

Thessalonica: A model Church

Call to worship Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!
Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! *Psalm 99:3,9 (ESV)*

Hymn StF 608 All praise to our redeeming Lord

by Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNnMhzETIb8>

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up ;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove ;
the grace through every vessel
flows, in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the
same, and cordially agree ;
concentred all, through Jesu's
name, in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds
unknown, a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet, what
heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you. Give us the will to be the servants of others as you were the servant of all: for you gave your life and died for us , but live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Reading 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Thanksgiving for the Thessalonian Church

Reflection

The Paul had had a short visit to Thessalonica, when he was fleeing from persecution in Philippi (*see Acts 17:1-9*). Paul began to preach in the synagogue in Thessalonica as was his practice and several Jews were persuaded to join Paul and Silas. Many God fearing Greeks also believed. Paul and Silas spent at least 3 weeks here (it could have been longer) before jealous Jews stirred up trouble against Paul and bad mouthed him. The officials were told and they bought in Jason (Paul's host) and other believers for questioning. Other believers enabled Paul and Silas to escape by night. Paul and Silas had done enough to plant a church that was effective in its mission in this city of about 200,000 people at that time. In the mean time Paul has continued preaching at first in Berea, then Athens and onto Corinth from where he is probably writing this letter. Paul had sent Timothy to find out how they were doing and he gets a good report, but hears there are several questions the Christians have – particularly about the second coming. Hence this letter, but the first chapter begins by affirming the faith of the Thessalonian Christians and describes the church as a model church. Over 40 years ago I still remember David Watson saying his wife described him as a model husband – but going on to say a model is a small version of the real thing! I want us to look at what Paul sees in the Thessalonian church which he thanks God for and makes them a good example of a model church doing the right things.

- 1) **Inspired by faith, love and hope.** They were a busy church doing the right thing for the right motives, work produced by Faith, labour prompted by love and endurance inspired by hope (v3). They were not sitting back waiting for the second coming, they were busy serving God and the community they were part of. Persecution hadn't ended with Paul & Silas leaving, they were obviously still suffering, but enduring that because of the hope they had in their relationship with Jesus.
- 2) **Chosen and empowered.** Yes, they had responded to the preaching of Paul and committed their lives as disciples of Jesus, but in doing so had also recognised that God had chosen them (v4,5). It is both a response on our part and also chosen by Jesus. This means we are also empowered by his Holy Spirit.
- 3) **Imitators of leaders** Paul is braver than me, commending them for imitating him, as I know I fall short of God's standard. They knew Paul had suffered for the sake of the gospel, and they had welcomed the message in the midst of suffering, and amazingly welcomed it with the joy of the Holy Spirit (v6). Suffering and Joy are words that you often find together. William Blake wrote "Joy and woe are woven fine, a clothing for the soul divine".

4) **Mission Minded** (v8) This small band of believers had a city of 200,000 people to evangelise and their commitment to making Jesus known was involving them in some persecution and people were hearing the message of the gospel not just in the surrounding area (Macedonia and Achaia) but as Paul says “became known everywhere”. In Grapevine magazine this autumn our lay workers activities were being spoken of, our Circuit website tells of our work inspire by faith, love and hope.

For your reflection.

- 1) What is the motivation for the activities you are involved in personally and as a church? (inspired by faith, love and hope?)
- 2) Like me, most of us have never been chosen to represent our country in the Olympics. Do you know God **has chosen you** to be part of his team? Do you know that he hasn't given you strength enhancing drugs to compete but empowered you by His Holy Spirit?
- 3) Are you imitators of celebrities, pop stars, or political leaders? Or faithful people with a heart to serve other?
- 4) Who do you know who does not know and love Jesus? This is your mission field. For some of them your testimony, your words may not be enough, they are scrutinising your life – are you living what you profess, is your trust in Jesus evident, do they see you hypocrisy and lack of integrity or an honest person who is not perfect but who loves Jesus and the people Jesus loves

Hymn StF 662 Have you heard God's voice

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtzcZ_2n31Y

Have you heard God's voice;
has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?
Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

***We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.***

Jacqueline G. Jones+

Prayers Loving God, you call us into your church to be a witness to the world. Inspire us to serve the community in which we live and to be aware of our place in this global village. We pray that you would equip us to be a blessing to others, that we would be peace lovers and peace makers where you place us. We pray that we may be faithful witnesses to your gospel. We ask these prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

Hymn StF 564 O thou who camest from above https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wFUK3Q_bPk

O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart !

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee ;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me —

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Blessing Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen *Jude v24,5*