

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

People Of The Kingdom

PART

1

TITLE

Growing In Grace

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3



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Well, good morning to you Providence. It is good to see you. I hope you are doing well today. My name is Dave. I have the joy of being one of the pastors here, and excited about what God is doing. And what an incredible way to start our time, just seeing folks commissioned to the nations and also send out to revitalize churches.

Let me say this quick word, just so there's some more categories to be thinking through. It's amazing the city that we live in, many rank this area as one of the top in the world to live in. It's come in number two and three behind a City in Australia and the Netherlands for the quality of life, always ranks in the top for commerce business, raising a family. It's just incredible.

When you see this many people on the stage, let me just say this. That's an incredible sign of a healthy church that can send people for the sake of the gospel. And Raleigh right now is 10% churched. And studies show that in 10 years, it'll be 3% churched. So we're going to send some more of you and ask God to raise up. Because here's the deal, right now we know of some 50 plus churches that are dying in our city, and what we're going to pray that God would allow those to be revived, new ones to be planted, and that the gospel would go forth in great power.

And we know that the scriptures teach that the light that shines the brightest at home shines the farthest away. Because we want to reach people here so we can reach people there, and get this gospel to all people as fast as possible. And I believe as Matthew 24 says, the end's going to come, she'll fold up, it'll wrap up when the king returns. And so may it be so.

Well, we start a new series. So if you have your Bibles. If you're a guest, welcome too. If you don't have a Bible, there's some underneath the chair, grab one. 1 Thessalonians. We're going to dive into this passage today and walk through it. But I want to set a little bit of context. So you get to 1 Thessalonians, and hold your place there.

Let me just set us up just a little bit. We're in a culture where it's quite chaotic, and as followers of Jesus, as people, citizens of his kingdom, we have an extraordinary opportunity to reflect the good and the glory of Christ into darkness. Much like the moon has no light of itself, but it reflects the light of the sun to the point that it impacts and influences the very tides of the oceans. And as the tides rise in our culture with darkness, with no sight of boats with hope on the horizon, may the church rise, may the God's people rise and be that voice of hope that's only found in the gospel.

When I say the gospel, what I mean is the good news of God, the good news of what Christ has accomplished. And I want you to think of it like this. The gospel is the good news about what has happened, what God has already done in Christ. Christ came to this earth as a man, walked, lived a perfect life, was completely without sin, was crucified on a cross where he absorbed God's wrath upon himself, drinking the last drop. Every single drop of it. Was buried in a tomb and then rose from the dead three days later, send his spirit to

come to live inside of us and birth the church and church planting, and to spread of the gospel gave a commission to those who would be his followers.

This is what Christ has done. The gospel is what God has done in Christ. The gospel's also what he will do in the future. He has promised that Christ will return. He will come back. He will set up a kingdom of peace and justice and perfection where there's no sin. He will come. So the gospel is what God has done in Christ. The gospel is what he will do, but the gospel also is what he is doing among his people as they look and live on his behalf. The gospel's also this sort of incredible fuel for us to live in between those two. So you think about it. The kingdom of God has been inaugurated. It's come because the king has come, but it's not fully arrived. And so it's already, but it's not yet.

And so we are in this tension point of between what he has done, what he will do, and we're living in this moment. And Christ has formed a church called the Thessalonians. And in this letter, it describes what a people of the kingdom look like as they work their faith out, and as they wait for the return of the king. And so this book is remarkable that we have it.

And so I want to pray before we dive in. Let's pray. Father in heaven, you are gracious, and good, and kind in all of your ways, and I pray that you would help us get our head and heart around you first and foremost, and what you are doing in your word and in your world. God, we acknowledge that Psalm 50 says that the world and the fullness of it is yours. If you were hungry, you wouldn't ask us because you own it all. So we yield to you, and I ask that you would teach us this morning, in Jesus name. Amen.

So here's what we're going to do. Okay. So, I want to give some context about the book and how it came about. And so this isn't the nice little walk through the airport with the Starbucks coffee and kind of wait for the plane. We're in the plane. We've taxied and I'm getting ready to. So get your seatbelt on. So here we go. Okay. We're going to start in Acts 16.

