

April 7, 2018

To Serve the Living and True God **Thessalonians 1:8-10**

Our sermon text is First Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 8 to 10. We're going to read all of chapter 1, just once again to get the context that it comes to us in, noting that verses 2 to 10 are one long sentence in the Greek, with many subclauses. So that context is important. Before we read, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we ask that you indeed would now speak to us from your word. We ask that we would be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. I ask that you would help me as I speak, and that you would help us all as we listen. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

First Thessalonians, chapter 1. We'll read the first chapter, as I said, and verses 8 to 10 are our text for this morning. Verse 1:

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

“²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because 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. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For 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. ⁹For 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, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Amen. May God bless His word to us.

So the theme of thanksgiving we picked up last week and the week before continues. This is still Paul's long prayer, or long sentence concerning thanksgiving, the reasons for which he gives God thanks concerning the church at Thessalonica. Paul previously has told us that he's thankful for their faith, for their love, for their hope, for their election. He's thankful that when the gospel came to them, it came to them with power, that it came to them with assurance from the Holy Spirit, and that upon receiving the gospel, those who did receive it were joyful, and they themselves were transformed to become examples to others. Paul continues to give thanks.

We're going to end up with what is basically a three-point sermon this morning, the classic three-pointer, and they come one from each verse. From verse 8, Paul gives thanks that Thessalonians have now become preachers who proclaim the word of the Lord. From verse 9, we're going to see that Paul is thankful, for they have turned from idols to serve the living and the true God.

And in verse 10, we're going to see that Paul considers their Christian life to be exemplary, because they wait now for Jesus, who is delivering them, or delivering us, from the wrath that is coming. So there's your points, one from each verse. There'll be some sub-points along the way, as I'm sure you would expect, but three main points.

Once again, we're forced to consider the idea of a church of people being transformed from that which they once were. Thessalonica was an extremely religious and idolatrous environment for a person to live in. Remember we're talking about a port city, which is also on a major highway, which is also a free city, where even the emperor of Rome is worshiped as a god. Within view of Thessalonica is Mount Olympus. Mount Olympus is considered by the ancient Greeks to be the home of the gods. Apparently there were twelve of them there. All of those gods are worshiped in that city. It's a very superstitious and religious city.

Remember we're told in the book of Acts, I think it's at Acts 17, the apostles, when they came preaching the gospel, were accused of being troublemakers who turned the world upside down. They were accused of being people who were causing nothing but trouble and ought to be very quickly kicked out of the city before they damaged the city's own relationship with Rome. That's the environment in which Paul is giving thanks for this church of the Thessalonians. They're a people transformed. They're no longer like the people around them.

In the gospel of John in the evenings, remember Jesus in John chapter 15, saying to the disciples, "I've chosen you out of the world. You're no longer of the world. My choosing of you has given you a whole new identity. You are no longer of those who surround you. You're my people." It's a transforming choosing. And that's what Paul is speaking of here in some detail.

Let's have a look at verse 8, first point. The word of the Lord sounds forth. Verse 8: "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." All right, let's unpack this a little. I want to unpack actually the last part of the verse before I look too much at the first part. What's Paul saying? "Your faith has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything."

It appears to be that what he's saying is, everywhere we go, and we introduce ourselves as preachers of the gospel, he's sort of getting feedback from the people that he's speaking to. "Are you the people that went to those ones at Thessalonica? Are you the preachers that went to the people of Thessalonica? Are you the ones that founded that church there? Because we've heard about them. We've heard all about them. They're a weird group. They're a weird group. They no longer go to the temples. They no longer make the sacrifices to idols. They're joyful! They're happy! They're irreligious."

Remember, in the eyes of an idolater, in the eyes of a person who practices an idolatrous religion, someone who turns from idols and has no visible public representation of god, that someone is actually irreligious. One of the first accusations that Rome hurled at the Christians was that the Christians were atheists, for there was no visible god in their meeting places. They had no idol. They rejected the gods that the public accepted as being gods. And so they were called atheists.

