

Lighthouse Bible Church

February 22nd, 2015

1st Thessalonians 1: 6 – 8 *Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4: 17 - 24*

‘An Example Church to Follow’ #3

Stand – Read – Pray

We have started a study in this book of First Thessalonians because this church at Thessalonica, as we have been seeing, is an example church to follow and emulate. We have been looking at some of the reasons that make this church and its people worth following. We have seen so far that this church was a praying church, both the leaders and the people. It was a faithful, loving and hope filled church because those qualities were the motivation of the people who were working, laboring and patiently waiting for the return of Jesus Christ.

This church also had a congregation of people who were secure in their salvation and faith, as we looked at last time. They were also a gospel preaching and living church because they upheld the Word of God in their lives and the life of that church.

And as we looked at those example qualities and as we continue to look at them again today, we have also been looking at our church, Lighthouse Bible Church, to see if those example qualities are a part of our lives and in the life of this church. We have asked the questions: are we a praying, faithful, loving and hope filled church and people. Are we a secure in our salvation and faith and gospel preaching and living church and people? And I think so far that it is a resounding yes, by God’s grace and the power of His Spirit.

But we have some more example qualities to look at that are displayed in the life of the Thessalonian church that we can then compare to our church.

The next example characteristic and fifth in order, if you are keeping track, that set this church apart as a God honoring example church to follow is this:

#5 They were Imitators of their Leaders and of the Lord, Church vs 6

Verse 6: and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.

What Paul is telling them is that, after they received the word of God, even in the difficult times of affliction, they stopped following after the things of the world. They stopped following after the false gods. They stopped following after worldly lusts and influences and began to follow them because they were following Christ, and so they were too.

And because of their new life in Christ and their following Him and Paul and Silas and Timothy, they too began to experience **affliction**. But the difference for them is; that even in their affliction and trials and tests and persecution, they had an attitude of **joy** and the only way that is possible is through the power of **the Holy Spirit**.

You see true joy and rejoicing never depends on our circumstances but in our relationship to Jesus Christ and our being led by the Spirit of God. What does **James 1: 2 – 4** say? **Count it all JOY when you fall into various trials knowing that the trying of your faith works patience but let patience have its perfect work so that you can be perfect and entire lacking ...**

You see that played out in the lives of the disciples in **Acts 5: 40 – 41** when they were arrested in Jerusalem and put in prison and then an angel came and let them out and none of the guards new it. Then someone said ‘hey, the ones that were in jail or now in the temple teaching the people’.

So they arrest them again and tell them ‘did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name and Peter says ‘we ought to obey God rather than men’. And then after trying to decide what to do with them, Gamaliel finally says listen ‘if this is of man it will come to nothing but if it is of God you won’t stop it’. Then it says **and they agreed with him and when they had called for the apostles and had beaten them they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council REJOICING that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.**

This Thessalonian congregation was starting to go through some of the same kinds of affliction but they were doing it with ‘joy of the Holy Spirit’. Notice what Paul says at the beginning of Verse 6. **And you became followers of us and of the Lord..**

Paul said that you became followers of us. That word followers in the Greek original language is the work *mimetai* and it is where we get our English word MIMIC. This church wanted to mimic its leaders and to mimic Christ.

They wanted to be like their leaders because their leaders were just like Christ and they wanted to follow the examples of their leaders, because they knew that they would be following and mimicking Christ.

