

*1 Thessalonians 1:8-10***PREFACE**

Because our furniture had not yet been delivered, the first few nights in our new home in Winterset were spent out on the floor of our west porch, a large windowed room facing the distant hills to the west.

On one of those muggy summer nights we didn't get much sleep, but were entertained by a thunderstorm. Now, even though we are both Iowa natives, we had just come from twenty years in southern California, where one does not experience thunderstorms but rarely—and even then they are mere shadowy cartoons of the real thing.

From the panoramic vantage point of our west porch we were witness to a breathtaking display of meteorologic fireworks. The black sky was continually ablaze as lightning danced from cloud to cloud; the noise from these frantic leaps was as constant: an uninterrupted rumbling was the soundtrack to the visual show. Periodically a blinding white spear would be hurled from the clouds to earth with a deafening crash, and then the terrible sound of that impact would reverberate endlessly into the distance.

It felt as if we were standing on the front lines of a relentless battle.

This is what happened in Macedonia and Achaia after Paul left Thessalonica—only the lightning was the Thessalonians, and the resulting thunder was the word of the Lord.

This is how the Lord Himself, through the prophet Isaiah, described the relentless, unstoppable advance of His word.

Read Isaiah 55:10-12.

It wasn't necessary for Paul to tell others what had been accomplished in Thessalonica; because of the reverberating witness of these remarkable new believers, others in the region had told *him*! Let's read our text.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

v8

the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you
word = *logos* (of which Christ Jesus is *the* Logos)

This can mean the word *from* the Lord, or the word *about* the Lord. Both are true regarding the gospel message. From the Thessalonians this message of hope and salvation has "sounded forth."

sounded forth = *exēchētai* = middle from <G1537> (ek) and <G2278> (echeo);
to "echo" forth, i.e. resound (be generally reported) :- sound forth.

This word combines the idea of something coming out of something else (*ek* = exit), and the idea of something echoing (*echeo*), i.e., reverberating.

In the Thessalonians the gospel was introduced by the apostle Paul, implanted by the Holy Spirit, and, as v5 suggests, the power of that good news then caused these new converts to eagerly imitate Paul—not just in general righteous behavior, but in ministry: they began to spread the word of the Lord to others just as he had to them.

This “sounding forth”—and, at the end of v8, “going forth”—was not just personal but geographical. The location of Thessalonica as a commercial hub greatly amplified the volume and reach of this message. It would be the difference between one neighbor telling another over the picket fence in little Martensdale, Iowa, and one commercial pilot telling another commercial pilot at O’hare International Airport in Chicago, or one diplomat telling another at the United Nations in New York. The word of the Lord “sounded forth” quickly, exponentially throughout the Macedonian/Achaian region.

Sidebar: We should never underestimate the power of God to spread His message far and wide from a small beginning. For example:

- In the early 1980s I pitched a simple monologue for Peter to my pastor at the time. He took the idea and suggested I write one for all twelve disciples. Because of that one man’s encouragement—and because God (not Al Gore) invented the Internet—to-date my plays have been performed all over the world, downloaded some 400,000 times.
- Also in the eighties I pitched the idea to my friend the music minister, to write brief devotionals he could use every week at the close of his choir rehearsals, and he liked the idea. So because of that small beginning, and one man’s encouragement—and that same God-invention—for the last twenty-five years my devotional writings and Bible Studies have been read all over the world, read or downloaded almost a three-quarters of a million times.

Now understand: none of this is about me; it is about the genius and power of God to spread His message through small, seemingly insignificant individuals. He gifts one person, gifts another, then brings them together at the right moment, and, by His grace, a small idea becomes something that grows and matures and spreads far and wide—just as it did in Macedonia and Achaia because of Paul presenting the gospel to the Thessalonians.

This should encourage us all—especially those working with kids in Awana, teaching them in Sunday School; grandparents speaking with their grandchildren, and teaching them by their lives. As we share the gospel—even with just our observed behavior and decisions—we must remember that small and seemingly insignificant decisions we make can help change the world for Christ.

But remember v7: the Thessalonians did not just speak to people; they were “an example” to people. We say more with our lives, our behavior, than we do with our words.

but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth

This is a difficult phrase to interpret, as evidenced by the different translations. The NKJV, NIV and ESV are translated in such a way to suggest Paul is employing some harmless hyperbole.