And word of these Christians and their activities, and the lives that they are living, and the things that they are saying, has gone all around the region. And it may not necessarily be positive. This could well be one of those instances where what Paul is talking about is bad publicity. But in a way, in Paul's mind, bad publicity is good publicity. What does he mean? If people are talking about the church being there in a certain place, the people are acknowledging that there is something different about these people, even if they hate the difference.

And we've had it here. You know, I've been told we're a fundamentalist cult. So long has it been since anyone actually preached a reform presentation of the gospel in this district—as far as I can tell, it's something like thirty years since there was a solidly Reformed minister in the district, he was at Jindabyne, something like thirty years—so long has it been since they've heard what you would call a Reformed presentation of the gospel, that to some of the people around about us, we are very strange. It's very strange that we care about what the Scripture actually says. They ask the question, "Why can't they just fit in with one of the other churches, say they believe in Jesus, and act as nice as they possibly can?" That's the question that's asked.

Bad publicity might actually be good publicity, according to the Apostle Paul. "The very fact that word is getting around," as far as Paul is concerned, "proves to me that you are the people of God." Remember here, he's giving thanks for the Thessalonians. And so Paul is pleased that everywhere he goes, people are talking about them.

Now let's get back to the start of verse 8—as I said, reverse the order a little bit. Look at what Paul says of them. "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." Notice what Paul says the Thessalonians are doing. The word of the Lord is sounding forth from them.

"Sounding forth." Okay, let's look first of all at that word "sounding forth." What does it mean? In Greek literature, the word itself is used only once in our New Testament. It's used once in the Septuagint. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, in the book of Joel, the word itself kind of implies a loud sound that's echoing through a valley—trumpet blast kind of thing, not necessarily a trumpet blast; thunderclap, not necessarily thunderclap; loud bell—something that's sort of echoing through the distance. And Paul is saying that the word of the Lord is coming from them. Look at what he says: "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you." The word of the Lord is echoing forth from *them*. It's moving through the countryside—the word of the Lord. Think of that.

Who's Paul. Well, we know he's an apostle. Who was Paul? Paul was a Pharisee. As a Pharisee, Paul was a very close, very precise student of the Old Testament. Paul as a Pharisee would have been one of those Jews who has memorized enormous portions of Scripture. That's just part of being a Pharisee. And Paul considered himself to be a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was considered, he tells us in another place, by his associates to be a leader of the young men. Amongst the Pharisees, he was the future. You know, he's the guy with potential. He's the one. "Look at Paul. He's clever, he's studious."

Paul has used the phrase here in verse 8, “the word of the Lord.” Now you don’t have to actually have been that diligent a student of the Old Testament to know that the word of the Lord is that which prophets spoke. It’s that which was spoken by a prophet. Amos spoke the word of the Lord. Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord. Moses spoke the word of the Lord. Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord. Joshua spoke the word of the Lord.

Now, Paul says, that *they* are speaking the word of the Lord. So we need to think about it. Let’s get some distinctions and some clarity on the subject. Is he saying that anything and everything I say is the word of the Lord? And the answer’s No, he’s not. Just look back a little at verse 6. He says, “You became imitators of us.” Imitators.

So what’s one of the ways in which they have become imitators of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy? They imitate Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy by preaching the same gospel that they have heard from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. They’re not preaching the word of the Lord through what we would think of as some supernatural spiritual gifting. It’s not as though this is just sort of coming from them almost by magic, you know, just coming down through the sky into their head, and out through their mouth. That’s not what Paul’s saying. He’s saying that they are preaching the gospel that they had heard. So, one, he’s saying that the gospel that the apostles preach is the prophetic word of the Lord. It is the word of the Lord. It’s the same gospel that the prophets preached.

You know, the previous book that we worked our way through was the book of Isaiah. Sometimes I might have slipped up almost deliberately and called it the Gospel of Isaiah. I don’t know if I did or not. But the thing about Isaiah is, even in the midst of preaching judgment and destruction upon the rebellious nations around Israel, suddenly Isaiah breaks out into the gospel. “The Savior is coming! Repent! Put your trust in the Lord, and you will be saved! The Spirit will be poured out upon the people of God!”

