

Christ in 1 Thessalonians

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Walk by faith, known by love, the voice of hope. If you ever were looking for a personal vision statement, that's not a bad one. To walk by faith, be known by love, to be a voice of hope.

We're in a series that's taking us two years to get through. We're working through 66 books of the Bible, and it's called the Christ in Scripture Project.

We're looking for Christ throughout all of the Bible, and we want to give him the glory as he is seen and revealed in the great story of the Bible and history, which is his story.

Interestingly, Thessalonians, 1st Thessalonians doesn't use the title Christ that much compared to some of the other books. We talked about this a few weeks ago.

Philippians, if you see on the screen, Philippians has 38 references to the title Christ across four chapters, Ephesians 50, Colossians 30, Romans 66, varied size books.

But 1st Thessalonians 10, 10 references to Christ across five chapters, but that won't stop us from finding encouragement and challenge.

In the Book of 1st Thessalonians, we're going to find three prayers, two big lifestyle challenges, three curious statements, and one significant teaching on the afterlife.

And so, Faith, Hope and Love will be the scaffold through which we will work through the whole book in chasing those things that I just spoke of. So, walk by Faith, known by Love, a voice of Hope. Firstly, walk by Faith.

Paul started the church, planted it at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. The first journey got to Turkey, the top of Turkey, Galatia. And the second journey got as far as Greece.

The third one was heavily based in Ephesus. So this is his second missionary journey where he got to Thessalonica. Let me read what happened when the Gospel was brought there by Paul and his companions.

When Paul and his companions, Acts 17, had passed through Amphibolus and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue.

As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah, he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

But other Jews were jealous, so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search for Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the other believers before the city officials, shouting, these men who have caused trouble all over the world, have now come here. And Jason has welcomed them into his house.

They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus. When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

I read the whole account of the start of the church because it's an extraordinary report of the Apostles' faith, isn't it? In the middle of a city full of strong, fierce allegiance to Caesar, Paul fearlessly declared that Jesus is king.

This is born out of faith. He is walking by faith.

And then Paul wrote in to First Thessalonians, the letter to the church as an encouragement to the church that he founded because he was concerned after leaving it that the young church may have succumbed to that same persecution that I just read of.

So he sent Timothy from Corinth to check it out. And it reminds me of what happened in China in about 1950. The Western missionaries who had been there for maybe 100 years, something like that, were told to leave under Communist China.

And the great fear was that without strong leadership, the church would crumble under persecution. Do you know what happened? It thrived like it has in multiple times where missionaries have taken the Gospel to China.

And then they've left and the Spirit of God has continued to grow the church. So yes, it was, it exploded the church in China under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the leaders that he rose up. So something similar has happened here.

The church is thriving. So Paul prays for this church. Prayer number one.

He prays, We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, your faith in God has become known everywhere. Walking by faith, the church at Thessalonica has become famous, famous as a faith-filled church. Are you known for your faith?

Are you a person who people would say, oh, they have a great faith? Are you familiar with this idea of the walk of faith? The Bible says you can't please God without it, doesn't it?

Can't please God without faith. Faith matters to God. Do you walk each day by faith?

Would people say NorthernLife Baptist Church, that is a faith-filled church? And what would it look like if we were genuinely faith-filled? We sometimes talk about George Mueller, don't we?

Do you remember why we talk about George Mueller? He had great faith, and he ran many orphanages in England based on faith alone. But here's a story that is from the Captain's Journal, not from Mueller, but the Captain's Journal.

Really interesting story. Mueller was crossing the Atlantic by ship to Quebec, where he had promised to preach. But a very dense fog had descended on the area where the ship was traveling through.

And so they had to slow down dramatically. And Mueller came to the Captain and said, Captain, I need to be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon.

And the Captain said, there's just no way we can get you there in time, because this fog is so dense, it'll be unsafe to travel any faster. And Mueller said, if your ship can't take me there by Saturday, God will find some other way.

I've never broken an engagement, a speaking engagement, in 57 years. I noticed he lived to 93. That's not bad going, is it, in the 19th century.

So we said to the captain, let's go down to the chart room and pray. And so they went down and prayed together. And Mueller simply asked God to remove the fog so that he could fulfill his ministry commitments.

And then apparently, the captain started to pray as well. And Mueller stopped him and said, firstly, you don't believe that God will do it. And secondly, I've already asked him, and God will answer my prayer.

So no need for you to pray, thank you, faithless one. And then came this classic line, my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God who controls every circumstance of my life.

Apparently, they returned to the deck and the fog had lifted. If only it was so easy, many of us say. But, yeah, Mueller has kind eyes, doesn't he?