This church was no longer imitating and following the world with its lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life, but they were imitating and following those godly leaders’ examples and the greatest example of all, Jesus Christ. Verse 9 says they **turned to God from idols**. They are really a living example of **Ephesians 4: 22 – 24** and many other places that say **put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your mind and that you put on the new man which is created according to God in true righteousness and holiness**. That’s the way they were beginning to live

And do you want to know something, that church had leaders to imitate and follow that would help them become imitators and followers of Christ. Paul told the Thessalonians later in **2nd Thessalonians 3: 9** that **we make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.**

He said in **1st Corinthians 4: 16**: **therefore I urge you, imitate me.** He said in **Philippians 3: 17**: **join in following my example, and not those who so walk, as you have US for a pattern.** These statements aren't made in arrogance but in humility because the key is what Paul said in **1st Corinthians 11: 1** where he says **imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.**

This church was doing that. They became imitators of Paul and Silas and Timothy and Jesus Christ and it had a profound effect on them and the world around them. They began to be like Christ:

They began to love as Christ loved and to love one another deeply

They began to suffer for 'R' sake and still rejoice in their circumstances as Verse 6 says

They began to reach out to the Lost as Jesus did and commanded

They began to live holy, righteous, sanctified, pure lives of obedience

They began to uphold the truth of God's word and refute error / confront sin

They began to be the example church and people for others to follow.

Are we a church like that and do we live our individual lives like that, to imitate Christ and follow Him because we have godly men and women to follow? We call ourselves Christians but do you know that that means? *Christianos*; means a follower of Christ.

We want to have a church that puts a high priority on biblical church leadership and the integrity that that position demands. We want to raise up and train men, in positions of leadership, to become those types of leaders that honor God with their lives and are an example for others to mimic. We want to raise up godly women to influence other's because of their life of following Christ.

That is why we put a high priority on the formation of our leadership team because we recognize the influence they can and will have over this church. Because as so often happens with the O.T. priests and the nation of Israel and for the church of today; as the leadership goes so goes the church.

So what about our church? We have put a high priority on the formation and selection of a leadership team because we recognize the influence they can and will have over this church? We want to hold the leaders to the biblical standards of leadership and in so doing, ask you to love them and submit to them and honor them and encourage them as the Scriptures call a church congregation to do?

Will you imitate those leaders as they also imitate Christ? Because when you do that it will have a profound effect, not only on us, but on the community and world around us as it did with the Thessalonian church.

We will love as Christ loved and to love one another deeply. Jesus said 'by this all will know you are My disciples if you have love one for another'.

When we suffer for 'R' sake will we rejoice and be glad in it. There may be times when we as individuals or leaders or as a church may suffer for righteousness sake or be the victim of harsh, bitter, untrue words, individually or collectively, and will we follow the example of Christ.

1st Peter 2: 21 – 23: when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. For to this we were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an EXAMPLE, that we should follow His steps.

Are we reaching out to the lost to love them as Christ did because we are, as **2nd Corinthians 5: 20** says, Christ's ambassadors as though God were pleading through us to be reconciled to Himself.

Are we living holy, righteous separated lives of obedience because **as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct** as **1st Peter 1: 15** says.

Are we upholding the Word of God and refuting error and confronting sin, in our own lives, in the life of the church and in the world around us.

Are we the example people and church to follow so that any one of us individually or all of us collectively as a church can say what Paul said 'be followers of me even as I am of Christ'.

And that leads us into the next, the 6th, character quality that set this church apart and it is found in Verse 7.

#6 They were an Example to Others to Follow, Church = Vs 7

Verse Seven: So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe

Paul says that you became followers of us and of Christ when you were changed by the power of the word of God and by the Spirit of God and now you have become the examples for others to follow. What a great compliment and goal for any church.

They were the example church to emulate and become like, because of all we have seen so far and more, they then became the examples for others to follow. That word **example** *tupos* means to strike or imprint to form a pattern. It is used in **Titus 2: 7** where it says **in all things showing yourself to be a PATTERN of good works** They became the church and people worth imitating.

And notice how influential their example was: it was noticed all the way to **Macedonia and Achaia**, the farthest north region and the farthest south region from Thessalonica. Hundreds of miles away, people were being influenced by this church.

Turn with me to **2nd Corinthians 8: 1 – 5** and let me show you another way this church was an example for others to follow and how far reaching their example really was and it was through their giving.

