed for His people, who will stand in His presence at His coming.

The name Jesus refers to salvation and deliverance from sin in general. The angel told Joseph that he must name Mary's son Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to take away the guilt of sin and make us righteous. He has died

exhibits the marks of the true church of Christ? Then are we good, faithful members of that church? Whereas the Thessalonian saints joined the church out of faith and a zeal for the gospel, today many are leaving the church as if membership in the church is not necessary. We will never be able to thank God for the church if we are not committed members of the church. God's saints have been called out of the world of darkness and into the church of Jesus Christ. Paul addresses the members of the church in Thessalonica as "brethren, beloved of God." These members were united to Christ by a true and living faith. They were God's elect, His chosen ones. They were in God the Father and in His Son. That says everything about the need to be members of a faithful church of Christ in this world. Then we have reason to give God thanks!

So, we ask ourselves the question: how thankful am I for the church? We must always, unceasingly in our prayers remember the church where God has chosen to place us. And when we pray we must ask God for thankful hearts.

III. *A Pronounced Blessing*

As is always the case, Paul begins his letters by pronouncing a blessing on the church. He

does in the verse we consider too. But that blessing would not be given to an unfaithful church with spiritually lazy and lethargic members. It is pronounced on the church that is zealous for the truth of God's Word and therefore for the cause of Christ in this world. The Thessalonian church received it. "Grace be unto you and peace, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." What a beautiful blessing to hear from God's ambassador each Sunday when he addresses his congregation. This is a sincere and fervent request that God's grace, favor, and blessing, and God's peace, the calm reassurance of heart and soul, be upon us as God's people. It is only then that we are truly blessed and happy.

But not only is this a desire of the ambassador who pronounces the blessing. When such a blessing is given to the faithful church by the mouth of her ambassador, then that church is truly blessed with God's grace and peace. And that in the way of her faithfulness. We hear God's blessing on us. May that blessing of God incite us to greater thanks for our election and salvation. And may this, in turn, incite us to give thanks for the church.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 8, 2017
No. 3901

Followers of the Lord
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Did you ever wonder how the Christian faith spread so rapidly through the heathen nations of the world? By the completion of Paul's life and labors, around 40 years after Pentecost, the gospel had spread from Jerusalem as far west as Rome. Probably even farther than this. Of course, we can ascribe this to the power of the gospel itself. God was behind the spread of salvation to all lands and peoples. He still is today. We can also say that the spread of the gospel can be attributed to the fearless preachers of the gospel sent forth by the early church expressly for this task. But there was more than this. The Bible makes clear that the gospel spread so rapidly also because of the faithful witness of God's people in their lives. The passage before us today is a clear testimony to this fact: I Thessalonians 1:6-8, "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 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." This is the way the truth concerning Christ and salvation spread so quickly where it did. That ought clearly to teach us our calling today as members of the church of Jesus Christ.

We considered this briefly in our last broadcast. Already in the greeting of this chapter Paul expressed great thankfulness for the labor of this congregation. That labor was "a work of faith, a labor of love, and a patience of hope." We mentioned that all this referred to the Thessalonians' witness in the city where she was located. What we consider today, then, is an amplification of what we touched upon in our last broadcast. Today, however, we will also discover just what it was that sounded out. We will consider the faith of these saints—the faith that made them followers of Christ.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 29, 2017
No. 3904

God's Saints: The Crown of Rejoicing
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Every minister of the gospel and every saint ought to take time to study and contemplate the Word of God in the verses we consider today. In I Thessalonians 2:19, 20 we read, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." This Word of God expresses something very beautiful: the bond that unites preacher and his congregation in love. In our series of sermons on Thessalonians we have already considered the calling that is laid upon the shoulders of the minister to preach. Having been put in trust with the gospel, the minister must preach it without deceit, uncleanness, or guile. He must seek to please God and not men with the Word he proclaims. We also considered the calling of the members of the church toward faithful preaching. The saints in Thessalonica received the preaching of the gospel not as the word of men, but as the Word of God itself. This Word of God is powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, and it works effectually

in the hearts of God's people. This is the way, then, that God's people must view the preaching. If all of this is true of both the minister and his congregation, then it follows, does it not, that a blessed and close relationship will develop between pastor and church.

That is what happened in the short time Paul had labored in Thessalonica. "Ye are our glory and joy!" is what Paul wrote of this church. What a beautiful claim for a preacher to make with respect to his church and congregation! Yet, there was something else that no doubt prompted this claim. Paul points out in this chapter that this Gentile church in Thessalonica followed in the footsteps of the churches in Judea. This Gentile church was suffering by the hands of their fellow countrymen as did the Christian churches in Judea by the hands of their fellow Jews. Paul then explains that these unbelieving Gentiles who had forced him to leave did not please God and were contrary to all men. The implication in these verses is that the saints in Thessalonica ought not to listen to the taunts

we can ignore or wave off the preaching as unnecessary and foolish. In other words, if we view the preaching in a carnal way, then the preaching of the gospel does not work effectually in our hearts confirming and strengthening our faith. On the contrary, the preaching hardens us, makes us indifferent to the things of the kingdom of heaven. But if we, like the Thessalonian believers, by God's grace receive the preaching as the Word of God, then we will drink in every word of the preaching. We dare not ignore the preaching, since it is God speaking to us. How do you view the preaching of the gospel? It has everything to do with this: those who believe hear and are blessed, those who do not believe stumble at the Word. Do you believe or stumble when the Word of God is preached to you?

