



“Thankful for the Mission”

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Idea: Every believer is sent on mission for Christ.

Intro: Matthew Henry, the great English Presbyterian pastor, is remembered today for his commentary on the Bible. During his lifetime, however, he was known for his gratitude. Once, while walking down the street, he was robbed. The thieves took everything of value. Later that night, Matthew Henry wrote in his journal: “I am thankful that during these years I have never been robbed until now. Also, even though they took my money, they did not take my life. And although they took all I had, it was not much. Finally, I am grateful that it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

Thankfulness is a matter of one’s perspective on life. It has been said that the more we look for the mercies of life, the more of them we will see. Blessings brighten when we count them, for it is out of the determination of the heart that the eyes see. If you want to be gloomy, there’s gloom enough to keep you blue. On the flip side, if you want to be happy, there’s gleam enough to keep you glad. Better to lose count while naming your blessings than to lose your blessings by counting your troubles.

For Matthew Henry, he looked at the horrific events of his night and found something to thank God over. On this Sunday morning just before Thanksgiving, what can you thank God for in your life? Allow time for public thanksgiving.

Inquiry: If you will, take your Bible and turn with me to First Thessalonians 1. The Apostle Paul penned this letter to the church in Thessalonica. He knew the Thessalonian believers well. It was Paul, Timothy, and Silas who had introduced them to the gospel and established the church there (Acts 17:1-9). He had seen the mighty transformation that had taken place in their lives through the redemptive work of Christ. In this letter, Paul, most likely writing from Corinth, sought to encourage and equip these believers in their faith. As he began the letter, he couldn’t help but express his gratitude for the work of God that was so evident in their lives.

We have spent the last two Sundays looking at his thankfulness for the church. We have learned that the active faith, love, and hope demonstrated by the church were incredible examples that motivated other believers to greater sanctification. We have also learned they were a strong rebuke that brought correction to those walking at a guilty distance. We have also looked at Paul’s thankfulness for the

gospel and how it reveals the love, pursuit, and earnestness of God that works to bring men, women, boys, and girls into relationship with Christ.

Today, we discover a third component of Paul's thankfulness. He was thankful for the mission. Like Paul, we too, should be thankful for the church, the gospel, and the mission.

Read First Thessalonians 1:6-10.

There was no doubt in Paul's mind about the authenticity of the Thessalonians' conversion to Christ. He had witnessed their transformation. He had seen them awaken from death to life in Jesus. He had seen them forsake sin and self and turn to Christ. They had walked away from their idolatry and held firmly to the Lord even in the face of persecution. As great as the evidence of their conversion was, there was even more. The Thessalonian believers had joined Paul and the other believers in the mission of Christ. They understood the Great Commission mandate upon their lives to make disciples and had joyfully engaged themselves, following the example modeled by Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

What is the mission of the local church? According to Jesus the mission of the church is to share the message of salvation with everyone in our world who is lost and dead in his or her sin. And before you begin to explain away the seriousness of this mission, let me remind you that all four Gospels and the Book of Acts contain some form of this mandate to make disciples of the lost (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Likewise, this responsibility is not relegated to pastors and leaders of the church. It is the responsibility and privilege of each member of every local church to share the message of salvation. Paul commended the Thessalonian church for their evangelical engagement of the lost people in their city and region. He was thankful for the mission they had engaged.

Today, we too are thankful for at least three reasons, which we find in this passage. We are thankful for the mission because:

1. Lives are transformed.

Read 1:6a.

The word translated *imitator* (μιμητής) is where the English term *mimic* is derived. Paul thanked the Lord because the Thessalonians were not believers in name only. They had not just given lip service to Jesus. They had surrendered their entire lives to Him, which resulted in a life transformation that was clearly evident in all parts of their lives. They mimicked and imitated the life and teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy shared the gospel with the Thessalonians, they had the complete assurance that it was the power of God unto salvation. They felt the earnestness of God through the power of the Holy Spirit move through their preaching and teaching of the Word. They knew it was the only hope for the Thessalonians. For this reason they preached the gospel rather than some other teaching. They didn't come to Thessalonica with an economic message, a call for greater educational opportunities, or an appeal for more religious commitment. They came preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the only hope for those in our community, our nation, and our world is the gospel. You can throw all the money there is at the problems plaguing our society, but they will never touch the heart of the problems because the human

heart is at the heart of all our problems (Jer 17:9). The Bible says it is deceitfully wicked. You can't buy it off, program it out, or work it in.

Man is dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1); He is cut off from God (Eph 2:12). He is lost and without hope in this life. It is here where grace steps into the picture with a “But God...”

12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. – Eph 2:12-13

God the Father through the sacrifice of God the Son made a way. He transformed the lives of the Thessalonians through the power of the gospel.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, - Eph 2:19

The lost was found. The sinner became a saint. The separated from God by sin was adopted and brought near by the blood of Christ. Today, we can and should be thankful for the mission because the gospel is the power of God that transforms lives. Through it we get to see our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances leave their lives of sin in the rearview mirror as they get on God's highway of holiness. Are you thankful for the mission? Are you grateful for the transformation Christ has made in your life?

