

## **NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024 am**

**TITLE: "Thankful to Go for my church" TEXT: 1 Thess 1 Verses 1-10**

**Series: How to pray for my church Part 1**

### **Scripture references from the ESV**

**1 Thess 1:1-10** Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly<sup>[a]</sup> mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers<sup>[b]</sup> loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. <sup>9</sup>For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

**One of the greatest blessings God gives to us as his people is  
the blessing of belonging to a local church**

Belonging to the local church is much more than belonging to a gym or a choir. It is much more than individuals attending a place of worship. The Bible speaks about the church in terms of Christ's body, where he is the head and we are the rest of the body. This is a union that goes much deeper than just physically coming together on a Sunday or having a common interest in Christianity.

- We are spiritually united in Christ as one people, in the same way that our body, although made up of many different parts, is one body.

When part of our physical body hurts, it affects the whole of our body, and that is true within the church of Christ. We are so intimately united to Christ as our head that

- if one member of the church suffers, all the members suffer

- If one member of the church goes through a hard time, the rest experience pain and sorrow

That is true for the church globally, but it is especially true of local churches.

**Here in Broadstone, we are a body of believers spiritually united to one another in Christ**

**and therefore committed to each other and invested in each other's lives.**

We do not always feel the depth of this union, and one reason for this may be because we largely pray for one another as individuals. That is not wrong, but if we only do that it is easy to fall into the mindset that the church is just a group of individuals who meet together on Sundays. One way to enlarge our mindset of what constitutes church is

**to pray for the church as a whole.**

When we pray, let us not just pray for individuals in the church, but in that moment, let us pray for the church as a whole, so that in our minds we are not just lifting up that one person but we are lifting up the whole church to the Lord.

We are not accustomed to this way of praying but through this series on 1 Thessalonians we will see what it looks like.

- How are we to do this kind of praying?

We do what the apostle Paul did. In the epistles, he speaks of his care for all the church, and that care was in part shown by praying for them. There were churches he had never visited, and he did not know all the individual members even of those he had visited but he prayed **big sweeping (but not insipid) prayers** (John Piper) in a specific way for them all as a united body in Christ. We will come to see what that looks like but

**Praying for our church begins by giving thanks to God for our church**

Paul starts with this (**vv2-3** above). It was genuine heartfelt thanks with no buts! He does **not** say:

- We give thanks for you, but we wish you were not so hung up over the return of Jesus
- We give thanks for some of you, but there are others of you that we just cannot thank God for

- Yesterday we could give thanks for you but after we heard what happened today, we no longer can

He uses the words **always, all** and **constantly** but he was not naïve about the problems churches face. He knew that there were difficult people, false teaching, disunity and falling into gross sin. Yet he is still able to give thanks.

The church in Corinth was an example of all of those problems, and Paul wrote to address the issues, but

that did not stop him from beginning his letter: **I give thanks to my God always for you because of the**

**grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, (1 Cor 1:4)**

Most of us find it easier to grumble about our church than we do to give thanks to God for it.

**Paul is able to give thanks for them because he looks beyond the problems to see what God is doing among them**

**Where God is at work, he is able to give thanks.**

The Thessalonian church was a good example of what a church should be (v7), and Paul could see how God was at work among them, enabling him to give thanks to God for them. What does such a church look like?

### **1. A church we can be thankful to God for is a church with a gospel culture (vv4-6).**

Paul was confident that these believers had been chosen by God because he was able to preach the gospel with power and they received it even though there was a cost to them. It was a message that came to them with God's power and changed their whole culture (v9b). They had experienced the grace of God and that grace was flowing out from them and affecting the way they related to one another (v3). We are all to work hard in the church, keeping going until the job is done and not giving up. Paul uses the words **work, labour** and **steadfastness** to express this.

### **What is our motivation?**

- Is it to look good in the eyes of others, to gain favour with God or to keep out of trouble?

These believers were motivated and driven by:

- Faith in Christ, love for Christ and the hope (confidence) of being with Christ

The gospel was not just the means by which they were saved. It was shaping the whole culture of the church.

- Because they believed Christ had been gracious to forgive them, they could be gracious to forgive others.
- Because they experienced Christ's love for them, they were able to love others and expend themselves in serving them
- Because Christ had promised them eternal life, they were able to persevere even though they suffered affliction

The gospel did not just shape their culture to be one of work, labour and steadfastness.

### **The gospel shaped them to be a people of joy.**

Despite their suffering, as they believed the good news of Jesus' love and the hope he set before them, the Holy Spirit was at work to create in them a heart of joy.

