

4 Traits of an Effective Church, part 2

(1 Thessaloninas 1:8-10)

2/6/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

I was reading an article this week that surveyed the current generation of 20 somethings and asked them what they wanted in a church..

The answers were somewhat expected but I thought a little interesting as well..

The #1 quality that young adults want in a church is “something that feels real.”

I am not quite sure what that means but I think it has to do with the genuineness of the church..

It seems that young adults today have seen enough phony organizations in their life, and certainly don't want to attend a church that isn't authentic..

I hope this means a church that isn't biblical, but who knows..

The second quality that this generation looks for in a church is “one that doesn't guilt them into serving.”

According to the survey, young couples are too busy with other activities and don't want to add church work to their busy schedule..

As a result, young adults are resistant to getting involved with church that demand more of their time..

What is interesting about that response is that is entirely honest but also entirely wrong....

In fact, to be part of a church is to serve the church..

The New Testament never makes room for a Christian to just attend church and never contribute to the church.

Sure there are people who cannot physically do much for the church..

There are people who cannot even support the church financially.

There are new believers who may not be able to do what mature believers are equipped to do..

But the NT assumes that Christians are those are working in the church in some capacity..

So to hear a survey of people looking for church where they don't have to serve is quite shocking...

Well, the Thessalonian church was a working and serving church...

It was church that small in number but big in impact in its area...

And we began looking at this church last week in an effort to learn from what could be called the best church in the NT...

Sure, Paul wrote some nice things about churches in Galatia and Corinth and Ephesus..

And yes, Jesus commended some NT churches in the book of Revelation, but no church seems to be exalted more than the church in Thessalonica..

Last week, we located this church on a historical map of the area..

As the crow flies, Thessalonica is about 900 miles from Jerusalem..

It would located in modern day Greece on the Aegean Sea.

We looked at a few pictures that help us understand what this city looks like today, but it wasn't much different in 51 AD when Paul wrote this letter to the church there..

In fact, the population of Thessalonica is around 300,000 today and it was roughly the same 2000 years ago...

And it well populated because it was a commercial center..

Folks came into the city by the sea but also by a major trade route that ran through the city as well..

Sadly, a city of commerce is also often a city of corruption and that was certainly true of Thessalonica as well..

Pornography was painted on public walls.

Crime rates were out of control.

Babies were abandoned in the streets for lack of care..

Yet, this is the exact place where God decided to paint a church through the missionary efforts of Paul..

Now if you look back at our map for a moment, Paul was a busy man..

He travelled all over the Mediterranean world spreading the gospel during the first century...

And though he was jailed in Phillipi for casting demons out of a slave girl, the Lord sent an earthquake and freed him...

That led him further west to Thessalonica where Paul went into the Jewish synagogue there and preached Jesus as Messiah to them..

Some believed Paul's message, were saved, and that is how the Thessalonian church began..

Sadly, the Jews in Thessalonian synagogue also ran Paul out of town.

As a result, the Thessalonian church was without Paul's leadership in their early days, but God showed much grace to them..

And they not survived but thrived...

And last week, we began to look at what made this church so effective..

How did they excel in a very difficult culture?

How did they make it when most if not all of them were brand new believers?

Well, the first 10 verses of 1 Thessalonians 1 give us 4 clues to their effectiveness..

And last week, we got through the first two characteristics of an effective church in verses 1-7...

Tonight, we see the last 2 characteristics..

As a review, the 1st characteristic of an effective church is that effective churches are filled with people who participate in ministry...

In a very real sense, churches dont have one minister, they have multiple people doing ministry..

Look, I am a pastor but I am not the only gifted part of the church.

You are all very gifted by the Lord to do ministry.

Some serve behind the scenes..

Some serve in the open.

Some serve in the community..

Ministry is not the work of the few in an effective church.

Instead, ministry is the work of the many..

And effective churches are filled with people doing ministry.

Look back at verses 2 and 3...

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and [a]steadfastness of hope [b]in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

The Thessalonians were probably few in number but they made up for that in effort..

They labored due to their love of Christ.

They worked due to their faith in the gospel.

They pressed on due to their hope in Christ Jesus.

On top of the fact that effective churches participate, we also learned last week that effective churches imitate..

Effective churches are not hypocritical.

They don't say that they love Jesus and then act like the devil.

No, their testimony matches the truth they believe.

Paul commends the Thessalonians in verse 6 because they were imitators of Christ..

6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

You see, effective churches profess a love of Christ but they also practice what they preach...

And let me say this..

That is hard to do in a culture that loves its sin.

Thessalonica was a Las Vegas or a New Orleans in its day..

Yet, the believers in the church there didn't compromise their behavior...

They didn't copy the world in order to win the world.

They copied Christ in order to win the world.

I see so many churches today trying to adopt more and more of the culture of the world in hopes of winning them to Christ..

They play the music of the world.

They watch the movies of the world.

They adopt the habits of the world..

Yet, the way to be effective in the culture is to copy Christ and come out of the culture of the world..

