

Session 5

September 30, 2018

AUTHENTIC JOY

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

What do people look for in a church? The answers vary widely. Some look for good preaching; others, for good programming, especially for children and youth. Others are interested in certain styles of praise and worship. But nearly everyone admits that the “church atmosphere” is an important factor in deciding what church to attend, and whether to stay there. By and large, everybody is looking for a community of believers who worship God and care for one another—and do so joyfully. Genuine joy in the Lord is impossible to miss when it’s present, and impossible to fake when it’s not. In 1 Thessalonians 1, the apostle Paul commends a hurting church for the joy for which they are known, even as they face ongoing persecution.

According to Acts 17, Paul, together with Silas and Timothy, started the church in Thessalonica while on their second missionary journey. A short time later, Paul sent Timothy back to the city to check on the new congregation. Timothy’s report was filled with good news. First Thessalonians was written as a response to that good news.

Joyous memories (vv. 1-4). Not all prayer should be prompted by dire need. Paul’s suggestion to “pray without ceasing” (coming up in chapter 5), leaves plenty of room for praying in celebration. The apostle mentions three specific memories that were cause for celebration. It’s not surprising that these three—faith, hope, love—are prominently featured in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, the city from which he pens this letter of 1 Thessalonians. *Your work of faith* does not refer to working for faith, but rather the works produced because of their faith (see James 2:14ff). Such good works were evidence of their salvation. Their *labor of love* indicates that the works they were doing were expressions of genuine love. The *endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ* meant that the church was well grounded, and patient in their sufferings, knowing that Christ would indeed deliver them at His glorious appearance (v. 10). That Paul’s efforts in Thessalonica had been so rewarded was a source of great joy for the apostle and the church.

Joyous message (vv. 5-6). Good news is always welcome, but it is especially good when all the news lately has been bad! So it was for this congregation. As the people embraced Christ, the Jews attacked them, ultimately forcing Paul and Silas to flee the city (see Acts 17). Yet while the attacks against them increased, the church flourished. How could that be? Because the message of Christ came to them in such a powerful way. *Not in word only*, indicates that Paul and Silas demonstrated the truth of the gospel in their behavior. The messengers lived out the message! *In power* means that the effects were dramatic. After all, the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). *In the Holy Spirit* reminds us that when the gospel is proclaimed, it’s the Holy Spirit who imparts truth and transforms lives. *With much assurance* means the gospel was presented—and accepted—boldly and confidently. This grasping of the gospel was done in such joy that Paul couldn’t help but marvel about it.

Joyous ministry (vv.7-10). Last evening, as I recounted the story of The Woman at the Well (John 4) to one of our youth, I was reminded that once she met Jesus, the Samaritan woman left her waterpot and ran back to the city to tell others she had met the Messiah. There is no greater proof that someone met Jesus than their desire to tell others. The joyous enthusiasm of the

Thessalonian believers is captured in verse 8: “For the Lord’s message *rang out* from you.” The wording is only used here—applied to these believers—and refers to a trumpet blast. Not only was the gospel trumpeted loudly, but it was spread broadly, within their region and beyond. So genuine and so enthusiastic was their joy, that Paul could add nothing to it! Thus, this congregation—though suffering—was a model of Christian joy.