The word of the Lord is the gospel, and it’s the same gospel that’s found in the Scriptures. They’re not actually speaking anything other than that which they have been taught by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. And in that preaching—in that preaching, they’re doing what a prophet does. They’re taking the word of God and applying it to the lives of the people around them.

Remember, I’ve now often told you, the main thing that a prophet did was not predict the future. The main thing that a prophet did was take the law of God and apply it to the people, and where they were, and what they were doing: “This is the law, this is what God says, this is what you are doing. Don’t you see the difference between what God has commanded and what you are doing? Don’t you think it’s time to repent? Because judgment will surely come.” That’s the main message of any prophet.

Now here we are. We’re Christians. Paul says that Christians speak the word of the Lord. Well, just looking quickly at verses 9 and 10: “You’ve turned from idols, you wait for His Son from heaven, you wait for Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” So what’s built into the

gospel that the Thessalonians have heard? Repentance, turn from idolatry, serve the living and true God, wait for the return of Jesus. And note something: The return of Jesus is also the wrath of God that is yet to come. Wrath is coming. Their gospel is no different to the gospel as was preached in the Old Testament.

Hang on. I better clarify that. It is different. In the Old Testament, what were the people told? The Savior is coming; believe in the coming Savior. In the New Testament, what are the people told? The Savior has come; believe in the works that He has accomplished. But it's the same salvation, from the same sins, through the same Savior. That's what I mean when I say it's the same gospel. We preach an accomplished gospel. The Old Testament prophets preached a coming gospel.

If we were to have a look in a few other places. Just stay in the book of First Thessalonians. Drop down to chapter 2, verse 13. Paul says, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God." Notice what he's saying. He's saying, "When we came to you preaching, you were getting the word of God." Well here, back at our verse in verse 8, he's saying, "And now you're preaching that same word of God."

Stay in the book of First Thessalonians, and look to chapter 4, verse 15. Now there is a supernatural word of the Lord. Let's just read: "15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep."

Now I'm not going to try and unpack too much of the eschatology side of what's being said here. We'll leave that for when we get there, the Lord willing. But just notice this. The apostles themselves did receive supernatural direct revelation from God. Just as your Old Testament prophets did receive supernatural direct revelation from God concerning the future, so did the apostles. "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord." I do not believe that what Paul is saying is that the Thessalonians themselves receive that same word, or that same type of inspiration.

Let's stay in the region of Thessalonians and turn forward to Second Thessalonians chapter 3. Chapter 3, verse 1: "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you." Notice what he's saying. The word of the Lord that came to them that they now preach, Paul is asking them to pray that this continues, and more so. This thing that has happened, we want more of it to happen, and we want it to continue to happen, and we want it to happen more quickly. Let the "word of the Lord speed ahead and be honored." Let the word of the Lord speed ahead.

People often wonder—"We're Reformed; we believe that no one is saved apart from the sovereign work of God; should we pray that people be converted, or should we leave it in the hands of God?" We get asked that question. Paul says we should. We should pray that the word of the Lord speeds ahead. We should pray that everywhere we go, there we find people waiting

to receive the gospel. We should pray, therefore, that people are being converted, that people are being called into the church.

My friends, yes, pray. God has appointed the ends. God has also appointed the means. And the main means by which the gospel is spread is through the prayer and the preaching of people like you and me—through His church, through the things that we do in faithful obedience. So yes, we should pray that the gospel goes ahead, that there is power in the word of God, that people are being converted, and that people would honor that word of God.

Turn back to First Thessalonians. So “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.” Not only has the word of the Lord gone forth from them, but their faith is known.

Once again, you’ve got this culture shock. These people trust a God whom they can’t see. These people aren’t worried by the common superstitions. Okay, the whole aim of ancient idolatrous worship was basically to keep various small-time gods happy so that they don’t cause you bad luck. You want good fortune, not bad fortune. You want good luck, not bad luck. There was even a goddess of good luck—“Fortuna”.