III. God's Word Honored

Paul gives God thanks for the way these saints received the preaching of the Word. We give God thanks too when the preaching of the gospel is received in this way. It is striking, though, that Paul gives *God* the thanks. We ought to take note of that. If

it truly was the Thessalonians that themselves first accepted the gospel before God actually saved them, then Paul would have to thank the Thessalonian believers. Paul does not do that. Paul does not say: Thank you, beloved saints in Thessalonica, for receiving the Word from me. I am extremely grateful to you that you chose Christ and listened to me. Paul does not say that. Never does the Word of God thank men for their salvation.

Paul thanks God, unceasingly, that is, without stopping, for God's great grace and mercy He has shown to His people in Christ. God brings to faith and repentance. God gives, God works, and as a result we believe. We too thank God that He has wrought so great a salvation in us. How can we begin to show our gratitude to Him? Well, there is one way, people of God, one way among many. We can begin unceasingly to thank God for giving us the preaching of the gospel.

We can begin to do this by receiving the preaching not as the word of men, but the Word of God.

FOLLOWERS OF THE LORD

I. God-Ward Faith

What was it that these saints in Thessalonica sounded out to the world? Of what were they such good examples? What was it that was spread abroad to all Macedonia and Achaia? The answer is found basically in the last part of verse 8 of our text: "but also in every place," Paul writes, "your faith to God-ward is spread abroad." *Their faith to God-ward* was that which was spread abroad. This phrase makes it very clear what characterized the Thessalonian saints: their faith.

That concept, and everything it entails, stands on the foreground in the Word of God we hear today. Ah yes, faith—a beautiful gift of God bestowed on His people! Too bad the idea or meaning of this gift is mutilated and destroyed by so many today! Because faith is an activity of the child of God, that is, something in which he is active, something he does, many want to define it as a power natural to man—an ability man has in himself. There is no doubt that faith entails actively embracing the cross, consciously taking Jesus to ourselves and confessing that we want Jesus in our lives. And that faith is on the foreground here in our text too. Yet, it is not at all in keeping with Scripture to make of this faith a natural

capability that every man has to accept Christ. By saying to fallen, depraved man, "Christ loves you and wants to save you, but you must believe (have faith in Him) first before He can save you," is a terrible error. This would mean that every person has the natural ability in himself to lay hold on Christ and salvation. It is not really all that difficult, therefore, to do this either. All one must do is surrender himself to Christ, and then Christ will save him. That conscious surrender to Christ by which the sinner lets Christ into his heart so that Christ might now work in him is what many call "faith." This error is not taught in Scripture. In fact, Scripture condemns this error. Yet it is this error that is behind almost every major religious movement of today: fallen man apart from Christ is *not* totally depraved, but has a free will that makes him capable of accepting or rejecting Christ and the salvation that Christ wants to give to everyone.

This is the faith, the free-will error would claim, that the saints in Thessalonica were exhibiting. That the saints in Thessalonica were exhibiting faith, the conscious embracing of Christ and salvation, we will not deny. But we will deny that this faith is a natural ability every man has in himself by which he can of his own will and power take to himself Christ and sal-

vation. We definitely will deny that. And we will do so because this denies the fundamental teaching of Scripture concerning faith: Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Faith is the gift that God bestows on His people at the moment they are saved. This is not something they have before their salvation. Faith is not a natural ability on the part of totally depraved man. It is a gift that God bestows upon His children only after Christ saves them. You see, faith is a powerful force in the child of God. When God saves one of His children, then He takes hold of that person and powerfully and miraculously joins him to Christ. He roots that person in Christ, so that the life of the Savior flows into him and makes him alive too. It is at that moment that the child of God is given (faith is a *gift*, remember) by God the ability to see and know the things of the kingdom of heaven. Whereas before this point in life he was blinded in heart and soul and understanding, now there is in him a certain God-given ability to discern and understand spiritual things. Once having that power of faith worked in his heart, the saved child of God turns to Christ and consciously embraces Him, he takes Christ as his own, and he confesses that he wants Christ and salvation. That conscious

knowledge and confidence of faith, that activity of faith, is what is on the foreground in our text. Paul had come to this city and preached Christ crucified. That preaching was the power God used unto the salvation of these saints. Through the preaching God had worked the power of faith; that is, by it God removed the hardness of heart and blindness of unbelief. And by that faith God bestowed the ability to seek the things of the kingdom of heaven—an ability rooted in and empowered by the Holy Spirit Himself.