I want just let you know, you stay in 1 Thessalonians. I'm going to put these on the page here and on the screen here. And we're just going to walk through, because I want you to fill the gravity of this letter and how we received it before we walk through it.

So, in Acts 16:12. Act 16:12 tells us that Paul he's on his second missionary journey. He is traveling and he goes from city to city to preach the gospel, to work, to engage with folks. And from there to Philippi he goes. Actually, God gives a vision, just go to Macedonia. And Macedonia is a Northern part of Greece. It's a province, a Roman province. And the capital of that province is Thessalonica. But on the way to Thessalonica before he gets down to Athens, I'll show you a map in a second, he goes to Philippi. And as he goes there, the next verse Acts 16:23 says that they were inflicted with many pains. They were arrested, basically thrown into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them safe.

And this is something we'll see constantly from Paul. As he goes on these missionary trips. He preaches the gospel, gets beat up, arrested, kicked out. Anybody want to sign up for a mission trip, right? Is incredible. Only a few times does it happen when you go with Pastor Phil. Not every time.

And he's just going. So he's kicked out and then he comes in Acts 17:1-3 it tells us that they came to Thessalonica from Philippi, where he goes, where he always went, started with Jews in the synagogue, and then also went to the Gentiles. And as he's reasoning with them from the scripture, he's explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, "This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ."

The text goes on to say that they were turning the world upside down. They were saying that there was another king. Caesar was not the king. There was another king. When you come back from the dead, you are the king. And this is what they were preaching. They were preaching this good news of this incredible gospel of grace of Christ and how he died for our sins, he was buried and rose from the dead. So let me show you this map so you can kind of get some of the geographical pictures of it.

This is Asia. Israel, Jerusalem's down here, they're coming across Ephesus. They're doing mission trips. Coming up here he's thinking he's going to go this way, and God in a vision, "No, there's people in Macedonia over in Europe, I want you to get their." We're recipients of what took place on that mission trip, which is remarkable.

So he goes to Philippi. Jesus kicked out, jail. Hello. Goes to Thessalonica. Jesus preach. Boom, kicks out. Goes to Berea, down here. He's down at Berea preaching again, and they're so mad at him up here, because they believe, some people believe he plants a church in Thessalonica. They get so frustrated with him. They confide him at Berea and go after him again.

So he goes down to Athens, makes his way down to Athens. He's preaching. He walks into the city, provoked by all the idols starts preaching Jesus again. I'm going to go back to the map real quick. Thank you. It's amazing how that happened. Oh, thank you.

So, he is in Athens, right? He's going to end up in Corinth, but when he is in Athens, he's got such a heart for the people in Thessalonica that he sends Timothy back. Now, there's no Uber and Southwest doesn't have an airline. Okay. So, he's walking. So this is what Phil does on his mission trips, right? Goes to the city then he sends you somewhere, then sends you back. Go check on them, go check. That's what he did. He sent Timothy to check on the church because he loved them. He saw evidences of grace as they had repented and believe. And so he sends to get a word.

When he goes over to Corinth and while he's in Corinth, stays a year and a half, he writes Thessalonians based on Timothy coming back to Corinth and given a report, you won't believe what God's doing in the City

of Thessalonica. This is how we get our letter. He writes it back. And it's interesting, right?

In 1 Thessalonians 3 we learned that they were willing to be left behind in Athens, and so we sent Timothy to establish and exhort you this young church plant that has just been established weeks before, months before. And then at 1 Thessalonians 3:6 he says, "Timothy has come to us and brought us good news of your faith." This is how the letters written. And it's interesting because most of the books that Paul writes in the New Testament, he writes in some sense to correct a certain pattern, or behavior, belief, but in Thessalonians he writes to commend them, not correct them. He just commends them. He sees their faith. He sees their love. It's a remarkable book of affirmation of what he sees.

And listen, when your pastors read Thessalonians, we think of Providence. When we read this letter, We think about you, your faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope.

And so let's read this amazing word as these people were living as a people of the kingdom. Verse one, "Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is God's word. And this is what we're going to learn this morning as a people of the kingdom, listen, who have encountered the gospel they grow. They grow in grace. They grow in gratitude and they grow in godliness. Let me show you three effects of the gospel as seen in this church and upon this church. The gospel provides grace. First point this morning, the gospel provides grace that saves and strengthens.