These people have faith in this God whom they cannot see, and people are talking about it. The word’s going out. “What a pack of weirdos! What a pack of weirdos! They’ve turned aside from the accepted public religion. They believe in a god they can’t see, they don’t have a temple with an idol in it, and they say that this God is the only God, and that He provides all their needs, and they need nothing else. They’ve got faith in this God!” They’re known for their faith.

Let’s move on into verse 9. The point here is repentance—turning from idols to serve the living and the true God. Let’s read it: “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.” Let’s look at the first part of the verse—“they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you.”

Once again, this is just this talking that’s going on around about the region. Everywhere that Paul goes, people are talking about the fact that some strange new religion has sprung up, that there are these preachers going around who are preaching about this person whom they call the Savior, whom they say was raised from the dead, and there were a bunch of people in Thessalonica who welcomed them, who received them, who were glad to hear from them. “They themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you.” There were people who wanted to hear this.

To the outside world—and it’s true to this very day, for many people converted from unbelieving families—it would appear to them you have done about the strangest thing you could possibly do. We live in an age where nothing is rebellious anymore and nothing is counter-cultural. All right, it used to be counter-cultural to go to hippie festivals and dance half naked in front of rock bands. That used to be counter-cultural. Now it’s just every other day of the week. If you do

that now, you're being normal. It used to be counter-cultural to practice all forms of sexual perversion. You know, people didn't want to know about it. "They *do* that?" Now it's publicly celebrated, and it's actually counter-cultural *not* to do or celebrate such things.

There's actually nothing left in the world for people to rebel against. They can do as they please. Boys can say they're girls, and in many parts of the world it's now illegal to disagree with them. "But you look like a boy." "*Ah, but I'm a woman.*" "But you have genitalia." "*Ah, but I was really born a woman.*" "But every cell in your body is filled with male DNA." "*Yeah, but I'm really a woman.*" The same applies in the opposite. "You look like a girl." "*Yeah, but I was really a man. I'm really born a man.*" And it's actually in many places against the law to disagree with them. Misgendering is now a crime.

There's nothing that's rebellious anymore. Everything must be accepted. John Lennon got his way. Imagine nothing means anything, nothing to live for or die for—just a brotherhood of man. He got his way.

What's the only rebellious and counter-cultural thing that you can do in this world? Put your faith in Jesus, bring yourself into submission to the word of God. Then they'll jump. Then they'll jump. "What?!"—What will be the question? "What is wrong with you? You should be enjoying your life. That's the way we live in this world. That's the way you get wisdom! You do whatever you feel like doing, until it hurts. And then you back off and do something else until that hurts, and then you back off."

And you pursue pleasure after pleasure after pleasure, because after all, in a totally meaningless life, the only thing that could possibly bring happiness is what? Pleasure. In a totally meaningless life, the only thing worth pursuing is any kind of pleasure. But I'll tell you what—and it's happening—the suicide rates are climbing, and the people who are suiciding are often now people who've pursued pleasure to the end of the road.

In the end, every pleasure is unsatisfying. In the end, every pleasure is not what we were made for. In the end, they get to where they think they would've been happy, and they find out and they realize, "You know what? I'm not happy. This pursuit of pleasure has not brought me contentment. This pursuit of my idol has not made me happy."

So we live in a world now where the only rebellious thing you can do is actually put your faith in Jesus Christ and exercise repentance and obedience to the will and the word of God. And when you do that, people think you are a fool. People will attack you, they will attack me. People hate the church that actually looks like that which God said a church should be, or should look like. People hate churches that actually put a wall of separation between them and the world around them.

Now when I say that, I'm not saying we're supposed to circle the wagons and not reach out. That's not what I mean. I mean our behavior is different to the behavior of the world around us.

The things that we do are different. Our priorities are different. And people hate that kind of church.