As a result, God's people in Thessalonica gained a knowledge of God. They learned who He was in distinction from their heathen gods, their idols. They learned that their heathen gods were vain—the work of men's hands, having no power to give life eternal. Because of this knowledge they turned away from these gods and toward Jehovah God—the true and the living God. This is what our text means when it speaks of their faith *to God-ward*. The faith of these saints turned them away from their idols and to God, or toward the one true God. Having turned to God, these saints in Thessalonica also placed their confidence in Him and in His Son. That also is the conscious activity of faith, the life of a child of God. He knows God and He turns to God and trusts God. And that reveals itself in

Word of God which ye heard of us," that is to say, when the Word of God was given or transmitted to you by us in the preaching, "Then ye received it," that is to say, then you consciously embraced it and believed it, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God. Through the preaching, those who hear receive the Word from God—He gives it to them. According to God's good pleasure He then uses that preaching to work effectually in the hearts of His elect. These are brought to faith though the preaching. Those who are brought to faith then receive or embrace that Word with a believing heart. It is *not* as those who believe in the free will of fallen man say, that they must first of all accept the Word before God will save them. If that were the case, then the Word of God no longer works effectually. The preaching of the Word is no longer the power unto salvation. It is man's choice that saves him. This verse clearly teaches us that God's Word preached is proclaimed to many. For those whom God has chosen to save, that preaching touches and saves by means of the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. These, then, in faith consciously embrace the gospel and follow after Jesus Christ. Those whom God has not chosen receive the preaching (hear the preaching) but it falls on deaf ears, and because there is no work of grace or of

the Spirit in them, they do not receive (consciously embrace) the gospel. In fact, they are hardened in their sin and reject the gospel of Christ. God has not worked in them faith and repentance.

Paul rejoices in the faith of the Thessalonian believers. When they heard the preaching of the gospel, they received it with believing hearts. This addresses our attitude toward the preaching of the Word of God. What is our response to the preaching? Do we go to church to hear God's Word proclaimed? Or do we neglect the assembling of ourselves with fellow believers? When we come to church, do we seek out the preaching or do we look for something more entertaining? When we listen to the preaching, is it with carnal ears or believing hearts? If we view the preaching as a mere man talking to us, then the preaching is not all that important, is it? I mean, what is the importance of being in church if the preaching is simply a man saying what he has in his mind. If it is God speaking to us, however, and we believe that, then we not only dare not ignore the preaching of the gospel and keep ourselves from God house, but we willingly come, because we want to hear what God has to say to us. Coming to God's house is our desire and joy! If we believe that the preacher brings to us only his own word,

too. It is the way God Himself has chosen to work and confirm faith in the hearts of His chosen people. That is what this passage before us teaches. The Word of God preached effectually works—produces results—in those who believe.

This is true because when the preacher expounds the Scriptures, then the Word he brings is *God's* Word. When God speaks, it always produces results. Through the preaching of the gospel God performs what He desires. The Word of God is heard from the mouths of those who preach, but it is a word *of* God, or belonging to God. It is His Word we hear. Although Paul in this verse stresses the positive result of the preaching, there is also a negative purpose of God in the preaching. The preaching effectually works in the hearts of God's people faith. But that same preaching effectually works in the hearts of others unbelief and rebellion. There are those whom God has appointed to hear the Word proclaimed and believe. There are others whom God has appointed to stumble at the Word and turn away in unbelief. That which produces this twofold result is the very Word of God itself. The Word of God when it is preached purely condemns all earthly pomp and pride and directs us to the cross alone for salvation. The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and

reveals the thoughts and intents of the heart. Because this is true, many are offended by the preaching of the Word of God, while others are humbled and brought to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ. Whatever the case, the preaching of the gospel by the church effectually works: it works the will of God in our salvation, and the will of God in the condemnation of others.

Now, God worked in a positive way in the hearts of the saints in Thessalonica. They were believers. By the Word they came to the conscious knowledge of their sin and salvation in Christ. By the Word of God preached to them they came to a hearty confidence in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and to a strong trust in God as the God of their salvation who loved them. Because this was the effect of the Word preached to them, these saints also *received* the preaching of the Word. Notice, the term "received" is used twice in this verse. Actually, in the original these are two different words. The first term refers to those who passively receive something—those who are given something without any active participation. The second term for "receive" refers to those who consciously and favorably take something or embrace something that is given them.

The idea here is really beautiful: "when ye received the

the life and works of a believer. In all things, he lives for God, and in every circumstance he trusts his God. God and His Son are everything to God's people. And this reveals itself in their lives.

This was the very faith that now characterized these saints in Thessalonica, a faith that must characterize all of us as God's children. It is impossible for us to say we have faith unless it reveals itself in a conscious knowledge of and trust in our God. This conscious knowledge of God and trust in Him and in His Son reveals itself as well. How? Verse 6: "ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." That these saints in Thessalonica followed the example of Paul and his companions we will consider in a moment. We are more interested at this point in the fact that the faith of these saints led them to be followers of the Lord, that is, of Jesus Christ. Literally, our text says that these saints became "imitators" of Christ. They followed Christ in the sense of imitating Him. And that is but a natural outcome of faith—we begin to follow Christ. Christ becomes our Lord and we His servants to do His will.

Faith entails a godly life—holy living. It is saying "no" to

the evil lusts of the flesh and the temptations of this wicked world. Instead we are called to imitate Christ and His holiness. We are called to a life of spiritual separation from the evil of this world. One who has true faith is characterized by this desire. Out of thankfulness for deliverance from the wrath of God, and out of the new life worked in him by the risen Lord, the child of God is committed to a holy life. All fornication and drunkenness, so much a part of heathen life, the child of God hates and flees. Worldly entertainment that may entice him to such sins, the believer avoids.