God was showing His grace on the churches in Macedonia, one of which was the Thessalonian church. Even in their difficult trials of affliction they had joy and in their deep poverty they were still willing to liberally give financially to help others. They gave according to what they had, then they gave beyond what they had, their giving became sacrificial and they gave it freely.

And because of that, they along with the church at Berea and Philippi, made an incredible impact on the saints that needed support. And because the Thessalonian church is the only one mentioned as an example church that reached beyond Macedonia and Achaia, they were probably the biggest contributors of the gift to them. They were a giving, sacrificially giving and freely giving church that became an example for others to follow.

The Thessalonian church became for others what Paul and Silas and Timothy had been for them; an example to follow. The only church that Paul ever calls an example church or model pattern church to follow, is this one. It wasn't a perfect church but it was a church that gives us a pattern for what all churches and people ought to be both in spiritual growth, ministry and outreach and giving.

Paul said in **Philippians 3: 17** that **you have us as an example and a pattern to follow**. Now this church is the example and pattern church to follow. Why were they now the example church to follow and how can we be an example church to follow? Because they were a:

A praying church; the leaders for the people and people for the leaders

Works of Faith, Labor of Love, and Patiently Endure until Christ, who is their hope, returns

Church that knew their calling, election, faith and salvation were by God's grace and were secure in that salvation and was something that could never be lost.

Church that preached the gospel of Jesus Christ

Church that had leaders worth following and imitating because they were following and imitating Christ.

When you have a church that is living like that then you have an example church that is worthy of following and imitating. And when you have a church like that, the impact of that church will be profound on the world around them, just like theirs was in Macedonia and Achaia. Everyone was hearing about and being influenced by this church. How are we doing so far?

Well before we answer that, let's look at another example character quality that set this church apart as an example church to follow because they were also **#7 An Evangelistic Outreach Witnessing church**. Look at Verse 8.

Verse Eight: for from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

Paul said that this church had an incredible outreach in sharing the gospel message and the message of salvation and faith that reached far beyond their initial influence and example of Macedonia and Achaia.

He says **the Word of the Lord**, your gospel message, is **reaching in every place**. That is incredible. If they could have an outreach like that in their day, just think what we could do in our day.

They were such an evangelistic outreaching witnessing church because they knew and saw how the gospel message changed their own lives and the lives of those they knew. They saw the radical change, as we shall see, that took place in their lives and they wanted to share that with everyone in every place.

They knew that they were sinners condemned to death and hell because they had sinned against a holy God. They knew that the punishment and wages of their sin was death. They knew that Jesus Christ took their punishment and died on the cross in their place. They knew that repentance from sin, believing in Christ alone for salvation and putting their faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross saved them.

And they wanted the whole world to know that. They wanted their new found faith to go out so the hearts and lives of others could be changed just like theirs was.

By the way, the phrase **the word of the Lord** is synonymous with the gospel message. Paul uses it several times in the book of Acts. In **Acts 16: 31 – 32** he said to the Philippian jailer **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.** In **Acts 8: 25:** it says **so when they had testified and preached *the word of the Lord*, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching *the gospel* in many villages ...** You also see it in ***Acts 13: 5, 26, 44, 46, 48 – 49. Acts 15: 35 – 36, 16: 32, 19: 10, 20.***

This church became a gospel preaching, outreach oriented and always witnessing and sharing their faith church that had an incredible impact on the world around them and it probably happened in several different ways. First of all it says in Verse 8 that they **sounded forth** the gospel message, the word of the Lord.

That word ‘sounded forth’ is *exechetai* and it means to echo forth or resound and it has the idea of blowing a trumpet and because it is in the perfect tense it means to be continually blowing the trumpet or in this case, continually sounding forth the gospel message.

They would probably have done that as people come into the city and they would go up to them and share the gospel with them in different venues. The workplace, their home, their church or wherever. They were constantly sharing the gospel. They may have even began to send out missionaries to other places as well.