I think that looks like a man who has walked with the Lord. Don't fix your eyes on the fog, maybe we could take from that. Fix your eyes on the God who rules over it.

Faith. We're called to walk by faith. Paul says to the church at Thessalonica, You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

You turned to God from idols. The human heart is an idol factory. Faith will help us pull those idols down.

Amen? Walking by faith involves pulling down idols. It is not passive faith.

Faith moves, faith expects, faith steps out, faith obeys, faith trusts. As I was just working through the book and marking down things, I found three curious statements. Three curious statements about faith.

First Thessalonians 2.10, Paul writes, You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. I've said, curious statement number one because who says that?

You guys saw how pure and holy and blameless, how righteous we were. I find that an odd thing to say unless by faith, you have appropriated the truth of the gospel. By faith, you've realized, I am actually righteous before God.

I'm clothed in the righteousness of Christ. I'm justified. I'm being sanctified and my conscious is not testifying against me.

I am holy and blameless and righteous in God's eyes, in Christ. That's what faith will do to you and do for you. Statement number two is in 218.

For we wanted to come to you, certainly I, Paul, did again and again, but Satan blocked our way. Curious statement, isn't it? Do you remember another time where someone else blocked their way?

They were the top of Turkey and they wanted to head further north, and someone blocked their way and headed them over to Philippi. Who was it that blocked their way? The Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit blocked their way one time. This time, Satan is blocking their way, and at other times, ordinary human circumstances affect their plans. A curious statement.

How do you work out who's doing the blocking? I would put it to you by faith. By faith in a developing journey, walking with the Holy Spirit, we discern what is going on in our daily life, realising there's a spiritual component, amen?

There are powers at play, and by faith and through faith, we find discernment to work out who is doing what.

Curious statement number three, 1 Thessalonians 3, verse 2, We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service, in spreading the gospel, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials,

for you know quite well that we are destined for them. A curious statement. The church were destined for trials, destined for suffering. The trials played a role in strengthening and encouraging their faith.

When we walk by faith, what should we expect? Trials and suffering, we are destined for them. So I wonder, what does walking by faith look like for you in this next season of your life?

Sometimes it's possible to see a bunch of days and weeks and years scoop together in a season in life, isn't it? You think, that felt like a bit of a season. What does it look like for you to genuinely walk by faith?

Ben made a comment the other day that I thought was apt about this. He said, Jesus never ran anywhere. Have you ever noticed that?

Never says, and Jesus ran. He always walks. It's a journey faith, isn't it?

Step by step. You can't please God without faith in this next section of your life. So what would it look like to be walking by faith?

And Paul writes that they are known by love. Back to the first prayer. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, known by love.

Jesus said, the world will know you are Christians by your love. We are to be known by love. Paul's second prayer dives into this further.

Chapter 3, verse 11, May our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

May he strengthen your heart so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. It's not a bad thing to look at the prayers of Paul and just copy them.

Think, what did Paul pray? May the Lord make your love increase and overflow. That's a worthy prayer, isn't it?

That our love would increase and overflow. And this leads to chapter 4, the first big lifestyle challenge. Big lifestyle challenge number one.

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact, you are living.

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more, for you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that means be made holy, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the pagans who

do not know God. I think this is very importantly nestled in the idea of to be known by love. What is the greatest driver to remove sexual immorality from your life or from your community, our community?

I would put it to you, the greatest driver is love. Sexual immorality is built around lust. Christian community is built around love.

Sexual immorality reduces humanity. Love magnifies humanity under God. Sexual immorality objectifies, love dignifies because love lifts up and serves and works for the good of others.

Sexual immorality is driven by the pursuit of self-gratification and even at times debauchery. Love empowers people to be all that God intended them to be. To be known by love is to be known for honouring every human life, isn't it?

Every human body in a way that is holy and honourable. Do those two words stand out to you when you hear them? Holy and honourable.

Holy and honourable. That's how we are to live, by the grace of God. And Paul goes on in his first big challenging teaching to say, verse 9, about your love for one another.

We don't need to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia.

Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. To be known by love, we will live holy lives regarding sexual desire. And we will live quiet, helpful lives in the context of community.

Finally, Paul teaches that we in Christ are to be a voice of hope, walking by faith, known by love, a voice of hope. His exact words are your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's third prayer is at the very end of the letter, verse 23. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all of God's people with a holy kiss.

I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul is rallying the church that he planned to apply their faith to the future, to make manifest hope in their midst. Because of what Christ has done, we can have hope for tomorrow, can't we? Hope of peace with God.

Hope that the Spirit will continue his work of sanctifying us. All the things that Paul prayed about. Keeping us blameless in Christ.