Brothers and sisters, I am thankful for the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. And I am thankful for the mission of the gospel because it through it we get to see people's lives transformed.

There is a second reason to be thankful for the mission. We are thankful because the gospel is sent out.

2. The gospel is sent out.

The gospel radically transformed the Thessalonians' lives so that they became an example to other believers. The word translated *example* in verse seven is τύπος. It carries the idea of “exact reproduction or type.” Paul commended them for becoming a living blueprint for others to follow. May our lives, like the Thessalonians, be a walking, breathing, and living blueprint of what it means to live for Jesus and be on His mission!

Notice the scope of their blueprint. Verse seven points out that they influenced all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. That is, they preached the gospel in their region in northern Greece as well as in the southern parts. In addition, their gospel went everywhere. It “sounded forth.” It blasted forth in a bold way through those they had reached and disciplined so that when Paul came to some cities to preach the gospel, it had already arrived by way of the Thessalonians.

The gospel is Good News. It is exciting news. It is a message of hope, life, and love. It is a transforming message that cannot be kept to you. Once you taste its goodness, you want others to taste it too. Once you experience the grace of our Lord, which exposes all your sin yet warmly accepts you as you are, you can't help but tell others about it (John 4). If you can keep it

to yourself, I would argue that you have not experienced the gospel of the Bible. If you can keep it to yourselves than you haven't met my Jesus. No, I am thankful for the mission because the Lord allows us to participate in it. As He changes my life, He uses me to share the message to someone else who shares it with someone else. On and on it goes, transforming lives one at a time.

Thirdly, we are thankful for the mission because partnerships are developed.

3. Partnerships are developed.

Read 1:9-10.

The Thessalonian believers became partners with Paul, Silas, and Timothy in the gospel ministry. Gospel partnerships are critical to the advancement of God's kingdom. Remember how I said earlier that God has commissioned everyone in the church in the work of the gospel. This is not just the responsibility of the pastors and small group leaders. You can't claim your ministry is serving on a committee or on a ministry team like the Kitchen Team. You and I cannot relegate the gospel. It is the responsibility and privilege of us all because it will take us all to fulfill the Great Commission.

There is no way we can reach the 20,000+ people living in Powhatan who are outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ if the responsibility alone is on the shoulders of a few pastors and teachers. But we can reach them with the gospel if every follower of Jesus will partner together in the gospel and share in their circles of influence.

We have a gospel mandate to reach the lost here and there (Acts 1:8). How can we do that? We do it as we lock arms with other believers and churches in the work of the gospel. As Southern Baptists we lock arms in gospel cooperation with 45,000 other churches to take the gospel to Virginia, America, and the world. Together through our partnership, we support over 4,000 missionaries and plant hundreds of churches annually all throughout North America through our North American Mission Board. And together through our partnership, we send and support over 4,000 missionaries and plant churches all over the globe through our International Mission Board. Every week a portion of your tithes and offerings go to support our cooperative efforts in this work. When you give to special mission offerings, like the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, your gifts go directly to fund gospel efforts on the field.

We are not in this mission alone. God has never sent His people into the work alone. He is always with us, and He has blessed us with gospel partners. Therefore, we are not alone in this work so that those lost in their sins are not alone. Praise God for the gospel partnerships He gives us in His mission.

Conclusion: How did the gospel come to you? How did God get the life transforming Good News to you? Who did He send on mission for your life? Was it a church, an evangelist, a friend, a coworker, or a neighbor? Who answered the mission call and brought the gospel to you? Since you've become a follower of Jesus, who have you taken the Good News too and shared? How have you allowed your life to be on mission for Christ?

This Thanksgiving season, we thank God for the church, the gospel, and the mission of Jesus Christ. We have an incredible and life transforming message for all people. It doesn't matter what one's race, education, economic, or social status may be. The gospel is the Good News for everyone who believes. But it is only good news if it gets there in time.

Today, some of you may need to respond to the Good News in repentance and faith. You can't be on mission with God because you are His mission. What is preventing you from responding to the gospel?

There are others today who need to join Christ in His mission. There are people perishing all around you. Their marriages are failing. Their kids are hurting. They are lost and one heartbeat away from a devil's hell. Yet up until now, you have remained silent. Why? Why don't you share the Good News with them? Why don't you introduce them to Jesus? He transformed your life, didn't He? He saved you so that He can save them.

We all live in neighborhoods filled with lost, hurting, and far from God people. What are doing about it? How is our mission? Are we praying for them? We should be praying. Perhaps, today that is where you need to begin. Lets flood the altar this morning with people on their knees crying out to God for our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, students in our schools, and the nations.