

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 - Chosen By God

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Preacher: Simon Lawrenson

[0 : 00] So good morning. Let me ask you a question as we start. Well, actually, I should tell you we're in 1 Thessalonians.

Give you seven minutes to find that. So it's a centimeter from the right. Surely. But if you have gone to Hebrews, you haven't gone far enough. If you've gone to Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, you've gone too far. So somewhere in between there. It's only five chapters.

Very small book. But that's where we are this morning. So let me ask you a question to start off with. What is shaping the way you live today? What is shaping the way that you live today? Is it your past? Like what has happened to you in the past? Is it your present circumstances? Are you like what's happening around you right now? Or is it your future? What you believe is going to happen?

[1 : 01] Or maybe your hope is going to happen? And I think to some extent, we all live in all three of those, don't we? And we all live in light of something. Some live in fear of the future.

And so we become very controlling. You know, we want some certainty about what's going to happen next. Others live for the present. Maybe we are driven by comfort.

The extra 10 minutes on snooze. Guilty. We're driven in that moment, aren't we? Or our appetites. We're hungry, so we eat. Or success or pleasure, whatever it is.

Sometimes we can be a little bit stuck in the past. Maybe we are carrying around wounds. Maybe we're a little weary. Or maybe we're defined by what has happened in the past.

But in this short letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul, the apostle, is holding up a radical new way to live.

[2 : 04] And he's going to say that a life that is transformed by the gospel, grounded in faith, love, and hope, is shaped by the return of Jesus.

And what we do now is shaped by that hope. And he's going to show us what that looks like, what it looks like when people truly, truly live with the future in view.

Not some kind of vague hope or wishful thinking, but a certain and living hope that Jesus is coming again. Amen. The book, the letter, is written to this church that is young.

It's a young church. Paul had been there. The church was born in hardship and opposition. But we're going to notice, especially in this first chapter, that this is a church that shines, that people shine.

They are not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, and neither are we, right? But they have not been established very long. Probably less than a year.

[3 : 10] And they are marked by something really, really powerful. And that is that the gospel message didn't just come to them.

It changed them. So, you know, we've been looking at, since Christmas, this idea that we want to see every person developing a living faith in Christ.

The gospel's got to change us for that to happen. It's just not something we agree with and move on. This church, Thessalonica, it's shaped how they live, how they endured, how they loved, what they hoped for.

And Paul is going to describe this church that models what discipleship looks like when Jesus is at the center and his return is on the horizon. And so the question for us is, what future are you living towards?

We all are shaped by that thing. And so over the next few months, we're going to be looking at two letters, actually, from Paul to the same church.

[4 : 16] They are written about 10 years apart. And Paul writes to them. And he's really affirming how their hope in the return of Jesus is shaping their every day.

Before we get into the text, let me give you some background. The reason for writing the letters is found in Acts chapter 17. That's the historical kind of narrative, the point. Paul is on his second missionary journey, which takes place in about 49 AD.

And the initial purpose for that trip was actually, you remember the story that Paul and Barnabas had done the first missionary journey and they kind of got to the end and they were like, oh, let's do that again. That was so cool.

And so they were about to go off on the second missionary journey and Paul and Barnabas kind of had this little falling out. And Barnabas took John Mark and he went one way and Paul took Silas and he went back around the churches that Paul and Barnabas had visited first time round.

And then later on, Timothy joins them. So three of them come together. And so they visit Philippi. And that was a bit of a bruising time for Paul and Silas in many ways.

[5 : 24] Like literally, they got beat up a couple of times, got thrown into prison. And after they got released, they arrived in Thessalonica.

And they quickly faced opposition there from a gang. And this gang kind of caused a riot in the city. And the whole city seemed to come against them.

And after around two weeks of being in Thessalonica, they were smuggled out of town under cover of darkness. And when they got to, or when Paul got to Athens, he started to grow concerns that he hadn't heard from this church, this young church.

He wanted to know kind of what had happened to them. How were they doing? And so he decides probably much to Timothy's delight to send Timothy back to this town that run them out of town.

He was like, I'm not going back, but Timothy, you can go back. And to check on how the church is doing. And so Timothy goes back. And after several months or a few months of Timothy being there, he returns to Paul and he lets Paul know how the church is doing.