Churches are in the world but they cannot become the world...

Look, the last thing I want an unbeliever to think is that Pine Grove is just the neighborhood bar and grill or social club.

We aren't.

We are different.

We believe different.

We teach different.

And we live different.

The church is only effective when it follows Christ and imitates his life..

The church loses its effectiveness when it follows the world and imitates the culture..

The Thessalonians loved their neighbors but they imitated their Savior...

A 3rd characteristic of an effective church is found in verses 8-9...

The effective church participates..

The effective church imitates..

But #3..

III. The Effective Church Reverberates (8-9)

8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a [d]reception we had [e]with you, and how you turned to God from [f]idols to serve [g]a living and true God,

As Paul draws to an end of the first section of this letter, he continues to heap the praise on this Thessalonian church...

Not only were they working and imitating Christ, their way of life was spreading around their area..

Macedonia and Achaia were simply names of modern day Greece..

Which lets us know that the Thessalonians were making an impact on their surrounding area...

And this is how Christianity works..

Picture a rock dropped in a small pond..

The ripples go out in all directions but the biggest movement of the water is right around the place where the rock went in..

The same is true for the believers.

I often remind new believers and even older believers that the first people to feel the effects of their salvation should be their family.

Yes, everyone in your life will eventually be impacted by your belief in Christ but the biggest ripples should be those closest to you..

And that was certainly true for the Thessalonians.

They were impacting their immediate area...

But it was more than that.

They were also impacting other areas of the world as well.

In fact, Paul says that the Thessalonian church was making an impact everywhere that reports of their faith were going..

Now, how do their testimonies spread?

Well, remember, Thessalonica is a port city and a also a city located on a major trade route...

In other words, reports about the changed nature of Thessalonian believers were going by land and sea all over the world..

Just imagine the talk down by the dock..

“What is going on with William?”

“He loaded the ship and was so pleasant.

“I didn’t even catch him trying to steal some of the cargo.

“So what in the world has caused this change of life?”

“Well, he is part of this group of people here called Christians whose lives have been changed by a man named Jesus..

“I have never seen anything like it..”

Then those comments are carried by that boat captain to the port he is headed to..

And the world begins to talk about this church in Thessalonica...

In fact, Paul says that the testimonies about the Thessalonians travelled so far and so wide and so fast that Paul didn’t need to talk about them..

Instead, the world was talking about that church..

And what a great reputation to have in the world.

For people to associate your church with a work of God in the lives of the people who go there..

For the world to take notice of the church should be the goal for every church in the world...

And that was certainly true for the First Baptist Church of Thessalonica..

Now, we also need to take note of what people were saying about this church...

And verse 9 gives us the content of what people were sign about the Thessalonian church...

The first they were reporting is that the Thesslaonians were a welcoming bunch of people..

Look at the first part of verse 9..

9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a [d]reception we had [e]with you

In other words, people were talking about how warmly the Thessalonica church had welcomed Paul and his companions when they had first come to them.

Remember, Paul had peached in the synagogue when he first got to Thessalonica...

And as people began to believe his message and put their faith in Christ, a church was born..

And Paul was able to spend some time with them before he was run out of town..

But Timothy had also visited the church, as well as Silas and other Christian leaders...

And the reputation of the church is that it was a welcoming church..

Paul wasn't from Thessalonica.

He was a native Greek.

He has grown up Jewish, yet these sweet believers in Thessalonica had welcomed him and loved him and cared for him like one of their own..

This is sign of an effective church..

Being hospitable to people who aren't like you.

Showing kindness to strangers and outsiders.

Sadly, many church have the slogan..

“Us four and no more.”

And they close up their hearts to the world in order to serve their own needs...

Look, effective churches love God but they also love others and love them so well that the world takes notice..

But that is not all that people were saying about the Thessalonian believers..

Look at the end of verse 9...

Not only was the church known for its hospitality, it was also known for its repentance..

and how you turned to God from [f]idols to serve [g]a living and true God,

Word had gotten out about how much the Thessalonian church had been changed by the gospel...

No understand, idols here doesn't mean that they had little statues that they worshipped...

It could mean that for some of these Thessalonian believers since false religion was all over Thessalonica..

But more than likely, the idols of the Thessalonians were money or sex or power...

Idols are anything that replace the Lord on his throne in your life.

Everyone in this room tonight was idol worshipper before you were saved..

Most likely, you worshipped yourself before you came the Lord..

But it may have been a job or a relationship or money for you...

Every man and woman is made to worship and every man and woman does worship.

Salvation simply opens our eyes to our idol worship and causes us to worship the Lord..

This is the idea of repentance..

In fact, this is probably one the best descriptions of repentance in the entire.

This picture of turning to God from idols is a picture of everyone who is truly saved.

They turned to God in faith by believing in the person and work of Christ.

But as they are turning to God in faith, they are also leaving their idolatrous life behind.

This is why repentance is a necessary component of salvation.

You must leave your sin and your idolatry and your worship of self behind in order to be saved.