### **The gospel was being lived out in the whole church**

We can know the gospel intellectually, hear the gospel preached clearly and even experience a measure of individual change, but still find that the gospel does not shape the culture of the church.

**What is needed is not just outward change but change at the deepest level of our hearts.**

It is possible to be busy working, to keep on going and to have a naturally cheerful disposition, but not to be doing it

from the motivation of Christ and the Gospel – it is all external and not a heart change.

When we have a gospel culture in the church:

- Our work will be driven by faith in Christ
  - We will wear ourselves out because of Christ's love at work within us
  - We will keep going because of the confidence of being with Christ for all eternity
  - The Holy Spirit at work in us will give us a joy that not even affliction can crush
- It will be work, labour and perseverance that come from an inner transformation.**

That inner transformation will be one that happens as we apply the gospel to the whole of life. It will affect the whole culture of the church, not just some individuals, leading to us being a church we can be thankful to God for because:

- 2. We will be a church with a good testimony (vv5-10).** Paul and his team served in a way that showed Christ. There was a beauty about their life and service. In response, the church imitated these workers and thus imitated Christ (v6). The church had a good testimony.

### **They became people to imitate**

Their reputation as a Christlike, gospel centred church became known without Paul having to say anything (v7- 10). Wherever Paul went, he heard about how the gospel had changed these believers. They were a church that did not dishonour what they said by how they lived.

### **They were a church to imitate because they imitated Christ**

Whether consciously or sub-consciously, we all have people we imitate and people who imitate us. We do this with how we dress, what we eat and where we go amongst other things, including our attitudes to our brothers and sisters in Christ. This being the case:

- Should we not seek to imitate Christ so that we can influence others to imitate Christ?

Paul sought to live like this:

- **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.** (1 Cor 11:1)
- **What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Phil 4:9)

### **As a church, are we corporately imitating Christ?**

- Are we a church where it is known that we are Christ's followers - people who are forsaking the world's idols and being transformed by the gospel?

### **What is a church that is worthy of thanks to God like?**

**It is a church with a Gospel culture and a church with a good testimony.**

- What does this mean for our praying?

Paul knows that this church is like it is because God is at work among them and he gives thanks to God, not to the church (v2). He knows that:

- The gospel came with power because the Spirit of God empowered him to preach it
- they responded to the gospel because the Holy Spirit was at work among them.

If we are going to be the kind of church that we and others can be thankful to God for, and others want to imitate, and if

we are going to be a church with a gospel culture that shows faith, love, hope and joy then:

**we need to be a church at prayer, praying big, sweeping (and not insipid) prayers**

This week, let us:

- a) **ask God to make us a church who give good reason for others to be thankful to God for us.** Paul often begins his letters with a prayer, asking God to carry out in the lives of the readers what he (Paul) is writing about. He knows that the church can only obey the commands if Christ is at work. If we are to be a church that is worthy of thanks to God, it will only happen as we ask Christ to work in us. Our private praying is important, but we need to be participating in corporate prayer too. Paul talks about **our prayers (v2).**

To become the sort of church that people can be thankful for, we need to gather together to pray.

**Only as we come together to pray as the whole body of Christ will the whole body be changed,**

**our hearts and wills being conformed to Christ's heart and will.**

The church is a body united to Christ, but when we come to Christ to change us, some parts of the body are seen to be missing and others have to be present on their own.

**When we unite to ask God to create a gospel culture among us, and to enable us to imitate Christ,**

**a far deeper change will take place**

- b) **ask God to open our eyes to see where he is at work in the church so we can be thankful to him.** It is easy to become so disgruntled or disappointed with church life and people that we fail to see how God is at work.

**God is at work among us**

**We can be sure of that because God is always at work.**

When problems arise, we quickly lose sight of what God is doing. We need to confess our grumbling about those minority issues and ask God to help us to see where the gospel culture is happening, and where we are displaying a good testimony to others.

**As God answers our prayers and opens our eyes  
we will be able to be truly thankful to God for our church**

**Take time to pray these two prayers yourself.**

**Take every opportunity to gather together as the body of Christ to pray these same prayers.**

- ask God to make us a church who give good reason for others to be thankful to God for us
- ask God to open our eyes to see where he is at work in the church so we can be thankful to him for the church

**As we see where God is at work and how the gospel culture is shaping us, making us  
imitators of Christ,  
we will truly become a church to be thankful to God for.**