[6 : 37] And we kind of get a hint of that in 1 Thessalonians 3. That will come on the screen. Verse 6, where Paul says, So Timothy has gone back to Paul.

And now this letter that we're holding is Paul's response to what Timothy has reported. And so this letter is super early.

It's probably 50 AD. And I want to just tell you and remind you that, you know, what we're holding right now is, when we think of the New Testament, it's like 99.5% original writing.

Right? So New Testament is like 20,000 lines of text. 400 words of those are disputed. And those 400 words are negligible, like in terms of meaning or changing of detail.

Right? And so this is super early, 50 AD. The earliest copy that we have is called P46. We've talked about it before. It was written about 125 years after the original.

[8 : 09] And if you want to, you can fly out this afternoon to go to Dublin and see it in the Chista Biti Museum. Some of it is actually housed in right now in Michigan, but it's coming back to Dublin.

And you can see it. And so Paul is sitting in Corinth right now, writing this letter. And he's been a follower of Jesus for about 16 years.

He's around 45 years old. And he's already written his second letter, the first being the letter to the Galatians. And now Paul starts this letter.

And he starts with this standard introduction. And if you guys haven't been around the church for very long or our church for very long, we're just going to read some. I'll say some things. We'll read some more. I'll say some things.

We'll pray, drink coffee, and happy days. Right? So verse one, Paul starts this letter with a standard introduction. He says, Paul, Silvanus, which is Silas, that's the Latin version of Silas, and Timothy to the church or the ecclesia, the called out ones of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

[9 : 19] Someone once said that grace is the fountain and peace is the stream that flows from it. It's a great way to look at it, isn't it? If you are to experience the grace of God, you have to experience the grace of God before you can experience the peace of God.

And, you know, there's lots of people, isn't there, searching for peace these days. We live in a world that needs peace. We just prayed about it. But to get it, we need grace.

And we need to understand that God's way is, God's love is one way, free and unmerited. And the more we soak in God's grace, the more we'll know God's peace.

And so after this introduction, we can see that this letter has two main sections that both conclude with a written prayer. That's really interesting how Paul kind of lays it out. Like, so the first section begins in verse 2 of chapter 1, goes all the way through to chapter 3, verse 13.

And then concludes with a written prayer, a couple of verses at the end of chapter 3. And then the second section begins, beginning of chapter 4, goes all the way to the end of the letter. And again, he ends with a written prayer that covers verses 23 and 24 of chapter 5.

[10:39] And then the letter ends with a fairly standard farewell, which is basically Paul saying, bye, see you later. And what we see actually in the first section, which is partly what we're going to begin this morning, is that the first section is then divided into four sections.

And each of those four sections begin with the word brothers. So that's quite helpful, Paul. Thanks very much. Right? So he kind of lays it out nice and easy. So verse 4 of chapter 1, for we know brothers loved by God, right?

Verse 1 of chapter 2 is the second section, for you yourselves know brothers that are coming. Then chapter 2, verse 14, for you brothers became imitators of the church.

And then finally verse 17, but since we were torn away from you brothers. And so we get four sections within that first section. And so let's just get into the text. Verse 2 begins the first section. Paul says, And so Paul says, look, when we think of you, when we look back at how we remember you and the testimony that Timothy has brought of you, we think of you in three ways, faith, love, and hope.

[12:08] And these are kind of like, you know, the trinity, aren't they? The trinity of Christian character, right? You know, Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth and kind of said the same thing. He says, So now faith, hope, and love abide.

These three things, the greatest of these is love. And so they seem to be like this, these three things that go together in Christian character.

And it's interesting that he says that it's a work of faith and a labor of love, right? Which means like the faith manifests itself in our lives.

It is something that is actively at work doing something in us. There is a work of faith. And the word labor, labor of love, means to labor to the point of exhaustion.

It's a verb. The noun means to cut or lash or beat, right? So he's saying that we've heard of your love and it doesn't lay down.

[13:11] It's a labor. And then he says, so he says your work of faith, your labor of love and your steadfastness of hope. And that word steadfastness is about remaining and not giving up.

They don't quit. Later he's going to talk about the affliction that they're in and how they've kept going. He says that you hope without throwing in the towel.