“You turned to God.” And that’s what people were talking about. “You turned to God from idols.” From idols. Remember Thessalonica? A highly religious, superstitious city. They cast off their idols. I would say that there is no other way to turn from idols, other than to turn to God. “You turned to God from idols.” If there’s no turning *to* God, there’s not turning away from idols.

People can do an awful lot of things. They can change an awful lot of things about themselves. But in terms of their relationship to God, apart from faith and repentance, all they’re doing is changing the sin that dominates their lives—exchanging one for another, exchanging one idol for another. A person that walks, for example, out of Buddhism or Hinduism to become an atheist has not turned from idolatry. They’ve changed their idol. They’ve changed from a visible idol to a more subtle, invisible idol, but it’s still an idol.

The idol of the atheist is a person’s own intellect. “I know enough to know. I know more than enough to know. I have the right to cast judgment upon God.” A person who is an atheist, who is truly an atheist, has set themselves up in their own lives as their own god. “I have the power to decide.”

But Scripture says, for example, Jeremiah chapter 10, verse 23: “I know, O Lord, that they way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.” And the atheist says, “I know that my way is in myself. I direct my steps, and I do as I please.” The atheist has made himself his own god. And a weak and pathetic and feeble little god he is, though he might not know it. But they’ve turned from idols. They’ve repented. They no longer fit in. They’ve cast off this foolishness to serve the living and true God.

Once again, this concept of the living and true God is found in the Old Testament. God is often called the living God. I mentioned Jeremiah 10. Let’s just turn to Jeremiah chapter 10 and look at verse 10, comparing God to idols. We’ll start reading at verse 8. Jeremiah 10, verse 8:

“They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but wood! ⁹ Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is violet and purple; they are all the work of skilled men.”

Verse 10: “But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.” Notice: “The LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.” What’s the context? As comparing God to idols, the one true God is the living God, the true God, and the everlasting King.”

Flick back now into First Thessalonians chapter 1, and notice what Paul has said: “And how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Once again, everything Paul says has an Old Testament background and context. You hear what he’s saying? He’s saying that they’re

now worshipers of the God of Israel, the one true living God. These Gentiles who once were far off have now been brought near. I'm roughly paraphrasing Ephesians chapter 2. They've now been brought near through the preaching of the word of God. They've been made sons of Israel, and they're now worshipers of the living and true God.

Let's read on now, our third and final verse, verse 10: "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." Verse 10 further explains verse 9, in a way. Verse 10 is, in a way, subpointed from verse 9, if you want to think of it that way. Paul says that they've turned from idols, or they've turn to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.

What's verse 10 explaining? It's explaining what a life of serving the living and true God looks like. It involves waiting for Jesus to return from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. Waiting. It involves waiting. What does Paul mean by waiting? I'm pretty sure he doesn't mean sitting like you were waiting for the bus arrive. You know, when you're waiting for the bus to arrive, the taxi to arrive, you're kind of just sitting there doing nothing. You're wasting the time however you can, in the hope that this thing will get here soon. That's now what he means. He doesn't mean that all you have to do is wait, all you have to do is sit around.

This is waiting with a sure expectation. This is waiting in a way that makes us prepared to meet the Lord on the day that He comes. This is a waiting of being ready. This is like the bride waiting for the limousine to turn up and pick her up to take her to the wedding. She is prepared to go. She is prepared to appear in public to undertake the marriage ceremony. She's waiting and prepared for that which is happening. And that's what Paul's speaking about here. We're waiting for Jesus from heaven. We're waiting for God's Son from heaven, in the way that He has commanded us to wait.

Now we won't turn there, but we could read, for example, Matthew chapter 25. Pretty much the whole chapter is an exhortation to the apostles with parables that they should be waiting for His return, and that they should be prepared for His return. They should be waiting with expectation. They should be ready for it, when He returns.

What does it look like? It looks like a faithful and obedient Christian life. It looks like a life being occupied with obedience to God, doing the things that you should do. One of the reasons that the word of the Lord is sounding forth from them is that they are waiting with a genuine expectation. They are waiting in obedience. God said, "Do this *until*. Keep doing it." So it's not a passive waiting, it's an active waiting. Later on we'll see Paul speak of the fact that he wants them to grow in sanctification. Why? Because that's what you do whilst you're waiting for the return of the Lord. You seek to be more like Him.