Thessalonica is this capital city in Macedonia, this port city. It's dark. And Paul comes and there's no power within this city to change. It comes from outside the city, outside of us, namely God. And it landed. Could you imagine reading this letter just maybe some short time a year or so after the church being planted and Paul preaching the gospel of grace, the grace, this unmarried favor, this free gift of God that God is lavished upon you that makes available to you. Nothing that you can do. Nothing on the planet that you could do to merit God's favor. He just gives grace. He gives his son for us because of his love for us. And it's grace. It's receiving a gift that you did not deserve.

And just imagine that they realize, and they had heard this gospel preach by Paul, and then he says to them in verse one, his first greeting is grace to you. It's it is probably landing on their hearts like Mount Zion would land if it fell into a kid's pool. It just landed. It's reminding them of how they came to faith, but it's also stirring them how to continue to live in faith.

Paul knew that the grace in the gospel saves sinners at a point in time, and it's the same grace that we need to strengthen those he's already saved. Rules that are rigid cause hearts to rebel. But a relationship with God

flooded with grace causes hearts to grow in a direction of obedience, not for the sake to be loved, but because you are already loved. This is what the gospel, listen, the gospel of grace had gripped them and it was growing.

Notice in verse five. It's the power. We'll unpack it a few weeks away. But it's the power. It came. This gospel came with power. It changes you. This is not a bandaid. This is not a message that makes bad people good. It's a message that makes dead people alive. And this gospel has come to them. And it's in power. Verse five says so much so that verse nine says, watch what verse nine says, that this power it's beginning to show evidence that they themselves, that the report that came back to them, how they're turning to God and from idols, they're turning to God and from idols, and they're serving the living and true God, and they're waiting. They're turning and they're waiting for his son from heaven who he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

They knew that as they lived on this day, that day was coming. And they knew that because of the gospel that this day, this wrath to come would not touch them, not one drop because Christ had drunk every bit of it on the cross of Christ. And so they were turning, they were waiting for the sun. And they had been saved from the penalty of sin and they were being saved from the power of sin. Grace was growing. Grace that we sing about. Grace that John Newton in the 1700s, as a former slave trader encountered, then leaving that horrific wretched tray.

Being a voice along with William Wilberforce to abolish slavery in Europe, in England. And in the last days he said, "Listen, this is one thing I know, that I'm a great sinner and God is a great savior." And he would pen these words of that helm. Being rescued by God's grace, he would pen amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear? The hour I first believed. Has grace gripped your heart? Has it landed on you? For salvation or for strength?

Listen, the second truth this morning quickly, is the gospel propels gratitude that's constant. The gospel propels gratitude that's constant. Notice in verse two of the text, it says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers." Now listen, when Paul writes his letters, he doesn't have Microsoft. He doesn't have word on his computer, right? He doesn't cut and paste these words of things. It's from the heart. And if grace is what captured his heart, the plants that grew in his heart, one of the tallest was gratitude.

He would write in Colossians 1 as he wrote that letter to the church at Colossi, "We always thank God for you." In Philippians 1, as he would write a letter to the church of Philippi that he helped establish, he would write, "We thank God for you." In every remembrance of you, we thank God for your partnership in the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians, right? I mean, think about 1 Corinthians, it's a letter of a church in Corinth, and Corinth was just messed up. I mean, these are Christians gone wild. It's insane what's happening in the book. And yet he starts the letter off. "I give thanks for the grace of God that I do see in you." And then addresses multiple things.

All that gratitude could be evident in us as we follow him. A gratitude journal. This is what I'm doing now. Gratitude in the gospel is sort of the insulation of the heart that surrounds it so when hard days come or you are hooked, that instead of grumbling, thankfulness comes out. Anything outside of hell is grace. What I'm trying to do now with young couples, I do premier counseling with, I give them a journal like first day, second session. So I give them a journal. Like, "What do you want to do?" It's the gratitude journal. I want you to fill it up every day with something you're thankful for. And in the first year, share it with each other. So friends of mine in the middle east lived in hard conditions. They started this years and years ago. And they said it was a family of four. They said, "Man, the first time we got around..." They share their journals every year between Christmas and new years. And he said, "Man, the first time we shared our gratitude journals, it took like 30 minutes to get through it. And after about 10 years of doing it, it took 10 hours to get through their journals." Cultivating gratitude for God and his gospel. Paul had it as the author of this letter, and we'll see this even in this letter with them.