You hope and you don't give up. And so he says that we see these three things in you. And then we know, verse four, and that term know is to know with full knowledge.

And he's saying this, is that your Christian walk is lived out in front of the world. There's no secrets. We know. We see it. And that's like a conviction for us, isn't it? Right?

You know, our lives lived out in front of the world. He says, we look at your lives and we know. But what does Paul know? Well, this is what he knows.

[14:16] Verse four, look at it with me. He says that we know, brothers, loved by God. That's present participle. So you have been loved, you are being loved, and you will always be loved.

Right? That's great, isn't it? Just in that one little phrase, that's just summed up like how God loves us. You have been loved, you are loved, and there's nothing that's going to stop his love in the future.

And then he says, you know, we know, brothers, loved by God that he has chosen you. Now, that word chosen can also be translated elected.

Right? So this idea of God's election is mentioned six times in the New Testament, and it's always in the context of divine choice.

Probably the most wonderful expression of it is in Ephesians chapter one, where kind of Paul seems to just go off on this hymn of praise, this kind of a major tangent that he goes off on from verse three and in verse four, he says, even as he chose us.

[15:25] And the idea is that he's chosen, we are chosen out from amongst others. And we are chosen in him when? Before the foundation of the world.

Why? So that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. So that God has chosen. This is a stumbling block for some people.

That God is selected, he is chosen, he is called. But look, it's entirely biblical. Colossians chapter three, verse 12, Paul writes to that church and he says, put on then as God's chosen ones.

Romans chapter eight, verse 33, he says, who shall bring any charge against God's chosen ones, elect? Ephesians chapter one, verse 11, in him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined, having been chosen according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.

And look, we should be enormously grateful that God has chosen us. And he's chosen us before the foundation of the world. Like, preacher Charles Spurgeon put it like this, he says, I am sure he chose me before I was born or else he would never have chosen me afterwards.

[16:50] Now, of course, that's a diff, this is a difficult idea for us to get our heads around, isn't it? For us to understand and then, you know, it probably, and I say probably, without question, it brings up more questions than it does answers.

And we can go down this rabbit hole that seems never to end of questions about election. Because at the same time as God, as affirming God's election for us, we also have to affirm that we have the ability to make real and meaningful choices.

Now, you're going to ask me how that works and I'm going to say I have no idea. like, we affirm both. That, that, in God's election of us and choice of us and yet, we don't just have choices but our choices are real and meaningful.

So, for example, we have to bring together somehow Bible passages like Matthew 11, 28 where Jesus says come to me.

Like, why would he bother saying that if he'd made a choice? Come to me. All who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest. John chapter 6, verse 51, I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

[18:14] If anyone eats of this bread, Revelation 3, 20, probably one of the most famous, behold, I'm standing at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice opens up, I will come in and eat.

Passage after passage, we encounter the issue of choice. We choose to obey God or not. And the fact that God holds us accountable for choosing or not choosing indicates that those choices are in fact real and they're meaningful.

Paul knew this mystery of election better than anyone else because Paul, if you remember, his, his, I want to say his real name. His real name was Paul but his first name, he had a different name, you know, earlier in his life, Saul.

And we don't call him Saul anymore because, actually I'm not really too sure why we don't call him Saul anymore but we call him Paul. He was known as Saul. He was a hater of the church. Maybe that's why we don't call him Saul anymore.

He was a hater of Jesus. He was, you might even describe him as the antichrist of the book of Acts. He went around arresting people, throwing them into prison and executing them.

[19:36] And one day, you remember, he was on his way to Damascus and he was there going by order of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council to slaughter Christians, to kill them.

And when he was on his way, the Lord appeared to him in glory, knocked him off his high horse literally and said, Saul, you are chosen, you are elect, what are you doing?

And Paul says to these Thessalonians, we know with full knowledge that God loves you and you're chosen by him. And for me, the problem isn't a theological question at that point.

For me, the question is, how on earth, Paul, do you know the mind of God? How do you know that they are chosen by God? Surely, Paul, that's a little bit presumptuous.