As we noticed in our last broadcast, this kind of life has its consequences in this world. Following Christ entails that we deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow Him. If the world hated Christ, Christ tells us, it will hate us too. And it does. It did for the Thessalonian believers. This is why Paul tells them that they received the word (that is, the Word of salvation) with much affliction and with joy of the Spirit. Because they followed Christ they had to suffer affliction at the hands of the wicked there in their city. Not only was it given to them to believe on Christ but also to suffer for His sake. And yet that suffering they counted all joy. The Holy Spirit worked in them, and they looked upon their affliction as an evident token of the fact

that they belonged to Christ. They saw such suffering as a natural result of serving Christ, and this gave to them great joy. Of course it would! It does for us too, does it not? When the world around us mocks us for walking in God's commandments, we rejoice. We count it joy in the Holy Spirit. Why do we rejoice? Because this is an evident token that we belong to Jesus Christ! He is our Lord and we are different from those given over to the worship of idols. All this is God-ward faith! It is what sets the believer apart from the world.

II. Exemplary Faith

The faith of the believers most assuredly set apart the church in Thessalonica! It did not take long before the members of this congregation became examples for all the believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia. That was a large area, mind you. Macedonia and Achaia together made up the most important part of what was in former times called Greece. Paul was at present laboring in Corinth, which, like Athens, was located in Achaia. Evidently, word had spread of the great faith of the Thessalonian church. The quiet, brave endurance of these saints had been heralded by those traveling to and from Thessalonica. Do not forget that Thessalonica was a

large city, through which many people traveled. No doubt news was carried by many who passed through. And in this way these saints in their individual lives had become a source of great encouragement to all God's people. A joyful church amidst suffering definitely brings great joy to others who believe and must suffer similar trials and opposition.

You know, friends, we must always remember that what we do and what we bear as God's people is heard of by others. If we are a bad example, others hear of that. Individual believers as well as churches bear a certain reputation. Look at Paul, Silas, and Timothy and their example. Paul tells the believers in Thessalonica: "And ye became followers of us!" The saints there had followed the godly example of faith left by these missionaries. By doing so they had followed Christ Himself. This congregation, in turn, had as a whole become an example for others to follow.

That is the calling of God's people today as well. As churches we must be a godly example in doctrine and in our stand against sinful living. As individual believers we are to profess and walk in faith. We are called to be an example of faith that is God-ward. We must be an example of faithful following after our Lord. When we are,

his studies. Then he must go to the pulpit with the Bible and say to his congregation, "Thus saith the Lord!" This is Jehovah's Word to His church! God says! This is what Paul and his companions did. They preached not the word of men, but in truth the Word of God!

But there is another important element that needs to be emphasized in this connection: God's Word *must be preached!* God's official Word to His people does not come via a song, or a movie or skit, or a panel discussion, or a sports hero, or even via a member of the church standing up and witnessing. God's official Word to His church comes via that ambassador whom God puts in trust with the gospel. And it comes only when he stands before his congregation with Bible in hand, and proclaims: "this is what Jehovah says!" God's Word *must be preached!*

That cannot be emphasized enough because of the particular instruction we receive in this verse of God's Word.

II. God's Word Received

You see, this Word of God

that the saints heard from the mouths of Paul, Silas, and Timothy had effectually worked in them. Paul explains this at the very end of verse 13: "The Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Such is what the preaching of the gospel does: it effectually works in those that believe. Now, that needs some explaining of course. The terminology "effectually works" explains the power of the preaching. The preaching works, it is operative, it puts forth power, it produces in the hearts of God's people. To put it in other words, the preaching always has an effect, it always produces results. The result it works is faith. When the Word of God is officially proclaimed by the church of Jesus Christ,

When the preaching is heard
it acts like a powerful generator
that produces the power to enlighten
the hearts of men to bring some
to faith and repentance.

it works believing in the hearts of God's people. The preaching is like a dynamo, a huge, powerful generator. That generator produces electricity that lights the houses of countless millions. When the preaching is heard it acts like a powerful generator that produces the power to enlighten the hearts of men to bring some to faith and repentance. That is the power of preaching. That is why the Word of God must be preached

need to know about God, about sin and salvation, about Christ, about this world in which we live, and about things to come is recorded objectively in the Bible. This Bible is the Word of God today.