Turn to First John chapter 3. We'll read verses 2 and 3. "2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as

he is pure.” Everyone who has this hope. “Everyone who thus hopes in”—whom? In Jesus —“purifies himself as he,” that’s Jesus, “is pure.”

Basically, we understand that we’re to come into the presence of the living God. When we come into the presence of Jesus, at His return, we are coming into the very presence of the living God, the God-man. And it’s incumbent upon us, us as Christians, we who are believers, to be pure. Sanctification is actually something that we, in an ongoing way, must be working at in our lives.

A Christian upon conversion is by God placed in a sanctified state. “You are mine. I have set you apart.” A Christian at judgment will be finally purified and sanctified. The reading we just did tells us when we see Jesus we shall be like Him. But a Christian in this life is undergoing sanctification, and it is for us to actually participate in, and work in obedience with the Spirit of God towards our own sanctification. Notice John says: “purifies himself as He is pure.” Yes, you are being purified. You are being sanctified. God is working in you to make you more Christlike, and in me also.

But because He’s working in us, we have to work. We actually have to do it. You’re not going to be sanctified by magic. You’re not going to be changed by magic. We have to recognize the sin that is in our own heart or in our own lives, and we have to fight against it. We actually have to resist. We actually have to set our chin against this evil that is to be found within us, and work in obedience to the leading of the Spirit of God, working towards our own purification or sanctification. That’s one of the ways that you’re waiting for the Son of God to come from heaven.

Flick back into First Thessalonians chapter 1. And then Paul puts in that little line, “whom he raised from the dead.” There’s a whole lot of Christian doctrine just built into that statement. Jesus raised from the dead, who’s coming again from heaven. God has raised Jesus and seated Him as His right hand. Jesus reigns now from heaven. He’s been raised from the dead, and He is to return. “Whom he raised from the dead.”

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, we don’t have a gospel. If He was not raised from the dead, we don’t have the proof that God accepted His works, that God accepted the fact that Jesus as the second Adam set things right, that He finally did the works that God required of a man. His raising from the dead, it says in the book of Romans, was for our justification.

How do we know that God is happy with what Jesus did? Because death could not hold Him down. How do we know that God has accepted our Savior as our King and as our Lord in His presence? “The LORD says to my Lord, sit at my right hand,” quoting Psalm 110. How do we know that this is the case? Because God raised Him from the dead, and He ascended. In the book of Acts, chapter 1—He ascended in the clouds to the presence of God the Father.

And then looking at just the last part there of verse 10, it reads in the ESV: “Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” It’s present tense, and ongoing. We could read it this way, “Jesus,

who is delivering us from the wrath that is coming, even now.” Jesus is delivering us. He’s always delivering us. He’s our Savior at all times.

Once again, a bit like I spoke to you of sanctification—it has a past tense, a future tense, a present tense—so does our deliverance. We have been delivered. We have been saved. We have been set apart as the people of God. You are saved, and your salvation is certain. If you’re a Christian, you can be assured of your salvation. But even as we know that we are saved, we are being saved in an ongoing sense. He’s our great High Priest in heaven, interceding for us, and we need Him to be constantly interceding for us. For though we are saved and though we have the Spirit, we are not perfect.

We’re sinners in an ongoing sense, aren’t we? We were sinners, we’ve been made Christians, but we still sin. Though as Christians, we should wish that we didn’t, and our desires should truly be not to sin, even so, we do sin and we need ongoing deliverance. We need to be continually delivered, continually delivered from our sins, and delivered from the wrath that is to come.

