

Sunday Update
1st November 2020

1 Thessalonians 2:9-16

9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: you suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Many people think that the Church in Scotland is at a cross-roads. It was getting to that point before Covid, and Covid has probably made the cross-roads come a bit sooner than some would like. Some of the old ways of doing things, ways that we are used to in the church and perhaps comfortable with, may well have gone and we're not quite sure what will replace them! We certainly live in a culture that is more cynical and sceptical of church than before and we have to work hard to stand still at the moment. Scotland is not the most receptive nation for the gospel; lots of people are looking to other places for their big life-moments because they seem not to think that the church has anything to offer them. The church is irrelevant to many people, seen as completely out-of-date. Our own Kirk Session is taking part in an exercise across Edinburgh, planning for the future; what does that future look like for the church in the city?

One of the key words that we need to understand more and more in the life of the church is "mission". We've heard the word before: you might have been involved in a summer mission a long time ago, maybe at the beach; we have a mission statement that tells the world what we're trying to be and do as a church – "Building Christ's Church in the Community"; and for a few hundred years the church has sent "missionaries" overseas to tell people about Jesus and build churches in places where there were none. Mission is something that God does. God has a plan and a purpose that the whole world should be full of His glory and He is working to that goal. Jesus came into the world to take that mission on, sent by his Father to build a kingdom. The Church's mission is to take part in God's mission, but how do we go about that? Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians is a little case-study in what the church might look like when we embrace our part in the mission of God. We will look at this through the eyes of the Bible passage above and Acts 17:1-11 which tells the story of Paul's visit to Thessalonica.

Thessalonica is the capital of the province of Macedonia, in the north of Greece. Paul visited the city as part of a tour through Greece, telling people about Jesus, visiting churches that already existed and planting new churches when people responded to his preaching. How did he go about that? When he arrived in Thessalonica, Acts 17 tells us that he went to the local synagogue on three successive Sabbaths and preached to the Jews, telling them about Jesus, that "*the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'*" (Acts 17:3) We're told that some of

the Jews were persuaded as were some Greeks and some prominent women – this was the embryonic church in Thessalonica. But in his letter, Paul tells us that he did something else: he worked night and day to support himself. We know from other places that Paul was a tent-maker and it seems as if he spent the rest of his Thessalonian week working to make tents and then being in the market-place selling tents or drumming up business for himself. He did this to make money to support himself and his friends, but it was also the place to talk to people, to have conversations, and it's not hard to imagine that these conversations would, at times, be about Jesus and faith!

It's easy for churches to become inward-looking. Survival mode tends to make that happen. When churches are concerned with their survival then we tend to be concerned with things like buildings and money and how we cut down on the bills and how we pay the bills. The challenge for us as church in our community in 2020 and beyond is to continue to be outward-looking, to engage with people beyond the walls of the church, to care for people and to help people outside of the church family. We have a plan to run some more events that would take us outside the church building and outside of the normal run of church-based events, but Covid has put that on hold. God is concerned for the needs of all the people, not just those who are members of the Church, and we should be the same; the life of the church should reflect that outward-look in the events that we run.

Mission is not just about events; it is also about the kind of people that we are. In Acts 17, the jealous Jews stir up a riot against Paul. They accused Paul and his friends of stirring up trouble and to catch the attention of the authorities, they accused them of defying Caesar *"saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."* (17:7) This is not just a message to proclaim, that "Jesus is King", but this is an allegiance for living. Again, in his letter Paul writes about what the Thessalonians saw in Paul and his friends: *"You are witnesses of how holy, righteous and blameless we were..."* (2:10) The quality of their lifestyle shone out of them for people to see. Perhaps in the marketplace, Paul the tent maker developed a reputation for a being an honest broker, someone whose word you could trust, and so people respected him and would listen more readily to his preaching. He became a role-model for the Christians, someone they could imitate as they tried to live a life worthy of God.

Christians are not perfect people. We should not expect that of ourselves and we'd hope others wouldn't expect that of us. But the bar is set very high for us to be *"holy, righteous and blameless."* We'll never meet these targets in a life-time of trying and in a sense that isn't the issue. However, we are not anonymous or invisible; we all meet people in one way or another, some of whom are not Christians; what do these people see in us? We all have a part in this God-given mission because this part is about being the right kind of people. We all have the capacity to draw people to Jesus, as we all have the capacity to turn people away from Jesus – it boils down to the kind of people that we are.

Jesus is Lord! We sing the song that declares that to be true. The challenge is to live the life that shows we are committed to making Jesus Lord of our lives in practice. That's hard today because to live as if Jesus is Lord is to go against so much of the culture of Scotland today. To call Jesus "Lord" challenges us to take time to notice other people; to call Jesus "Lord" challenges us to speak the truth; to call Jesus "Lord" challenges us to love, to be patient, gentle and kind, when the world about us is so often the opposite! Then the challenge is to tell people about Jesus. That's the mission of God for us today. Jesus is *seen* in His people! He is seen in His people long before the gospel is heard *from* His people, but the gospel is also to be heard.

We don't know what lies beyond the cross-roads; some of the new challenges facing the church will be exciting, some will be daunting. Whatever that looks like, the mission of God is outward-looking to

bless the world; the mission of God is to be a people who love Jesus and live like Him. Jesus said “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21) Are you ready to be sent?