Yet, it is obvious the verse we consider means more by the terminology "word of God" than simply that Word which is recorded for us in Scripture. The saints were not simply receiving printed Bibles from Paul and his co-laborers. They were receiving the Word of God *from the mouths of these preachers!* Paul writes, "Ye received the Word of God which ye *heard of [from] us!*" So this verse refers to the Word of God, not written, but spoken. It refers to the Word of God preached, the Word of God imparted, exhorted, comforted, and charged. These are the words Paul uses to describe the preaching in the first 12 verses of this chapter. Our text reflects the attitude of these believers toward the preaching. And it instructs us, therefore, on how we too must receive, not the Bible itself, but the *preaching* of God's Word. That is what Paul has in mind in this verse: the official proclamation of the Word of God by the mouths of those called and sent by the church to preach the gospel. We established those offices in our last broadcast when we considered who preached in Thessalonica, that is, Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Notice, friends, that we are instructed in something very, very important here in this Word of God before us. We are told in no uncertain terms that God's Word must be preached! That is implicit in the instruction God gives us: God's Word must be preached. That in turn means two things. First, *God's Word* must be preached! The Word of God must be preached from the pulpit. Not the word of man, not the good advice, the stale moralisms, the jokes and stories of men. The preacher may not spend time in his sermon expounding something that he thinks is nice or even necessary. Too many preachers today do this. They have a book that tells them of some nice subjects to broach with their congregation. Then that preacher takes his Bible in hand and searches for a number of Bible verses that may illustrate or support the point he is trying to make. That is not preaching. It is something that goes under the guise of preaching, but it is not preaching. *God's Word* must be preached! The Bible must be taken in hand and the preacher must expound and explain God's Word to His church. Even Paul did that in his preaching. He used the Old Testament Scriptures. He explained the coming and death of Jesus Christ by expounding the Old Testament Scriptures. Today too, a passage of God's Word, or a doctrine of God's Word, must be grappled with by the preacher in

that in itself speaks volumes to our fellow believers. Living a godly life, pursuing godly things, all this leaves a wonderful and lasting impression on fellow believers. It is an example they can follow and an example in which they will rejoice together with us.

In fact, our faithful example will be more than just an example to fellow believers.

It will sound out into every place—whether believing or unbelieving. Of this we read

in verse 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." The word for "sound out" means to "reverberate." The idea is that of a bell that is rung as a warning. It rings out in one place, and the sound of it goes out and echoes through the land for all to hear. This also is what happens when the members of the church are characterized by faith toward God. It is a natural result in the life of the church that follows after Christ. Paul points out that the word of the Lord, the word concerning Jesus Christ and salvation in Him, reverberated not only through Macedonia and Achaia, but into

*Living a godly life,
pursuing godly things,
all this leaves a wonderful
and lasting impression
on fellow believers.*

every place. This does not mean that all of a sudden everyone in the known world knew about this congregation and her faith. It means that the faith of this church not only came to believers in these regions of the world, but reached to every place in these regions. This congregation was a witness to everyone. The word of Jesus Christ was

heard by the heathen too. So much so, Paul says, that he and Silas and Timothy did not have to go everywhere to spread the word of the gospel, for it was already being spread by this congregation—and that by means of her example.

It is evident from the passage we consider, of course, that this witness was not accomplished because the members of this church worked hard, to use modern terminology, to be mission-minded. This congregation was not sending out all kinds of her members in order to sound out the gospel. Her members did not feel the call (as so many today like to speak of themselves) to go out and do great things for the Lord. They did not leave their children at home and go out and become missionaries for the Lord in order to gain this witness. That was the church's task—to send

out laborers to preach the gospel to others. These saints were like that bell, which remains in one place, yet the sound of which reverberates through the land for all to hear. They were a witness—an open and active witness in their own city. They spoke the Word of the Lord to others. They were not ashamed of the gospel in their lives. They talked of it at home, in the workplace, and wherever they traveled. Perhaps, there may even have been some saints who traveled for their work. They took their faith toward God with them. Whatever the case, even in the face of fierce opposition they could not keep their mouths shut. And that is how the gospel spread round about from this congregation to far-reaching areas. Obviously, the Lord was using the witness of these saints in a mighty way.

That too speaks to us of the witness of believers today. Our witness to others does not have to be some great and noble deed for the Lord. It entails speaking of our faith to others right where God has placed us: in the home, at the workplace, with whomever we visit. It entails a godly example to others to show them that we walk according to the gospel of grace. Then the Word of the Lord will sound out from the corridors of the faithful church. Our community and all those round about will hear of us.

They will see our example and enthusiasm, and the result will be that the sound of the gospel will ring forth through the land.

III. Spreading Faith

Such faith will spread. This is how the church of the early new dispensation grew so rapidly, by the witness of God's people wherever God had led them to live. So much so was this true that churches sprang up everywhere in Asia Minor, North Africa, Greece, Italy, and beyond. Already it had spread through the areas of Macedonia and Achaia. The gospel was going out. It was spreading. God was using the faithful witness and example of His saints to spread His word. We indeed ought to support financially and with our prayers the mission work of the church in her calling to preach the gospel in foreign lands. That is the calling of the church. But this does not diminish the calling of the congregation and of us as individuals to be busy where we live in our witness to others. It ought not to be a forced witness. It need only be a witness of godly living and unashamed conversation of our faith. When this characterizes the church of Christ, the gospel will sound out into all the earth. And others will be followers of the Lord, even as we. May God strengthen us in that calling.

we consider today centers in the "word of God" the saints in Thessalonica received. "When ye received the word of God," Paul writes of them, "ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." We need to understand, first of all, therefore, what is meant by this "word of God" the Thessalonian believers received. What is the Word of God? Well, obviously, it is the Bible, right? The Thessalonian believers gladly received the Bible. But the answer is not that easy. The saints to whom Paul wrote this letter did not have the Bible as we have it today. They may have had the Old Testament Scriptures, but they certainly did not have as yet the New Testament. And if they did have the Old Testament Scriptures, there certainly was not a printed copy in every person's home. Maybe only a few copies available in the synagogue in the city, not much more. So, there certainly is implied in our text something more by the "word of God" than the written Scriptures as we have them today. Our Bible is indeed the written Word of God, but there is more to this concept than at first we might think. You see, God's Word is that which God through the ages speaks to His people and by which He reveals Himself to them. That Word of God He has spoken in many different ways. Sometimes He spoke that Word directly for

everyone to hear: the ten commandments, for example. Or when the voice from heaven was heard concerning Christ: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" Most of the time, however, that Word was spoken by God to and through special servants whom God chose. Peter tells us in II Peter 1:21, "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." These holy men were the patriarchs and prophets of the old dispensation and the apostles of the new.