The Thessalonians had done that.

They had left the sewer of their culture.

They had left the sewer of selfishness and greed and immorality behind.

They had come to God.

They had turned to Christ.

They were no longer trusting in their goodness to be right with God.

They were now trusting in God's message of salvation in Christ.

And when those 180 degree turns happen, the world takes notice...

The surrounding area had taken notice of the radical change in these Thessalonians..

These men and women who were now following Christ.

And look, let me tell you something.

People still take notice of true repentance.

Folks will be the talk of the town today if they give up their sin and come to Christ.

It's just not normal or natural human behavior.

This is why salvation is supernatural..

God has to change a heart and call a heart.

Because it is not within the ability of man to change his ways in his own power and have that change last.

Sure people change all the time.

But to leave your sin and your self to come to God could only be the result of hand of God.

Yet, God had done that in the hearts of these Thessalonian believers, and the whole world was taking notice..

You see, effective churches reverberate..

They sound off in their communities..

They echo far and wide..

And the welcoming nature of the Thessalonian church combined with the incredible change seen in the believers in the church reverberated all over the world..

Then there is a final characteristic of an effective church that we find in verse 10...

Effective churches participate...

Effective churches imitate..

Effective churches reverberate...

And last..

IV. The Effective Church Anticipates (10)

Look at verse 10..

10 and to wait for His Son from [h]heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

That I could preach an entire message on this one verse, let me devote an entire 5 minutes to it tonight..

As Paul brings the introduction of his letter to a close, he notes that the Thessalonians were a church that lived in expectation of Jesus' return...

Now remember, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection had occurred 15-20 years earlier as Paul writes this letter in 51 AD.

We look back and wonder how the church could have been so foolish to think that Jesus would be back that soon..

But we forget that Jesus put no timetable on his return..

He simply promised that HE would be back..

This Thessalonian had every right to think that Jesus would return in their lifetime...

They saw the culture of the world around them.

They saw evil rising and winning in their world.

So they, like us, looked forward to Jesus' return.

Now there is a little debate here about the return that Paul is referring to..

Is this the return where Jesus meets the church in the air and snatches them to heaven in the rapture?

Or is this a reference to Jesus' second coming where He establishes His kingdom on the earth?

In my view, this is clearly a reference to the rapture, where Christ hangs in the air to gather his church before the outbreak of wrath in the 7 year tribulation.

In fact, this verse furthers the view that the church will be raptured before the tribulation.

You see that Jesus comes to rescue the church from coming wrath...

People who hold to a mid tribulation or post tribulation view say that the church will experience some wrath before they are raptured..

However, the text here is clear.

Jesus comes to save the church from the wrath to come..

The wrath being a reference to God's outpouring of judgment in the 7 year tribulation...

Now before we get too far down a rabbit trail, let me get back to the text..

Why is it good and helpful for a church to look forward to the return of Christ?

How did that help the Thessalonian church be effective?

Couple thoughts..

#1 - Anticipating the Lord's coming fuels evangelism.

There is nothing more motivating to share the gospel than to be expecting the Lord's return at any minute.

Churches that wake up every day expecting to see Christ in the clouds are busy trying to win souls...

#2 - Anticipating the Lord's return fuels sanctification.

If you are struggling to repent of a sin, live every moment expecting Jesus to return.

That is pretty good motivation to stop sinning and start obeying.

#3 - Anticipating the Lord's return fuels perspective.

If the world is weighing too much on your shoulders, remind yourself that Christ is coming to fix this broken planet.

It is easy to be spun out by all sorts of injustice and evil and sickness in the world, but those who look forward to Christ's return are filled with hope and not despair..

The Thessalonian church had its share of struggles but those struggles didn't compare to their hope in Christ's return.

And that anticipation made them an effective church in the world..

Conclusion

So what can we take with us tonight?

#1 - Reception and repentance make the headlines.

I think that Pine Grove has the reputation of being a welcoming church...

That never needs to change.

WE will open the doors to anyone who wants to know about Christ.

WE will preach the gospel to anyone in need of it.

Hospitality and kindness never go out of style in the church, so may they never go out of style here..

I also hope and pray that repentance is a reputation of this church.

I hope the community sees people here who take their walk with the Lord seriously.

No, we aren't perfect but we also are complacent..

WE are striving to turn to God more and more every day.

WE are saying goodbyes to our sins and ourselves while growing in our love of the Christ..

A kind welcome and holy living go a long way in the world..

May Pine Grove be known for both.

#2 - Return and rescue motivate our hearts.

A church that expects Jesus to crash their services each week is a church that will be highly motivated to get to work.

I will never forget spending some time studying end times events..

And though I was learning much, I also found myself witnessing and serving much.

There's nothing like knowing that Jesus could return today to get you off your couch and into action.

The church must live in light of Christ's return and we must use that as motivation to get busy and push forward.

Knowing that Jesus is coming again to rescue his church is both a great comfort and a great motivator. May we all get to work....Let us pray.