And yet he knows. And he doesn't say, I know, he just says, I know with full knowledge. Like, I'm pretty confident. I'm pretty confident this is true. Can you imagine like the Apostle Paul walking in here and then going away later on and going and writing us a letter and he's like, I'm sure that you guys are called by God.

[20:44] How do you know? What is it? What is it about us? What is it about the Thessalonians that would lead him to believe that? Well, here's how.

I think four things. And I think in these four things, help us understand the relationship between God's election and human free choice. Here's what he says in verse five.

Because, do you notice that? That word because? He says, I know that God loves you. I know that God has chosen you because. This is the reason why.

The reason he knows. He says, our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. So, four things that Paul mentions.

Right? The first thing he mentions is the gospel. Now, that word you might not know. Gospel, like you've heard of gospel choir. you've heard of maybe gospel churches.

[21 : 47] Maybe that's it. What does the word gospel mean? He says, our gospel came to you. And actually, verse six describes the gospel as a word, as a message.

In other translations, it says that you have received the message. And that's what the gospel is. And you could you could you could take that word and just say good news message.

Now, that might be even more confusing because we don't get a lot of good news messages these days, do we? Like, we turn on the news and it's pretty filled with bad news. But this is good news.

This is a good news message. Think of it like this. The gospel is a specific set of ideas, proclamations, messages.

Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, helpfully, sets out that message very, very clearly. Here it is coming on the screen. He says that this message involves the king incarnate.

[22 : 55] Brilliant. It's revelation. It's a message. The king incarnate, i.e. king Jesus has come amongst us. That's Christmas.

Just in case you weren't aware, right? King Jesus has come amongst us. The king has come with authority and power as the promised one. The king was killed.

The king was raised. The king was exalted and the king pulled out of the Holy Spirit. If you're in any doubt as to what the gospel message is, that's it. it's revelation.

It's news. It's something that we didn't know that now, after the news has come, we are aware of. It's revelation. There is a king.

His name is Jesus. He has come. He is the long awaited one. He comes with all authority and power and yet, by God's decree, he was killed, raised, and now exalted.

[23 : 59] He's pulled out of his Holy Spirit. That's the gospel. But, Peter also doesn't leave it there because he says, actually, those eight things, that message demands a response.

Right? And the response is also coming on the screen. The response is to that message, conviction, confession, repentance, baptism, trust, fellowship. That's the response.

Or, I should say, the right response. And that message with the response, albeit a growing understanding of it, because like, none of us understand the message entirely and none of us are responding perfectly.

Amen? That's quite quiet. All right? The message with the response result in four things.

Number one, forgiveness. Number two, acceptance. Number three, new life and then new power.

And so, listen, what Paul is saying is that the message, this set of ideas, this revelation about Jesus and who he is and what he's come to do has come.

[25 : 10] That's the message. It's come to you. And it's a message that demands a response and has a result. And so, notice that what else Paul says in that verse as the reason he knows that God has chosen them is not just because the gospel has gone out.

Lots of people have heard the gospel, have heard that message, made no difference. So, he says, our gospel came to you not only in words.

Now, notice he didn't say that it doesn't have to come in words. He says, like, of course it comes in words, but not only in words. You can't have a message any other way, can you? So, he says, it's also come in power.

So, look, the big issue is this. How can you know that God has chosen you? Well, the message has gone out. Yeah, good, but how does that set you apart from someone else who has received the message?

You see, look, there's lots and lots of religious people in the world, isn't there? And lots and lots of religious people actually believe the message. Like, when I say believe the message, they've understood it, they get it, they understand what it means, there's no confusion about the facts and the reality of it.

[26 : 36] But they don't possess what Paul calls the power. It's like the seed has been planted, but nothing's happened to the seed. That's Jesus' words from the book of Matthew, right?

It's like the seed has gone down, but there's been no watering of the seed, there's no tilling of the ground, it just stays there. There's lots of irreligious people too.

People who are spiritual, they might sense a power, but they don't believe the message. And the way that you know that you're different from both, the religious and the irreligious, is because both, even though both have received the message, they don't have the message and the power.

This is what Paul is saying. It may be helpful to go to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. So, Paul is writing another letter to the church of Corinth and this is what he writes.

He says, in verse 3, even if our gospel is veiled. So, even if our gospel, the message, it's halfway down on the screen.

