

Chosen to imitate Christ (Proverbs 3:1-12 & 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10)

10-Feb-19

G'Day Church family.

We're continuing our 9-part series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the church of Thessalonica - and we're looking at Part 2

There are Bibles in front of you and a sermon outline in the bulletin if you want to take notes.

Let me pray for God's help before we begin. Let's pray...

Recap/Intro

Last week, we learnt that the apostle Paul wrote to the new church at Thessalonica to:

[PowerPoint 1-Recap]

- Encourage the new believers to keep going in the face of opposition
- To say he is thankful to God for them
- And thankful for the Thessalonians 3 pillars of Christianity - their faith in Jesus, their certain hope of Heaven and God's agape love shown in Jesus - that they are now showing to others

[PowerPoint 2-Intro]

In this week's passage:

Paul now goes on to say the Thessalonians are *chosen* Christians

And they are chosen to *imitate Christ*

Chosen (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

[PowerPoint 3-Chosen]

So, starting at verse 4. Paul tells the Thessalonians they are **chosen** by God. The word for chosen here, literally means **elected** - just like we elect MPs and our Prime Minister - Paul is saying God elects or chooses people to be His. When it comes to God electing or choosing people - and not choosing others; It can have some people getting into a tailspin about why God chooses some people and not others.

So, we need to be clear what the Bible teaches about God choosing people

- God is sovereign and rules over everything - He is all knowing, all powerful and everywhere (Psalm 139)
- He knows the beginning from the end (Isa 46:10)
- He loved the people of the world so much He sent Jesus so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)
- He chooses to save people from their sin by His grace (His undeserved favour - not by anything they do) His grace is seen - in sending Jesus to die for sin (Eph 2:8)
- He chose people in and through Jesus from before the creation of the World (Eph 1:4)
- And he decided in advance those people He chose, to be adopted sons and daughters through Jesus - according to His good pleasure and His will (Eph 1:5)

- In the OT God's choice was usually associated with choosing the nation of Israel (although there were exceptions such as the cases of: Jacob and Esau, and King Saul and King David)
- In the NT God's choice is individuals
- Paul tackles the problem of God choosing some and not others in Romans 9
- Paul shows that God chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau
- And just in case anyone thinks God chooses individuals based on the faith or good stuff they would do in the future - Paul says in Romans 9:11
¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad— [God chose Jacob] in order that God's purpose in election might stand
- At this point people might be tempted to accuse God of acting unjustly - by choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau. Paul anticipates this complaint and says Romans 9:15 - "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."
- God is sovereign and free to choose who He wants and free to pass by others
- The creature (that's us) has no right to accuse the Creator of anything?

[PowerPoint 4a-Chosen continued]

But what choice do we have in God choosing us?

Eph 2:8 says even our faith is not from ourselves, but is a gift from God

And John 10:44 says:

⁴⁴ "No one can come to me [Jesus] unless the Father who sent me [Jesus] draws them

- Balanced with this - the Bible also says in -

- 1 Tim 2:4 - God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth
- And in
- 2 Peter 3:9 says - The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise (to return) ... instead He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish

[PowerPoint 4b-bottom line]

The bottom line is this:

- God has ordained to redeem a remnant of humanity to salvation. These elect individuals were chosen before the creation of the world, and their salvation is complete in Christ. (Romans 8:28-30)
- We don't know who are in this remnant - nor how many?
- Only God knows
- And God could well have us in mind to tell those He has chosen - about Jesus - so sharing our faith is mandatory - not optional!

So, the Thessalonians Christians and in fact, all Christians are chosen by God
How does Paul know they are chosen?

[PowerPoint 5a-Brothers/Sisters]

First, because he sees them as **brothers and sisters in Christ (v4)**, loved by God

They are family - part of Jesus' family - loved because they have faith in the love of God - that **agape** love poured out on the cross by Jesus

[PowerPoint 5b-Power Gospel]

Second, Paul knows they're chosen because of their response to the missionaries Gospel message - the Good News of Jesus - they brought
 This message came not just with words - but with the power of God's words
 You see:

God's word that goes out from His mouth: will not return to Him empty, but will accomplish what God desires and achieve the purpose for which He sent it. (Isa 55:11)

And:

...the word of God is alive and active.

And His word also came with the power of the HS to give the missionaries and the Thessalonians deep conviction - that God had chosen and saved them

[PowerPoint 5c-Deep conviction]

Third - that deep conviction showed itself by the missionaries being prepared to live among them - despite opposition - so that the Thessalonians would see that the missionaries were prepared to endure persecution - to make sure they knew about and believed in Jesus

[PowerPoint 6a-Imitators]

So much so, that the Thessalonians become imitators of Paul, Timothy and Silas - and imitators of the Lord Jesus

Imitate means to copy or follow an example or model of someone else

Imitators (vv6-10)

We need to be careful who we imitate though...

President Calvin Coolidge [1923-29] invited some people from his hometown to dinner at the White House. Because they didn't know how to behave at such an occasion, they thought the best thing to do was to copy what the President did. The time came for serving coffee. The President poured his coffee into a saucer. As soon as the visitors saw it, they did the same. The next step for the President was to pour some milk and add a little sugar to the coffee in the saucer. The visitors did the same. They thought for sure that the next step would be for the President to take the saucer with the coffee and begin sipping it. But the President didn't do that. He leaned over, placed the saucer on the floor and called the cat.

(pause)

Thankfully, the Thessalonians imitated the missionaries who were imitating Christ

[PowerPoint 6b-Imitating]

What did this imitating look like?