The Word these men spoke and wrote through which God revealed Himself was fulfilled in Christ. Christ is God made flesh, and therefore Christ is ultimately the revelation of God concerning Himself to His people. This is why Christ is called "the Word" in the Bible. It is important for us to understand in all of this, however, that throughout the ages, as God spoke this Word by the mouths of holy men, He saw to it that all of it was recorded for us. That is why today, when we speak of the Word of God, we speak of the Bible—the Scriptures—the written record of God's speech to His people, as being the Word of God. And truly today, God's Word is that which is embodied in the Scriptures. There is no longer direct revelation of God through the mouths of special servants. The Word of God is complete. It is ours. All we

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 22, 2017
No. 3903

Receiving the Word of God
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

The Word of God we consider today is of great importance. It addresses how you and I are to view the preaching of the gospel. Do we believe that the preaching of the Word is necessary? Do we believe that God requires of us to go to church to sit under that preaching? Do we view the faithful preaching of God's Word the word of a man to us or, in truth, the Word of God? When we do sit under the preaching and it touches a sore spot do we humbly bow before it or become defiant?

In the last broadcast God's Word spoke to the preacher. In the first twelve verses Paul addresses what must be the attitude of the preacher toward his own preaching. When the preacher who is called of God to proclaim His Word, then he must seek to please God in that preaching. He is not out to please men; he is not out to gain fame, fortune, or the glory of his own name. He must not be interested in gaining something to himself by means of his preaching. He must be interested in one thing: the salvation of God's people. This says everything about the methods he uses to

bring God's Word. He must not preach words that flatter men, that deceive men, or even that entice men. He must simply, honestly, and sharply preach the Word. This is pleasing to God. That is his calling as a preacher.

The Word of God before us today addresses those who are called by God to hear the preaching. We read in I Thessalonians 2:13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." We need to have a proper understanding of this Word of God before us today. It has much to say of our attitude toward the preaching of the gospel. That, in turn, will have much to say of our walk of life in response to the preaching.

**RECEIVING THE WORD
OF GOD**

I. *God's Word Preached*

The emphasis of the verse

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

October 15, 2017
No. 3902

Entrusted with the Gospel
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Today in many areas the church institute has become big business. The gospel it preaches has become commercialized. It has become a commodity that many church institutes and para-church organizations sell. To use the words of the apostle Paul, "they make merchandise" of the gospel of Christ. Under the guise of saving souls, evangelistic movements have become multi-million-dollar organizations. Under the aura and excitement of moral and social revival, the church and her leaders have lined their pockets with wealth. It is little wonder that the political and economic sectors of our country have begun to scrutinize and audit many a religious organization—including the institute herself. The apostle Paul strikes a blow to the roots of all such merchandising of the gospel in I Thessalonians 2:3, 4. We read there, "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts."

We consider these verses today. God has given His church and its ambassadors the task to preach the gospel. The trend of much of modern day Christianity is not so much to *give* the gospel as it is to *sell* the gospel.

The instruction given in the verses we consider today follows upon what we have considered in the last two broadcasts. We noticed that Paul gave his greetings to this church and commended her for her work in the gospel. As a congregation she was not afraid to witness concerning Jesus Christ, despite such strong opposition. As a result, the Word of the Lord was spread throughout Macedonia and Achaia. She had exhibited a strong, exemplary faith in Christ. By faith these saints had become followers of Paul and his companions—and in doing so they had become followers of Christ. In the first several verses of this second chapter, Paul reflects back upon his labors and the labors of his companions in Thessalonica, to show just how it was that these saints had become followers of him. He preached the Word of the gospel there. Besides, he

and his co-laborers also lived by that gospel. In this way they became examples to the Thessalonian saints. By doing so, however, they followed Christ Himself. So, we consider for a few moments the labor in the gospel of which Paul speaks.

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

I. A Divine Trust

While addressing his own labors, Paul gives solemn and important instruction to every preacher of the gospel. Verse 4: "we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." That this instruction is given for the benefit of every preacher of the gospel and not merely for the apostles can easily be shown from the text itself. Just as in chapter 1, so also in this chapter, when Paul writes "we" in the plural, he refers to himself together with Timothy and Silas. All of these men were bold in God to speak the gospel unto God's saints. These three men were fit representatives of three different offices that were still prevalent in the early new dispensation: that of apostle, prophet, and preacher. Paul himself was an apostle, that is, one who was directly commissioned by Christ personally to preach the gospel. The apostles were the original 11 disciples who were chosen by and followed Christ during His earthly

sojourn. Paul was chosen by Christ a little later—"as one born out of due time," Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15:8. These apostles of Christ were commissioned by Christ to preach the gospel. To them was entrusted, therefore, the word of salvation.