[27 : 48] Even if our gospel is veiled, the message, it is veiled to those who are perishing if in their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

So, look, he isn't saying that people haven't heard the message. He is saying that the message has been ineffective. And it's been ineffective because the God of this world has blinded the minds.

And then he describes what they have been blinded from which is the light. And then in verse 6, Paul says, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Here's what I think he means. He says, when you're hearing the message, King Jesus has come. He's a promised one. He's come with all authority and all power.

And he was killed and he was raised and he was exalted and he sent the Holy Spirit. When you hear that message, you may start thinking that you have to investigate that.

[29 : 01] Like right in the very beginning, like I'm not too sure that can be true, but I'm going to check it out. It might be an intellectual exercise.

Like you've come to church and you realize, hey, you know, maybe there's more to this gospel thing, this message thing that I thought. Like there's some pretty bold claims that 99.5% of the New Testament that we have in our hands is the same as what Paul wrote.

That's a pretty bold claim. I need to check out to see whether this guy has a fruit loop or not. But with that claim is actually true, I need to find out whether Jesus, the Jesus of Nazareth is King Jesus.

There's a big difference. Like your eternity rests on that, right? And so I'm going to check it out. And so you come to church, you realize, hey, maybe there is something more to that. You begin to study it.

Maybe you go along to Christianity Explored course and Joe is there and he's giving you all of these other claims. You're like, this can't be true. And look, the sad thing is sometimes it stops there.

[30 : 05] You're like, well, maybe it is true. Who knows? Maybe it is true. Maybe it's not true. This is what Paul meant, I think, in Romans 10 where he says, they've not all obeyed the gospel.

There's people who have not obeyed the gospel. They know the gospel. They've heard it. They've heard the revelation. They've heard the message. But they've done nothing with it. It's also the same thing that Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6.

He says, working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. You see, the real difference between hearing the message and receiving the power is that at some point in that process, you begin to realize you're not just investigating, investigating, you're being investigated.

There is a power at work, right? You sense that there is a power dealing with you like it's grabbed you. Which means if you've, which means if you've come to God and you have because your choices are real and meaningful, something has also come to you.

There is power. And this is what Paul says. You're not just understanding the message, you're being dealt with. And all those what if questions, what if this is true?

[31 : 26] What if my life means something else? What if there's a grand purpose for me being here? Why am I here in the first place? Why do I exist? Why does any of us exist? Who am I? Am I more than me?

All of those questions is this power dealing with you. But Paul says, look, that's one of the reasons why I think God has chosen you.

Because it's not just about the message, but it's also about the power you've been dealt with. It's not you that sits in judgment over what Jesus has done.

It's actually Jesus who sits in judgment over what you are doing. He says, look, there's something else. He says, and in the Holy Spirit. You see, the gospel message and the power of it is life changing.

It should change our lives. This is not just information. This is not just religious stuff. It's spiritual and it's powerful and it changes your life.

[32 : 34] And as dozens of you that will testify to that truth this morning, it changes your life. When Paul was writing to the church of Corinth again, he listed the Holy Spirit and this is an amazing passage, but, and we don't have time to really explore it, but he listed the Holy Spirit as an evidence of God's powerful work.

Right? But in a really interesting way. Look at what he said, 2 Corinthians chapter 6. He said, we put no obstacle in anyone's way so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way.

By great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger. And look, here it is, right? Here it is. By purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love.

Like if that doesn't confuse you, it's like, why would he put the Holy Spirit in a list of Christian characteristics? Purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, then genuine love, but he includes the Holy Spirit as a Christian characteristic.

He is not suggesting that the Holy Spirit brings about the evidence for God's powerful work, although I'm sure he does. Paul is saying, you have received the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 05] The result of believing the message and responding to the message and being dealt with by the ramifications of the message is now that your very life, your character is becoming more and more Christ-like as the Holy Spirit conforms your will to his.

And Paul says, like, I see that. You've received the Holy Spirit. And then fourthly, the final way that he knows that God has chosen them is that because the gospel came with great or full, the word full means great conviction.

the Greek word is pleophethora and it's only used four times in the New Testament and only once is it translated as conviction.