No matter how they did it, they had a far reaching effect with the gospel message. It says **they sounded forth not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place, their faith toward God had gone out.**

And do you want to know why? Because they were not **ashamed** of the gospel of Jesus Christ because they knew that it was the power of God unto salvation. They were not **afraid** to share their faith for fear of *rejection* or *ridicule* or physical harm.

They weren't like some people are today, fearful to share what they say has transformed them and changed them and saved them for all eternity. I have shared with some of you before the statistics that the Way of the Master puts out about the number of Christians who share their faith regularly; only 2%

Another way they sounded forth the gospel is by the way that their own lives had been changed as we will see in Verse 9. They were a living testimony to the saving power and grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They didn't do the things they used to. They didn't go to the places they used to go. They didn't say the things they used to say. Their life and their actions and their message were a powerful evidence of a changed life and a witness of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. They are a living example of **1st Peter 4: 1 – 4.**

And you know the amazing thing is, this Thessalonian church was being persecuted for sharing their faith individually and as a church as verse 6 says. But that didn't stop them. They were bold in sharing the gospel, no matter the cost because they realized that they were the ambassadors for Christ, as **2nd Corinthians 5: 18 – 21** says, and lost sinners need to hear about the Savior of sinners, Jesus Christ.

So what about us, are we that type of church? Is evangelism and sharing our faith and the gospel message and reaching out to a lost and dying world one of our priorities? Do we share our faith as we have opportunity, with our lost family members, friends, co-workers that God has placed before us to share the gospel with. Are we individually and collectively as a church 'sounding forth' the Word of the Lord.

We, as born again believers and Lighthouse Bible Church, are called to be a lighthouse to a dark, dying and decaying world as Jesus said in **Matthew 5: 14 – 16**. Think about it, that is the only reason you were left on this earth after you were saved, to share the gospel so others could be saved. Everything else we do we can do far better in heaven.

Are we a living epistle, as **2nd Corinthians 3: 2 – 3** says, that the unsaved world can see and read to see Jesus Christ the hope of glory. Does the way you respond to circumstances and situations and tests and trials and tragedies in your life point the unsaved world to a supernatural power and peace and God and Savior that they need to know?

Paul said that the Thessalonians **faith toward God had gone out, so that they did not need to say anything**. Their reputation, their example, their witness and testimony already speaks volumes for what kind of church they were.

So much so that Paul says ‘we don’t have to say a word’. Your church and your life and your message are saying volumes. What about us? What are we known for and what outreach do we have and who is being impacted by our ministries and witness and testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ? How are we doing? We will answer that and all the questions next week as we look at the final two example qualities that we want to have as well.

Closing prayer

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Introduction and Review:

Verse 6:

James 1: 2 – 4, Acts 5: 40 – 41
Ephesians 4: 22 – 24, 2nd Thessalonians 3: 9
1st Corinthians 4: 16, Philippians 3: 17
1st Corinthians 11: 1, 1st Peter 2: 21 – 23
2nd Corinthians 5: 20, 1st Peter 1: 15

Verse 7:

Titus 2: 7, 2nd Corinthians 8: 1 – 5
Philippians 3: 17

Verse 8:

Acts 16: 31 – 32, Acts 8: 25, Acts 13: 5 – 49
Acts 15: 35 – 36, Acts 16: 32, Acts 19: 10,20
1st Peter 4: 1 – 4, 2nd Corinthians 5: 18 – 21
Matthew 5: 14 – 16, 2nd Corinthians 3: 2 - 3

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1st Corinthians 11: 1, 1st Peter 2: 21 – 23
2nd Corinthians 5: 20, 1st Peter 1: 15

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1st Peter 4: 1 – 4, 2nd Corinthians 5: 18 – 21
Matthew 5: 14 – 16, 2nd Corinthians 3: 2 - 3