

Text: 1 Thessalonian 1:7-10

Title: Living for Jesus is our witness of Jesus

Occasion: EFC Sunday Service, July 5th, 2020

Good morning brothers, sisters and friends from EFC

It is a privilege to share with you this morning the Word of God. My name is Josué Olmedo. My wife and I serve university students with a local ministry called CECE and with the global family to which CECE is part, the ministry called IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students).

As EFC we have been in a journey through the letter of Paul to the believers in Thessalonica. Last Sunday, Pastor Jeremy led us in meditating in the last passage of 2 Thessalonians where Paul talks about the peace that comes from the Lord. The prayer of our pastors and elders at EFC has been for our lives to be shaped by the Word of God as it has been expounded from 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The apostle himself prayed thanking God for the faith, love and hope the believers in Thessalonica showed in their lives.

Please, I invite you to read together with me today's passage

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

“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. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

I am impressed and challenged by how Paul describes these followers of Jesus. He says, “And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (v7). They became a model to other believers in how to live and share the Gospel. They became positive influencers for the Gospel in Macedonia, Achaia and, as Paul says, everywhere. They became a model in how to live and share the Gospel for other believers who inhabited the area of what is known today as the Balkans. So, their faith had an impact in an important and wide-ranging geographical area. Paul says, “The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere” (v8a)

The impact of their faith in God on other believers and other people was so deep that Paul tells us that he didn't need to talk about their testimony because other believers themselves in this region of Macedonia and Achaia were telling others about how their brothers and sisters from Thessalonica had received the Gospel. Paul says, "Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us" (vv8b-9a).

They lived out their faith in such a way that it caused people to tell others about it in a positive way. What were they talking about? People were reporting the kind of reception the believers in Thessalonica gave to the Gospel Paul preached to them and the fruit in their lives of receiving the gospel. Receiving and fruit. Receiving the Gospel and the fruit of the Gospel in the lives of the Thessalonians believers.

What was behind of such positive reception of the Gospel? Or perhaps I should more correctly ask, who was behind such a positive receiving of the Gospel? The Holy Spirit. Yes, the Holy Spirit was behind their receiving of the gospel. Not only in hearing and receiving, but also in the sharing of the gospel. The Holy Spirit was behind the two ends of the communication of the Gospel. Let us hear what Paul says about the vital role of the Spirit in the sharing of the gospel and in the reception of the gospel,

(vv5 and 6) "because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit"

Here we see the Holy Spirit empowering Paul with words spoken with conviction and his righteous behavior in sharing the Gospel. Furthermore, we see the Holy Spirit empowering the Thessalonians to welcome the gospel with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. Here we can see that the Holy Spirit is front and behind this whole process of evangelization, both in the sharing and in the receiving of this message.

Considering the verses we just read, 5 and 6 , I would like to reinforce something said by Pastor John in the first video of the Evangelism Training series. As we seek to share the gospel with other people we need "to yield to the Holy Spirit". We depend on him! It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the messenger and the one who enables non believers to receive the gospel. I encourage you to be part of one of the discussion groups that during the next few weeks will be exploring the topic of evangelism together.

As we saw before, the receiving of the message of the gospel by the Thessalonians and the fruit of this message by the Thessalonians caused people to talk about it positively.

But, what happened to the Thessalonians? What was the fruit that was evident in their lives from receiving the gospel of Jesus through the Holy Spirit? Paul tells us the following: (vv9b-10) “They tell how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”

Paul mentions at least three fruit in the lives of the Thessalonians. Firstly, they converted to God, which meant they abandoned their false gods. Secondly, they started to serve God. Thirdly, they started to wait for the coming of Jesus. Conversion to God. Service to God. Waiting for Jesus.

Their conversion, service and waiting for Jesus had a positive influence on other believers. They were telling others about it. Their testimony become an example to others in conversion, service and waiting for Jesus.

I think most of us, maybe all of us, have had Christian believers around us whose lives have been an example for us to follow, whose lives have challenged us. I invite you for a minute to think about other believers, alive or who are no longer with us, that because of their conversion, service and waiting have had a positive and remarkable influence in your life.

Take a minute to identify at least one person.

I want to share with you briefly about three Christian believers that have had a positive influence in my life because of their conversion, service and waiting for Jesus

Conversion: The first person is Edison. He now is an engineer. I met him through CECE when he was a student. He was part of a local church. He asked me to meet regularly to talk through several questions he had over the Bible, faith, and the big questions of life. In some point I suggested to him to read through a book called Basic Christianity written by late Pastor John Stott. The last chapter of the book invites the reader to consider to follow Jesus by recognizing him as Lord and Saviour. I was positively surprised when at the end of the session he told me that according to what he read in the book he could not consider himself truly a real Christian and that he was willing to invite Jesus into his life, follow him and recognize him as his personal Lord and Savior. His conversion was not dramatic but it was real. Because of his new relationship with Jesus he implemented several evangelistic initiatives at his university, his church, when he graduated and got a job started to tithe and give offerings, he has shown practical compassion with students in need of help, and now he is studying theology to serve more effectively in CECE and his church. His testimony of conversion refreshed my soul to trust in the power of the gospel.

Service: The second person is Denis Mukwege. He is a medical doctor from Congo, from a Pentecostal background, who specializes in reconstructive surgery for women who have experienced violence in war. Two years ago he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work. Besides continuing to help people and especially women with surgical treatment, he began to fight the causes of violence: evil politicians who want to keep war going on because of economic greed. Dr Mukwege challenged me not only to serve those who have an immediate need, but to think hard and to start changing the causes of such poverty.

Waiting: The third person is Marva Dawn. She is an American theologian, from a Lutheran background, who works in Christian education as well as in theological education, with an emphasis in spiritual formation. How are we going to disciple people to truly live for Jesus in the midst of evil, worldly powers, is her constant question. Marva Dawn suffers some very serious physical limitations, however with the help of his husband and friends she carries on enthusiastically the ministry the Lord has given her. Not only enthusiastically but with hope. Waiting for the coming of Jesus. She is utterly convinced that the physical limitations her body has do not have the last word in her life, she expects the final transformation of her body, as Jesus promised when he comes again. Dr. Marva Dawn encourages me to grow in my awareness of the new creation the Lord has promised.

I want to challenge you to treasure in your heart your own stories of believers that have had a positive impact in your faith. But above all, I want to challenge you to become the kind of believer that because of your conversion to God, service to God and waiting for Jesus, becomes an example, a positive influence, to other fellow believers.

Let us hear the Scriptures again: “They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”

Let us pray. *“Father, we ask your help to constantly receive the gospel of Jesus Christ with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. We pray that your Holy Spirit helps us to convert to you and abandon our idols, to serve you and to wait for the coming of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen”*

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