

Welcome: I want to welcome you to Germantown Church of God, located in Cascade, MD. I am Pastor Mark Hosler. I am glad that you can be with me. We want to say Congratulations to 2020 Graduates. The video presentation at the beginning of this service features Graduates who are connected in some way to our Church Family. Parents, Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles and friends are proud of you and we want to wish you the best. As we begin, I want to read a passage of Scripture especially for you graduates.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:1-13

Prayer Time

**Isaiah 26:3 – *You will keep in perfect peace
all who trust in you,
all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (NLT)***

Scripture 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Message: **What Is Church (Pt. 3)**

I want to start out today with a question or two for you to think about.

- ***How does your Christian faith impact other people?***
- ***Has your Lifestyle and witness as a Christian resulted in other people becoming followers of Jesus?***

Those questions help to set the stage for our study today. For the last few weeks we have been looking at this first chapter of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Our sermon study has been entitled: **What Is Church?** We have been trying to identify some of the characteristics of a **Healthy and Life-Giving Church**. We don't want to be a part of some organization that is not making a difference in the world, or in our Community. We don't want to be a part of a Church that would not be missed if it no longer existed. So what kind of a Church makes a difference. A quick review:

- We have learned that a Church is an Assembly of people who have a spiritual identity. They are people who have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- Last week we learned that the Thessalonian Church was a Church that Paul loved and cared about. He expresses appreciation for them because they have been known as a Church whose faith produced good work. They were known as a Church that was engaged in labor – strenuous, difficult labor – prompted by their love. And they were known for their endurance in spite of difficulties and persecution.

Today I want to conclude our study of this chapter. As I have studied this section, the word **authenticity** comes to mind. We learn how important **authenticity** is to our witness to the world. We learn that authenticity is another characteristic of a healthy, life-giving Church.

Pastor Mike Todd, executive pastor of Transformation Church in Tulsa, OK says: ***"[At my church], we believe that authenticity is the highest currency," "It's more valuable than money.... The Church has been so buttoned up for years—[Christians] want to present a level of excellence that everybody knows is not real, but we still try to somehow keep to this. However, I think that our biggest way to convert people from watchers or viewers to people who partner is authenticity."***

What do we mean when we talk about authenticity. The dictionary defines authenticity like this:

The quality or condition of being authentic, trustworthy, or Genuine; It is something that is not false

People who have authenticity do not say one thing on Sunday, or when they are gathered with their friends in a Worship service, and then practice something totally different the rest of the week. They practice what they preach. Paul recognizes that the faith of the Thessalonians was authentic. It was the real thing. It wasn't just a show. And their authenticity had an impact on others. Others became followers of Jesus because of them.

The Genuineness of the Message. As Paul begins in verse 4, he says that the Thessalonians were **beloved by God, and chosen by Him**. Eugene Peterson translates this verse in this way: **“God not only loves you very much but also has put His hand on you for something special.”** Now is Paul just using flowery speech to make the Thessalonians feel good about themselves? He is convinced that the Thessalonians were truly loved by God and were now aligned with what God is doing in the world. How does he know that? What evidence does Paul see that convinces him that the Thessalonians were part of this assembly of people that God had called for His purposes?

He reminds them of the way they had first encountered the Gospel message. **our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.** Authenticity in our Christian faith begins with our initial response to the gospel. There was a genuineness in the way they had responded to the Gospel of Jesus. They believed that it was true. We may be aware of people who initially appear to accept the gospel. They seem to be enthusiastic about the faith. But over time that initial excitement and enthusiasm diminishes. When the Thessalonians first heard the message about Jesus, they were convinced of its **genuineness** and they remained faithful to the message. When they heard the message about Jesus, something inside of them stirred. They lived in a world with a variety of options for faith. Which message was truth? They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit moving their hearts and assuring them of the truthfulness of the message. Paul recognized the change in the Thessalonians had come about through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds them of their early faith as a way of encouraging them. Authenticity in our faith comes when we are convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel. There is no other way.

A second evidence that Paul provides indicating that the Thessalonians were a part of something special is this: **You became imitators of us and of the Lord.** As we see in the New Testament, when a person embraces the message about Jesus and become followers of him, that results in a lifestyle change. We cannot go on living the way we always did. Several times in his writings, Paul challenges believers to imitate him as he imitates the Lord. There did not have copies of the Bible to teach them how to live. They had mentors. The Thessalonians abandoned their former way of living and followed the example of their mentor, Paul. A changed life, confirms the authenticity of our faith. People know that you are sincere because of what they see in your life. Perhaps you have heard the expression, **“What you are speaks so loud, I can't hear what you're saying.”** When our behavior does not match our words, our witness will be compromised. Onlookers will not be convinced to follow Jesus.

A third evidence that the Thessalonians had truly embraced the gospel was their **joy**. **“You welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit”** I mentioned in last week's study that the believers in the Thessalonian Church faced opposition and persecution for their faith. That came from the Jewish religious leaders as well as the Roman government officials. But in spite of their hardship, they maintained a joyful heart. For the Christian our joy does not depend on our current circumstances. Our joy wells up from within as a result of the activity of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Onlookers cannot overlook a joyful heart. Joy confirms the genuineness, the authenticity of our faith.

Fourth, not only had the Thessalonians become imitators of Paul, they now in turn became **they had become a model for others**. People were looking to them as an example of how a follower of Jesus should live. Paul says that their faith impacted people in Macedonia and Achaia, and beyond. When our

faith is sincere, and authentic, it will impact the lives of others. When others recognize that our faith is genuine, that we are not phony's they will be compelled to listen to our witness. Other people will be brought to faith.

Paul says that other people were talking about the changed lives they saw in the Thessalonians. **They had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.** Most of the believers in the Thessalonian Church were Gentiles, who had previously worship pagan idols. The city was known for several deities, including emperor worship. But at their conversion, the Thessalonians abandoned their idols in order to serve the true and living God. While we don't often see the formal practice of idol worship in our world today, I fear that many in our world, and in our nation are held in the grip of idolatry. Wealth, Power, Pleasure, Self, Immorality capture the hearts of people, and many people have difficulty breaking free from the chain of idolatry to follow the Lord. Many people try to serve God while at the same time holding on to their idols. But faith that is authentic is faith that abandons all that is not God to serve the Lord.

Finally Paul says that authentic believers are looking forward to the coming of the Son, Jesus from heaven. The Bible anticipates that there will be a period of divine wrath at the end of the present age. In that period, God will afflict the inhabitants of the world who have rejected His will with an unparalleled series of physical torments. But those who make up the Church, who are beloved by God and chosen by Him are looking forward to the end of the age, because Jesus will rescue His own from that coming wrath.

What is the authenticity level of your faith and witness. Let me ask again the questions I posed at the beginning of our study today:

- ***How does your Christian faith impact other people?***
- ***Has your Lifestyle and witness as a Christian resulted in other people becoming followers of Jesus?***

We look at our broken world and nation today, and we may wonder if change is possible. Is it possible that we will see a true revival of faith in our nation that will result in reconciliation and harmony. I am convinced that when we see authenticity in the lives of followers of Jesus, when we see followers of Jesus living out the faith that they profess with their mouths, we will begin to see a turning to the Lord.

Invitation