NKJV: ...but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out,
NIV: ...your faith in God has become known everywhere.
ESV: ...but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere,

Clearly the gospel had not reached “everywhere,” or “every place,” since it hasn’t yet even today. And it certainly had not reached literally “everywhere” because of the Thessalonians. It makes more sense to translate this as the KJV and NASB do:

KJV: ...but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad;
NASB: ...but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth,

This tracks better. Here Paul is saying that *wherever people have heard of you, Thessalonians, the word of the Lord has sounded forth*. That is, their reputation as sincere, effective believers in Christ had spread far and wide—and over a relatively short period of time.

...so that we have no need to say anything.

Imagine Paul leaving Thessalonica and arriving in Berea. He opens his mouth to say something like, “Let me tell you about the Thessalonians,” only to have the Bereans say first, “Hey, have you heard about what happened in Thessalonica?” The word had gotten out even before he left the city!

v9

And that’s how he begins v9:

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you...

The word had already gone out that the Thessalonians had turned from their former ways to *The Way*. And here is evidence that most of the converts in Thessalonica were Gentile:

and how you turned to God from idols

As Robert L. Thomas points out, “Idol worship did not dominate the Jews after the Babylonian exile.” As you might recall, perhaps the largest subset of converts were God-fearing Greeks—but they could very well have retained some of their idol worship even while worshiping Yahweh.

Here is the picture of true repentance—a turning *away from* the direction they were previously headed (“from idols”), followed by a turning *toward* a new direction (“to God”). Here, in vv9-10, Paul presents two aspects of this new direction:

- to **serve** a living and true God, and
- to **wait** for His Son from heaven

Here is the universal job description for *every* believer: to serve and wait.

serve = *douleuein* = from <G1401> (doulos); **to be a slave to** (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary) :- **be in bondage**, (do) serve (-ice).

Once again, what is remarkable here is that Paul does not say what you might expect—what he will say to other young churches—something along the line of, *You now belong to Christ, so you should be serving and waiting...* But to the Thessalonians he affirms them for *already* having turned away from idols to serve and wait... Who are they slaves to now? “a/the living and true God”

This God is not dead and ineffective, like their previous idols, but *zao*—alive; unlike those lifeless statues of fictional gods, their God is full of life: He *has* life and He *gives* life; He is the Creator of all that is, and gives life to all.

Sidebar: Because the definite article is not in the text, the NASB plays it safe with “a living,” but includes “or the” in the margin notes. All the other translations cut right to the implied “the”—i.e., the *only* God.

He is also—in case you haven’t caught the implication, *Thessalonians*—the only true, genuine God. All other gods are counterfeit representations of Him, pretenders. The God whose Son is Jesus the Christ is the only true God.

v10

Every believer is to serve, and, in v10, every believer is to wait.

wait = *anamenein* = to await; **to keep on waiting for**;

This word includes more than just idly waiting around for something to happen. It includes the idea of expectancy, of enduring with anticipatory hope.

Read Job 2:9. [not KJV or NIV]

The word in the original Hebrew translated “hold fast” (*hazaq*) in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the OT) is translated by the same Greek word in our text, translated “wait.” And who are they waiting for?

His Son from heaven/the heavens [lit.]

Here Paul tees up a theme he will revisit in both letters: the return of Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2.

And finally, Paul adds to the first two descriptions of Jesus—that He is “from heaven” and “raised from the dead”—a third description: Jesus “rescues us from the wrath to come.” In pretty fair detail we looked at this coming “wrath” at the end of our previous study on Christ in the Old Testament. The technical use of the word *orge* refers to the seven-year period of “tribulation” that follows the triumphant return of Christ Jesus to remove His church before the wrath commences.

Interesting word translated “rescues” or “delivers”; it offers us an eloquent word-picture of this climactic event.

rescues, delivers = *rhyomai* (rhooh'-ah-mai) = akin to (rheo) (**through the idea of a current; to rush or draw (for oneself)**), i.e. **rescue, deliver**

Just before the commencement of this horrible, seven-year time of wrath against God’s enemies—an event no one would wish to witness—Jesus will reveal Himself in the clouds [*without touching down on earth*] and sweep all His children to safety, and, as if drawn into a life-giving river, they will follow Him back to heaven. Here is how Paul speaks of it in Chapter 5:

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11.