Imitating looked like

V6 - welcoming the message of Jesus in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the HS

Suffering has always been the lot of Christians

Jesus says in John 16:33 - In this world you will have trouble! But take heart I have overcome the world!

Martin Luther wisely said - if Jesus wore a crown of thorns - why should His followers expect only a crown of roses

But just as it is true that as Christians, we have suffering and trouble in this world - it is also true as Jesus says - in John 16:22

So, with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

A joy brought about by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) - joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit

[PowerPoint 6c-Challenge]

Challenge: The early Christians were able to suffer for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel - and wore it with a badge of honour? And rejoiced in that suffering - because it was for the sake of the message of Jesus spreading and the missionary work continuing. Are we able to join them?

(pause)

[Powerpoint7a-Model]

Imitating also looked like v7-8

Being a model to the surrounding areas

Macedonia & Achaia

In fact, everywhere

The word for model literally means a pattern

This is pretty high praise from Paul - he doesn't tell any other church in his letters that they are a model or pattern to the surrounding regions

The Thessalonians have been such a wonderful model of Christian of faith, hope and love - that people from other areas are coming up to Paul, Timothy and Silas and telling them they've heard how the Thessalonians welcomed the missionaries with open arms

[PowerPoint 7b-Challenge 1]

Challenge: Who are we modelling? Is the person we're modelling, modelling Christ?

(pause)

[PowerPoint 7c-Challenge 2]

Challenge: Pause for a moment and ask - what would people in our community say we and our church are modelling? Is our modelling consistent with our vision to love the community with the love of Jesus?

(pause)

The surrounding regions of Thessalonica notice **three distinct results** from the Thessalonians imitating:

[PowerPoint 8a-Result 1]

First, v9 - *they've turned to God from idols*

The context of Thessalonica - like most of Greece - was the worship of many gods, the belief in many myths and legends - and the worship of sex and erotic love - and even homosexuality.

In our context - idols take two forms - **religious idols** - such as the worship of statues and saints, the worship of Buddha's and Hindu gods and so on

And **contemporary non-religious idols** - like the over-indulgence in sport, money, possessions, sexuality, partying, drugs, alcohol, following and modelling the lifestyles of celebrities, overuse of technology and social media. All these become a priority over worshipping and serving God.

Evidence of someone becoming a follower of Jesus - is to see their lifestyle and priorities change - where these idols become less or non-existent - and Jesus becomes their first priority

Challenge: It's worth self-examining our priorities in life? Is our life - a life that models Jesus' example and teaching? What do our children and grandchildren see as our priority in life?

(pause)

[PowerPoint 8b-Result 2]

Second result of imitating Christ, is the Thessalonians are *now serving the living and true God*

Serve literally means slave - the Apostle Paul was delighted to call himself a slave of Christ. It underlines the *wholehearted nature of Christian service*.

And notice God is referred to as a *living God* - as opposed to the Thessalonians' and our "dead" idols.

And notice too God is referred to as the *true or genuine God* - as opposed to the gods and idols they served which were *not real!*

Challenge: Who or what are we serving? Is it the living and true God - or are we serving or a slave to - someone or something else?

(pause)

[PowerPoint 8c-Result 3]

The third result of imitating Christ is that the Thessalonians in v10 are **waiting (literally waiting with great expectation) for Jesus, God's Son** to return from Heaven - Jesus, the one whom the Father raised from the dead, so believers can have eternal life - the one who has rescued believers from the coming wrath of God - on that final judgment day. They wait expectantly - knowing they are rescued from that wrath of God

Whereas the non-believers will be dispatched to eternal punishment - the believers - will be delivered into eternal life in Heaven

They wait expectantly for that!

Challenge: Are we looking forward with great anticipation to eternal life - that's what the Thessalonians modelled - and people saw that certain hope in them - do people see that certain hope in us - if not? Why not?

(pause)

Response (Proverbs 3:1-12)

So, Paul tells us, as Christians, we are *chosen*

And we are chosen to *imitate Christ* - whilst we wait for Jesus to return or for God to call us home

How can we respond as we do wait?

Our OT reading from **Proverbs 3** - gives us our response

And - we need to respond with our Head, Heart and Hands

[PowerPoint 9-Heading]

Head

- Don't forget the Lord's teaching (v1) - read our Bibles, meditate on it commit it to memory
- Don't rely on your own understanding and head knowledge - v5
- Don't be wise in our own eyes - God is much wiser and smarter - v7

[PowerPoint 10-Heart]

Heart

- Keep the Lord's commands (rules) in our heart (v1). You see we can have all the head knowledge we want and never apply God's word to our lives. By

applying God's word to our hearts - we are then motivated to use and apply God's word and not just know of God's word

- Have God's love and faithfulness in our heart - v3 - have a loving and faithful heart to God and others - always looking to be loving, compassionate, merciful and faithful
- Trust in the Lord with all our heart - v5 - - believe His promises - believe He cares - believe He's always there no matter what!

Hands

[PowerPoint 11-Hands]

- Don't let love and faithfulness leave your life - as a reminder put them around your neck [put on garland] - v3 - show people your love and faithfulness to God and to others
- Submit all our ways - our plans - to God - let Him be the one to direct us - v5 - that means - praying before every action or decision
- Have respect and reverent fear of God - knowing He is the source of all that is perfect, wise and true - always wanting to please God - and keeping away from any evil actions and decisions - v7
- Honour God with our wealth and possessions - remembering we only have anything because God blessed us with it - and acknowledge it is all His by being giving and generous to the Lord's work and to the poor and needy - v9
- Finally, don't be angry or disappointed with any discipline the Lord sends our way - because God disciplines those He loves - so that we become more and more like Jesus - who is the one we were **chosen to imitate!**

Let's pray