Silas, on the other hand, was not an apostle but represented a number of men who were slowly disappearing, to be replaced by the preachers of the gospel. These were yet called prophets. To these prophets, God gave the gift of special revelation. For example, Agabus prophesied that Paul was going to be bound in prison, and that there was going to be a famine in Jerusalem.

Now, it is rather difficult to discern whether special revelation was given to Silas as well. What was happening is that the office of prophet slowly was filled by those officially called by the church as preachers. And these preachers were at first called prophets. That is quite natural too, since the preacher of the gospel comes as a fulfillment of the office of the prophet in the Old Testament. Whatever the case concerning Silas, he too was commissioned to preach. The third type of person called to whom was entrusted the gospel was the preacher himself. Of this type of men Timothy was representative. He was a preacher, a minister of the gospel. This is evident from verse 2 of I Thessalonians 3, "And sent

not matter if he receives a little or a lot. He is called to preach, and preach he must—no matter what the consequences! If there comes a day that the church is unable to pay their minister because of persecution or such like, that does not mean that the church will be without preachers. Necessity is laid upon the preacher to preach that which God has entrusted into his care, because he is concerned with the salvation of God's people and nothing more!

*Necessity is laid upon the preacher
to preach that which God has
entrusted into his care,
because he is concerned
with the salvation of God's people
and nothing more!*

III. A Divine Witness

God is our witness to that fact! This is what Paul also says concerning himself. Paul writes in verse 5 of I Thessalonians 2, "God is witness." Again in verse 10, "Ye are witnesses, and God also." That same point Paul makes at the conclusion of verse 4, "God trieth the hearts." God tries the hearts. God examines closely, scrutinizes the hearts of His servants to whom is entrusted the gospel. God approves or disapproves of their work. If it is done out of deceit and guile or as a cloak of covetousness, God will judge. His judgment will be

harsher than any that man can meet out. If a preacher builds upon the foundation of the truth wood, hay, or stubble, his work will be made manifest in the judgment day. Fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

But God also rewards. If a man builds on the foundation of the truth gold, silver, and precious stones, his preaching will also be made manifest in the day of judgment. Paul writes in I

Corinthians 3:14, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." In that knowledge the preacher of the gospel labors. He does not need money. Money perishes. He does not need popularity. He does not need to have influence. He does not need earthly fame and glory. What he needs is God's divine approval. When that is given, then the preacher of the gospel knows that life eternal is his. In that he glories. That is incentive to preach. May God give to His church such preachers of the gospel. In this way His cause will indeed prevail!

As enthused as they may seem on the outside over their particular cause, it does not take much to see that the underlying motive is uncleanness, that is, impure motives.

In the third place, Paul's preaching was without guile. This term refers to one who baits or lures another into following what he has to offer—much like the advertisements we can see and hear. Much of modern Christianity today hawks the gospel, offers it as a commodity, much like McDonalds would their hamburgers. It is said that to gain numbers the church must be willing to lure people to the gospel by means of slogans or popular methods. In fact, I heard it said not so long ago that if Jesus were alive and busy today, He would be using all the different methods used today. Methods such as the super bowl, skits, plays, and movies, big-time singers, all in order to lure or bait people to adhere to the gospel.

This was not the type of preacher Paul, Silas, and Timothy were. Of that we can be certain! Paul says "our exhortation was not of deceit, uncleanness, or guile." We did not come with flattering words, we did not come to seek glory from you, we did not come in a veil or cloak of covetousness after your goods. We wanted nothing of this. When we came preaching, there was

one thing alone that motivated us: we wanted to please God! *That* is of the essence! That is what distinguishes the true preacher of the gospel from the false! God gives to His ambassadors the gospel. He entrusts its keeping into their care. And He gives the command to them: preach that gospel. Call men to repentance! Make them to know their sin. Make them to know their utter depravity. Their blindness of heart and darkness of thought. Then call them to repent of that sin and seek for salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ. Nothing less will do. Do this not because this gospel becomes a means to another end, but do it because the gospel is an end in itself. Preach the gospel for one reason: to save sinners!

That is the one great concern of the true preacher of the gospel. He is not interested in fame and fortune. He is not interested in what people can give to him or can be gained from people. The true preacher of the gospel is interested in one thing: preaching—nothing more! It is the power God uses to save His elect people. It is the power God uses to call His saints out of darkness and into light. The sincere preacher of the gospel preaches because necessity is laid upon him by God. Being called into the ministry of the gospel, it does not matter if the preacher receives nothing for his labors in the gospel. It does

Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith." So, it ought to be evident that when Paul writes in our text about himself and his coworkers, he is writing a word that applies to every ambassador of Christ who is called to preach the gospel.