We have hope for that. We can be hopeful because the one who promises it all is faithful. A voice of hope.

Have you discovered that a person in your circle of people that you know, who walks by faith and is known by love, is a healing balm when they bring their voice of hope into the community of faith? Amen.

When you find someone who is just walking by faith, known by love, they bring hope. Paul launches into his second big lifestyle challenge in Chapter 5, starting in verse 12.

We ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord, who admonish you, hold them in the highest regard and love because of their work, live in peace with each other.

And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I've always found that verse 16 is a great one to go to if you're discipling someone. And a person is like, I don't know what God's will is for me. And you go, can I tell you what God's will is?

How would you know what God's will is? This is God's will for you. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Don't quench the spirit, do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all, hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. What a great practical charge to the church. And when I looked at that, I just saw hope, hope.

For Paul, the voice of hope believes for peace. You've got to have hope to believe in reconciliation, don't you? Hope draws us towards reconciliation.

Hope speaks to the idle and disruptive, because I think to be idle is to have lost a vision of moving towards a better future. A voice of hope believes the best so can be patient for God's best to turn up.

The voice of hope trusts God to bring about justice in the future, so is able to yield the need to pay back wrong for wrong. So are you a voice of hope in your community? Are you a voice of hope?

Hope rejoices because it believes the best for the future. Hope doesn't quench the spirit or disempower the prophetic because the prophetic gift speaks to the future and hope looks to the future.

And then Paul wraps up his third prayer with this general charge to the Thessalonians that I just read, to do what is good and avoid every kind of evil. Walking by faith, known by love, a voice of hope.

Now, it would seem that some people have died in the community of faith at Thessalonica. And so Paul wants to speak into this because there's some bubbles going on about what happens when believers die.

1 Thessalonians 4 verse 13, Brothers and sisters, we don't want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again.

And so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Some of you are remembering great sermons you heard in the 70s about this passage, I'm sure, about the second coming, the rapture. Build each other up by the spirit as voices of hope to each other.

In this part of the Bible, we're taught that when a person dies, they sleep in the Lord. They're not forgotten, they're not spiritually dead. They are, I think, like Colossians says, hidden with Christ in God.

It's a beautiful way to describe it. Hidden with Christ in God. And then we have this hope, the hope of the gospel that Jesus will return.

At a time set by the Father. We don't know when. He will return.

But the Bible's clear, he will wrap up human history when he returns. And I just want to encourage you that I believe the Bible teaches that the battle's already won. The battle's won.

We sing about this. And I really enjoyed writing a Bible loop study on Revelation, which is our name for some of the material we put together helping study the Bible.

And if you don't understand Revelation at all, I just want to commend to you this Bible loop, little devotion. They're about four or five bucks. Just ask at the Pathways Desk.

And it will give you an interpretation of Revelation that includes the belief, my belief, that Armageddon has already happened. And that's because Revelation is, it's all over the place. It's going back to the cross and going forward.

Unless you believe it's all in the future. And that's one of the ways you could interpret it. But I think it makes so much sense that when Jesus died on the cross, John was seeing the battle.

And when Jesus turns up as a victor on that horse in Revelation, he's already bloodied. He's gone to the cross. He's won the victory at the cross.

And excuse me. And that's why Thessalonians doesn't feel like it makes complete sense with Revelation. Here it says, there's just a death.

Jesus returns and the believers are caught up with him. So I would put you, it's really worth going and thinking about this. That Armageddon is not some fresh battle that happens near Jerusalem.

Why would soldiers of the devil and battle when the battle has been won, amen? It really has, the cross and the resurrection. And Revelation talks about the devil already been chained up, I think in Chapter 13.

Anyway, I'm going out on a limb there for some of you who are very staunch believers in a different interpretation. But I just put it there because I think it's incredibly encouraging.

I think Revelation talks about what has happened so that we can be resurrected and we go before Christ. And the challenge is we will all come before Christ and be judged for our sin.

And you can either have Christ pay for your sin or you pay for it yourself. And that is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the wrath of God. But we will be resurrected and we will face a judge who will be righteous.

We are called to be a voice of hope as the church. And we can be because Christ has made a way through death to eternal life.

In Chapter 1 verse 10, Paul says that believers are to wait because Christ has died, risen again, ascended to heaven and He will return again. We are to wait for the appearing of the Son of God from heaven, whom God raised from the dead.

Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath. Hallelujah. This is the reason we can have hope for the future.

So do you have a vision for your life? Can I commend to you 1st Thessalonians, Chapter 1, by the grace of God, may we walk by faith, be known by love, and be a voice of hope.