

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 17 January 2021

Sermon Title : Old-Normal Faith in a New-Normal World

Speaker : Rev John Foo

Text : 1 Thessalonians 1:2-8

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the regular activities we used to have had to be put on hold. As we entered into Phase 3 in Singapore, some of these activities slowly began to resume. While many activities in our lives had been put on hold, we wonder whether we had similarly put our faith on hold too. Have we been conscious of how this pandemic has affected the way we live out our Christian faith?

Believers in Thessalonica had their fair share of challenges back in their days. They faced rejection by their own Jewish community there, were oppressed by the Romans, and the city was bathed in Greek paganism that promoted immorality and indulgence. It wasn't easy for them to live out their faith. However, amidst all these, we find a church highly commended by Paul for their faith and example.

Context

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. Paul visited this city during his second missionary journey. He did not stay very long but subsequently wrote to them to express his joy and warm praise for their wholehearted commitment to God. Although Paul was not there with them, he clearly heard of the Thessalonians' loyalty and commitment to God. This was commendable because despite the short contact with Paul, the Thessalonian church had turned totally away from the idols and deities that were everywhere in their culture and committed themselves to God, so much so that their faith in God had become known everywhere.

Paul commended the Thessalonians for having:

1. A faith that shows (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

The Thessalonians had shown their work produced by faith, labour prompted by love and endurance inspired by hope in Jesus Christ. This triad of faith, love and hope is also mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 where he says that at the end, only these 3 remain and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13) These three are basic Christian virtues or graces we need to be having in our Christian lives.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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- Faith
When we say that we have faith, we have to live a life that shows we have faith. What we do, say or think is the work that will show we have faith. In this pandemic, even if we may lose our job or get affected by it in other ways, we must continue to live with faith in Christ; and show that we do not worry because our faith is in God.
- Love
Paul's use of the word "labour" prompted by love suggests that it is not an easy thing to do and would likely involve inconvenience, difficulty or even rejection or persecution. It is only when we are prompted by God's love that we will be able to go forth to serve or reach out to others unconditionally, including those we find are difficult to serve or reach.
- Hope
The hope we have in Christ should sustain our faith and keep us going in the face of adversities just like how the Thessalonians could endure the severe suffering they were going through. (v.6) Whatever the circumstance may be in our lives or the world, we should always show that there is hope in Christ.

2. A faith that shines (1 Thessalonians 1:7)

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5 that no one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl but instead puts it on a lampstand where everyone can see the light. Similarly, we are the light of the world and we are to shine forth our light so that those who see our light will see the good work that we do and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

- The Thessalonian believers had embodied this concept. The gospel that came to them had resulted in their conversion and change because the power of the gospel had transformed them. Even though their conversion came in the midst of adversity and suffering, they experienced joy by the Holy Spirit that made their lights shine even brighter.
- Although we do not wish to have to face adversities or sufferings in our lives, when we do have to go through them, those are opportunities for our faith to shine bright. When we continue to persevere in our faith through tough situations, our testimonies will bring glory to God.

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3. A faith that speaks (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

We can only have a faith that speaks when we are totally convinced that the gospel of Christ has the absolute power to save. God is calling for those who have a burden for lost souls, those who are willing to be His messengers, to bring his message of salvation to the lost.

- Paul used the words "rang out" or in some translations "sounded forth" to give the mental image that God's message came out of the believers in Thessalonica very loudly and clearly, and could be heard not only in Macedonia and Achaia but everywhere. They were shouting out the gospel to anyone who was willing to listen.

CONCLUSION

Let us take time to consider the way we have been living out our faith, especially in our current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. As we adjust our lives in the new-normal, there are some essential elements in how we live out our faith in our Christian lives that we should not compromise. Let us commit ourselves to God by following the Thessalonian believers in living out a faith that shows, a faith that shines and a faith that speaks.

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A. Review Sermon Content

Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.

As a group, spend some time to share your success and struggle in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do at the previous meeting.

Appoint someone to read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-8 twice, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, ‘This is the Word of the Lord.’

All to respond, “Thanks be to God.” Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now.”

- a. As God's word was read, which verse speaks to you the most?
- b.
 - (i) What is the key takeaway for you from the sermon "Old-Normal Faith in a New-Normal World"?
 - (ii) How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 2a. Believers in the Thessalonian church had turned totally away from the idols and deities that were everywhere in their culture and lived out a faith that shows, shines and speaks in the midst of severe suffering.
 - (i) How has this knowledge impacted you?
 - (ii) Why do you think they were able to do so?
 - 2b. How has knowing our perseverance in faith through tough situations are opportunities for our light to shine brightly for God, impact how you will respond in future challenges of your life?
 - 2c. Why do we need to be totally convinced that the gospel of Christ has the absolute power to save before we can live out a faith that speaks?
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- 3a. Faith, love and hope in Christ.
 - (i) Which do you find a challenge to show in the current situation of your life?
 - (ii) Why?
 - 3b. What is one thing you must change in the way you live, to show that you have faith, love and hope in Christ, in the following week(s) until your next meeting?
 - 3c. How can your group members encourage or help you achieve 3b. in the following week(s) until your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies and Prayer

Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.

4. Share your testimony on how you were transformed by the gospel in the midst of suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

OR

Give thanks to God for enabling you to be totally convinced that the gospel of Christ has the absolute power to save and live out a faith that speaks.

5. With a prayer partner, bring all that has been shared in 3a, 3b and 3c to God, Pray also that you may have the transforming faith of the Thessalonian believers, so you may encourage one another to live out a faith that shows, shines and speaks of the gospel of Christ.

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