Of these Paul writes in verse 4, "we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel." Before getting into what is involved in the preaching of the gospel, every preacher ought to understand the full impact of this statement. God does not give the task of preaching the gospel to everyone. It is true that God requires of all of us to be active witnesses of His Word. But God does not give the official work of preaching to everyone. There are only certain men that He deems worthy to be entrusted with the gospel. That is what this phrase of verse 4 means too. Literally we would read, "we were approved of God to be trusted with the gospel." Paul was conscious of that fact, and he labored under that conviction. God had chosen him, had approved of him—and as a result God had entrusted Paul with the gospel. That awesome reality ought to sink down into the heart of everyone who dares to claim that he is a preacher of the gospel. Let us not forget what the gospel is. It is the good

news of salvation in Christ! It is the news that God has provided a way of escape from hell and eternal condemnation for sinners. It is the word that comes to those who are persuaded in their hearts that they have sinned against the most high majesty of God and therefore are liable to punishment. It is a word that comes to those who in sorrow over sin truly seek to be restored to favor with God and again be received into His presence. This Word of the gospel is good news. It tells those who look for forgiveness that in the cross of Jesus Christ there is to be found a way to escape punishment and to be received once again into God's favor. The gospel commands men to repent of sin and believe, and to those who with sincere hearts do so, God will in no wise cast them out. That is the gospel. That gospel itself is a serious matter. It reveals that salvation is found in the cross of Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way. It speaks of the death of Christ as a ransom for sin and as a cleansing from sin. The gospel is Christ!

God entrusts the preaching of that gospel only to those whom He approves—and to no one else! Let that false prophet beware! God does not give to him the gospel, though he claims to be sent from God. Let the true preacher of God, called and sent by the church, beware as well!

God has chosen and approved of his place in the church. *God* has! Now God bestows on that preacher the sacred trust of the gospel of salvation—the good news that comes to sinners. Let God's servants never desecrate that sacred divine trust that is given to them, but may they faithfully discharge their office, and may they faithfully proclaim God's Word alone! That is their calling. This they must fulfill by *speaking* that gospel to others, or by *exhorting* others in that gospel.

These are the two terms Paul uses to describe the preaching of the gospel: speaking and exhorting. Actually, the term for "exhort" means "to call near," or "to summon." In the speaking forth of the gospel, God's people must be exhorted and admonished in their sin. They must learn through the preaching what their sin is in order that they might bring it to the cross in true sorrow. The preaching

of the gospel must also comfort and strengthen. It must lead God's people to the cross of Jesus Christ for plenteous pardon and forgiveness of sin. The preaching of the gospel must summon God's people to hear instruction in righteousness: how to live a life of holi-

*The preaching of the gospel
must lead God's people
to the cross of Jesus Christ
for plenteous pardon
and forgiveness of sin.*

ness and spiritual separation from the wicked world. All this must be included in the faithful execution of the calling of those to whom God has entrusted the gospel. If it is not, then one is unfaithful to that trust that God has given Him. If this gospel is diminished or ignored, then a preacher betrays the trust given him with respect to the gospel itself.

II. A Pure Exhortation

Paul was fully aware of this in all his labors. He was aware that God had deemed him worthy to be entrusted with the gospel. For that reason too, he knew that his exhortation, his speaking forth of the gospel, must be pure. "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, so speak we!" Of what must every preacher of the gospel be aware when he preaches the gospel? He must preach *not to please men*. When

I read that phrase of our text, I was reminded of the prophet Jeremiah. As a prophet he could not help but speak the words God placed upon his lips. But it was a word that did not please the wicked rulers of Judah. He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem as judgment upon

her sin. He was then beaten and thrown into prison because he spoke God's Word to the rulers of Judah. Once more they called him from prison in the hope that he would speak peace to them when there was no

peace. Again he spoke God's Word and again he was thrown in prison and even into a pit. But he spoke God's Word. He was called to do this in order to please God. Whether it pleased men or not made no difference at all. Such is the calling of the minister of the gospel. He must preach to please God and not men. Often when preachers do this they are ignored or scorned, because the Word of the gospel is not pleasing to men. No man likes to hear what he does wrong. No fallen, sinful man likes to be told that he is nothing in himself, but that he must find his all in someone else. Proud man does not like to hear the fact that he is not good, but needs salvation from himself and his sin. This gospel is exactly what caused such persecution against Paul and the saints in Thessalonica. When one preaches the gospel therefore, it is not to be men-pleasers.

This is where many who have been entrusted with the gospel today have strayed from the instruction of our text. Many preachers today have chosen to

be men-pleasers. They do this in order to gain glory to their own name. They compromise, or accommodate, or are non-committal, because they know that this is the popular thing to do. But there is more too.

Read verse 3, "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile." Paul did not preach out of deceit, uncleanness, or in guile. Paul was not deceitful. He did not lead his listeners astray. Paul did not teach error or falsehood. He spoke the truth. He revealed the truth about sin, salvation, and a call to holiness. He did not attempt to lead these saints away from the truth of the Scriptures and into a lie. How many do exactly that today—all in the name of Christianity—all in an attempt to gain a following. They promote the lie, that which is clearly contrary to the Word of God, all in order to please their listeners and gain a following to themselves.

In the second place, Paul's preaching was not of uncleanness. What is meant here is "out of unclean or impure motives." Paul did not exhort in order to gain to himself luxuries, or a means of high living. Many popular preachers today make merchandise out of the gospel. They use it to become rich or to become famous and influential.