I’ll ask you the question. I’ve asked it before, or spoken of this before. I know that you probably know how I’m going to answer it, but it’s worth bringing this to mind. What are we saved from? What are we saved from? You wouldn’t be wrong if you said we’re saved from the world. You wouldn’t be wrong if you said we’re saved from our sins and the penalty of our sins. But why do we need to be saved from the world? Why do we need to be saved from our sins and the penalty of our sins? What are we saved from, ultimately? Let’s get the answer from Scripture. I want you to turn to the book of Romans chapter 5. We’ll start reading at verse 6. Romans chapter 5, verse 6:

“6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

Why did we need to be saved from the world, from our sins, from the penalty of our sins? Why? Because all of these things are the judgment of God. All of these things are the expression of the wrath of God against sin. Jesus didn’t save us from the Devil. He didn’t save us, in a way, from the world. He didn’t save us from sins primarily. In the first instance, what He has saved us from is the judgment of God. And in being saved from the judgment of God, we are set free from the grip of Satan, from the grip of the world, and from the penalty of our sins.

Being saved from God by the Son of God, that’s what salvation is. We’re actually saved from God’s judgment. God has hidden us from His judgment in Jesus Christ His Son. Salvation is a God-centered thing. It’s all about our relationship as people who bear the image of God, with the God whose image we bear. We’ve been delivered from the wrath of God—going back to First Thessalonians—we’ve been delivered from the wrath of God that is to come. We are going to be delivered from the wrath of God that is to come.

Does that mean that Christians will not be tested, tried by the fire? No, that's not what it means. That's not what it means. What it means is that we will not be judged and thrown into the lake of fire. We are delivered from that final judgment. We'll be tested, however God says we are to be tested. If God says we are to go through persecution, we'll go through persecution. If God says we're to suffer for the name of Jesus, we'll suffer for the name of Jesus. If God says Christians are to die, Christians will die.

But that's not suffering His eternal judgment. That's not suffering His wrath against sin. That's suffering in the name of Jesus. That's suffering for the glory of God. It brings actually a reward. And many who suffer, suffer joyously because they know that they're serving God, and to them, this is confirmation that they're walking in the footsteps of Jesus. But we're delivered from God's final and ultimate judgment, and we're constantly being delivered from God's final and ultimate judgment.

Christian, why can you rejoice—even if you know you're a sinner, even if you know that today, this week, you've committed sins that really, honestly you ought to have died for? Why can you rejoice? Because Jesus is delivering us from the wrath that is to come. The judgment that is coming, we are being delivered from it constantly. We have been delivered, we are being delivered, we will be delivered.

As I said, God has hidden us in Christ. He's our safety. He's our shield. He's our righteousness. We sang that—"God's Christ, who is my righteousness, my beauty, and my glorious dress." That's what Paul's speaking of here. Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. And so Paul is thankful as he speaks to the Thessalonians that he's speaking to Christians who have been transformed, and whom the world is speaking about. The world knows there's something different about them.

Once again, the challenge is before us. The challenge is before us. Would he say the same things of us? Would he be thankful for us? Would this praise for God burst forth from his lips because we're here? You know, this church of Thessalonica, it may not have been any bigger than our church. It could have been this small. Paul thought it was a precious and a wonderful and a beautiful thing, that in the midst of an idolatrous city given over to evil, there lived the people of God being noticed for the fact that they are different to the people around them, being spoken of all over the region because they are different to the people around them.

My friends, once again, the challenge is to us. Have we turned aside from the idols? Do we serve the true and the living God? Are we waiting and living as though Jesus could return from heaven any day now? That doesn't mean stop working. It actually means keep working. It doesn't mean do nothing, it means be what God has told you to be, and do it to the glory of God. Do it well. Do it with all your heart.

And His return will not be something that we fear, it will be something that causes us to rejoice. We will rejoice that finally this present evil age comes to an end, and that we've got an eternal

life in the new creation in the presence of our Savior to look forward to. Okay, let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I pray indeed, Father, that we would be counted worthy to be called the children of the living God, and that we indeed would rejoice in the goodness that you have shown to us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Lord in heaven, let there be no idols in our hearts. Let us not be fools. Let us not be worshipers of things that are nothing. But Father, help us to be true worshipers of the living God. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.