Listen, 1 Thessalonians says it like this, chapter 5 he says to pray without ceasing, and to rejoice always, and give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ. Listen, think about this. "Give thanks in all circumstances." When people are trying to figure out God's will, and we like to help people, give them some biblical categories and principles to navigate those decisions, who do I marry? Where do I work? When do I leave? What kind of job? I wish we could open it up and it'd just be like, "Marry this person at this time, live in this city, work this job." That's not how it works, right?

But there are some things that he has specifically said, "This is my will." So let's at least start there. Let's be a people that at least start there. And what does he say? He says, "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will." You want to know what God's will is for your life? Pray, rejoice and give thanks. There's a few more things to add to it, but let's start at least there. Give thanks in all circumstances. The gospel, it does it, it propels gratitude, it provides grace, but thirdly, lastly will land this plane, is that gospel produces godliness that grows faith, love and hope. Notice in verse two, how this gospel has produced godliness that shows itself up in faith, love and hope.

Notice in verse two as he's given things, he goes to verse three, and he says remembering, but what are they remembering? Before our God and Father, your work of faith, your work of faith. In other words there was evidence of faith that was not simply in words they said, or the church they went to, it was in how they lived their life. They were living in light of Jesus' return. It was a faith that was working itself out. Their faith had feet, and it was a salvation that worked, not a salvation by works. Ephesians 2 helps us with this.

Ephesians 2 Paul's right into the church at Ephesus. And he says this, "For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it's a gift from God, not your own doing, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works." So we do good works because of the great work he's already done. We don't do good works in order to merit favor with God, we do the good works because we've already been loved by God. And he's created us and prepared them beforehand that we should walk in them.

And these good works, oh, there's a variety of these good works. But the greatest of all of these works is to open our mouth and share the hope we have in Christ, to have our feet move and our mouth move to open and to say, to extend ourself to the point of discomfort that we would want to bless people in hopes to reach them with the gospel.

Last week I was FaceTiming with one of our church partnerships over in the Czech Republic. And there's a brother in their church I was talking with, he's a banker in the City of Prague, and he is in that city, he and his family are some of the first that have come to faith in the church plant partnership that we have there in Prague, just south of Prague in Czech. And the church planter has just been investing in him and discipling him. And by God's grace, they just ordained him a few weeks back as the first elder in the church. And he's helping to do some teaching.

I called him. I FaceTime him, and when he pops up on the face it's daytime here and nighttime there, his wife are out and he's crying and he's overwhelmed, but yet his face is radiant. I'm like, "Bro, what's going on?" And he's like, "You won't believe what happened. I can't believe you called today. You won't believe what happened today." I'm like, "What happened today?" And he says, "Man, I'm trying to pray with every business transaction that I do now. I have an ambition with my life to make Jesus known to everybody. And today I was given a ride to one of my friends' grandmother, an older lady, and I just shared with her the hope of the Jesus. And bro, you won't believe it. I'm like, "What?" And he says, "She believed. He said, "It's the first person I've ever led to Christ. I had no idea that it would happen, and it happened. I want to see more of that happening." And he says, "I'm just rejoicing. I'm overwhelmed at the kindness of God, of what he is doing."

Or your work of faith. Are you working your faith out in those ways? Your labor of love. Notice second, what he remembers. He says, "Your labor of love." Now this is not some goose bump, sappy love that stops by and grabs a loaf of bread and drops it off and go. It was a labor of love. That's not what he's talking about. The word labor here it means this exhaustive, this idea of sweat and fatigue to the point of weariness. It's the labor of love that sacrifices. It observes needs and rises to the occasion and works. It's a love that teaches kids in a ministry at a church year after year. And as they do it, gratitude rises rather than grumbling. It's a love that leads life groups for multiple years, shepherding folks, instructing them, caring for them.

It's a love that serves widows that are aging. It's a love in retirement years of serving those in nursing homes. It's a labor of love that parks cars every week in hot weather, rainy weather, holds doors and serves in