Prayer: Father, thank you that You have a plan and purpose, a mission to bless the world and to fill the whole world with your glory; thank You that you sent Jesus to make that happen and that You have sent Your church to take the mission of God to the world. Help us to look to others, to notice them and their needs; help us to declare that Jesus is Lord and then to live like Him in the way that we think, speak and behave.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For us to always be an outward-looking church; the minister, the elders and other leaders to be wise about mission; the Kirk Session meets on Wednesday. As we pray for our own church, pray for our neighbours, their ministers, elders and other leaders, to be outward-looking churches.
- Give us the opportunities to care for other people, for people in the community who are in need.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital start to climb again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- People in Cambodia suffering from floods, those who built their fields and crops on bank loans but their fields are washed away, but the bank still wants the loan repaid; homes are destroyed, cholera is spreading, incomes gone.
- People in Syria where wildfires have killed some, displaced more than 25,000 other people and destroyed farms and forests.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Jesus is Lord, the cry that echoes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLJFpxOcGKk>
 The Church's one foundation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1YBYrJ8Hzg>
 Jesus is greater <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1mINnh3Uzc>
 As the deer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBppKZ0eJlQ>
 Will your anchor hold <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTfypuXwrMA>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the "sermons" tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS The next issue of "EVERY DAY WITH JESUS" Booklet for November and December 2020 is now available and please contact Ian Aitken for a copy. Also, new issues of the "WORD FOR TODAY" Booklet and "WORD 4u2TODAY" Booklet for Young People for November and December 2020 and January 2021 and "OUR DAILY BREAD" for December 2020 and January and February 2021 are also available and please contact Michael Merriman for a copy.. Let the Bible feed you.

Shoeboxes – we've said already that we won't be making shoeboxes up this year; the way in which we do it is just not possible given the Covid restrictions. However, we would encourage you to donate the money you might have spent on shoebox material to Blythswood and Jean Dewar is happy to act as the channel for your donations, either in cash or by cheque. You can also donate online at <https://blythswood.org/donate-to-shoe-box-appeal/> Margaret Black in Balerno is sending some shoeboxes and Tillie Boulogne has some leaflets, though you would really need to make up a whole box by yourself.

Tearfund Quiz – Saturday 14th November from 7.30pm on Zoom. We have done this in the Hall for 2 years and this year we will do the Quiz on Zoom. Your "ticket" will be a donation to Tearfund, which you can do online by a donation into the church bank account with the reference "Tearfund" or by giving the minister some money and he will send it on.

Remembrance Sunday – Sunday 8th November is Remembrance Sunday. As part of the service we will have an act of remembrance around 11am; there will be some appropriate bible words, the traditional words of remembrance and the 2 minutes' silence. There will be a recording of the wreath being laid in front of the communion table as part of that service. The wreath itself will be placed outside the church building on the morning of November 8th and will sit in the church garden for that time to allow anyone who wants to take time to remember in a personal way to do so outside. We're not allowed to hold any formal act of remembrance outside in a way that would gather a crowd, so please stay safe. Later in the day, the wreath will be placed at the war memorial in Currie as part of our acknowledgement of those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of our peace and freedom.



Beg, encourage, urge

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Dear God,
you lead each of us
on our path through life.
Today our paths meet
at this moment, in this place.
Bring us together to worship you.
Amen.



Play together...

Blindfold one person. Have someone else stand in front of them and answer "yes" or "no" questions asked by the blindfolded person. How quickly can they work out who's in front of them?

Question...



What encourages and motivates you?
How would you encourage or motivate someone else?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202%3A9-13&version=NIRV,CEV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.



Talk together...

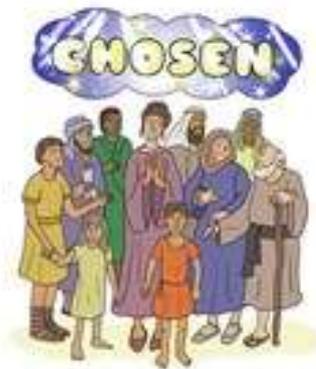
- Think about how you do things...When you put on your socks or shoes, which foot do you do first? When you eat lunch, do you eat your favourite or least favourite things first? When you fold your arms or legs, is it left or right that's on top? When you have a list of things to do, which do you do first- the ones you like or the ones you don't?
 - Does it matter how people do things as long as they get done?
 - Why do you think Paul says he begged, urged and encouraged the Thessalonians? What's the difference between each one?
 - Are you more like to do something if someone begs, encourages or urges you?
- Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are chosen by God and should live life honouring God.
- How can we live in a way that honours God?
 - How do you think people might see God in you?

Praise together...



Two Fischy Music songs to choose from today (or listen to both!) *You are a star*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oFO2hZ0fZc>

I'm the only I:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbe2taDZmJM&t=93s>



Play something...

Play a game where you might need to encourage, beg or urge someone to get the answer correct or to guess something. For example Pictionary, Articulate, Charades, Heads Up, 5 Second Rule etc. How does it feel when they get it right, or wrong?!

Pray together...

Give each person an inflated balloon and a pen. Write your name and/or a sketch of yourself on the balloon. Bat the balloons around the room for a while until someone shouts stop. Take hold of the nearest balloon and say a prayer for the person written on it. "Thank you God for....Thank you that they....Help them....Amen."

Do something...

Write an acrostic poem about being chosen using the letters of the word "chosen".

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