Every single time, the other times is translated as assurance. Could also be used translated as confidence. And note that it's the gospel that came with full assurance and confidence.

This doesn't relate to their response. Like, you don't have to be confident in your response to the Lord. You can come with weak faith, little faith.

[35 : 24] That's not what it's referring to. He is saying that the, it describes the fact that when the message is received and the power and the Holy Spirit are involved, there's only one outcome, a confidence that is the, a confidence in the electing act of God.

And so then my question is, is that in your life, can you be confident in that electing work of God? Do you see that? Do you wrestle with that power over the message and the Holy Spirit's transformation in your life?

As a daily occurrence. And so then in the remaining verses of the chapter, which we'll rush through for obvious reasons, Paul describes what happens in the man or woman of God when these four things collide.

What happens to your life? What can you expect your life to look like if those four things are taking place, if you are indeed chosen by God? when the gospel comes in word, when it begins to deal with you, when it imparts life-changing power and confidence in you, what happens?

Well, what happens is that that person who was is no longer. That's the short term. The person who was isn't anymore. So Paul says, you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake.

[37 : 03] That's like a nod to Paul's past, isn't it? Where Paul was a former murderer now putting himself in front of them and saying, this is what the gospel can produce in someone's life. these things, Paul says, have collided in me and the person who was is no longer.

I'm no longer Saul, I am Paul. And so in verse 6 he begins to say to them, and this must have been such an encouragement to them, this is the change I see in you.

So this is the change that God has made in me, but you know what? As an encouragement, this is what I see in you. And so Paul firstly says in verse 6, you became imitators of us and of the Lord for you received the word with much affliction.

So their faith was a sincere faith, meaning it was good in summer and it was good in winter. It was good in good times and it was good in bad times. It was good in easy times and hard times. But not only that, the second thing is that he says with the joy of the Holy Spirit. And look, the amount of times joy and the Holy Spirit are linked in the Bible is crazy.

[38 : 29] Like as an exhortation, if we are Spirit-filled people, we should also be joy-filled people. And joy-filled people are Holy Spirit-filled people.

Acts chapter 13, verse 52, the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. One example. Even Paul in Galatians, he said that the fruit of the Spirit is what?

Love and joy. Joy. Which means that, again, that a joy-filled Christian is a Holy Spirit-filled Christian. That is not to say that there aren't going to be times when things are not going to wear you down. Like, we don't live in Disney World. There's going to be times that are harder than other times. There's going to be dark times. There's going to be times of struggle and challenge. But listen, joy isn't happiness. Joy is the emotion of gratitude. Think about that.

[39 : 41] Joy is the emotion of saying thank you and meaning it. And practicing gratitude towards God invites joy into our lives.

And I would encourage you, you know, as we come to the Lord's table this morning in a few moments, is to practice being grateful. Practice saying thank you.

And so Paul says, look, it's not just a sincere faith, but it was a sincere faith that was one full of joy, even under affliction. And then he says in verse 7, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, for not only was the, or has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere.

So that we need not say anything. It's like Paul's like rocking up to the church in Athens and Corinth and all of these other places and he's like, oh, yeah, I've just come from Thessalonica and they're like, oh, the Thessalonians, man, they're great.

He's like, I don't even have to say anything. Your reputation has gone so far and wide and it's not about you, it's about Jesus. That's great. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

[41 : 19] That's what we mean by change. That's what we mean by transformation. And to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Such was the life change in these believers that Paul could use them as examples of being followers of Jesus. He says they turned from God or they turned to God from idols which speaks about repentance which challenges us, doesn't it, over our idols, the things that we hold dear, the things that are competing for our loyalty, the things that are competing for our trust and our hope. What do we really hope in and for? Paul says they have turned to God from those things. And then he says they have turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God which speaks about devotion.

Serving God is not just believing something. It's a lifestyle of surrendering something. And that's a daily choice.

And he says finally to wait for his son from heaven. That speaks of hope. Jesus is coming back. And the question then is are we or how are we waiting?

[43 : 02] Because all of us are waiting. So the question is how are we waiting? Are we waiting actively or passively? Are we living like Jesus could return this week?

This day? What future are we living for? Who are you becoming because of the gospel?

And so this morning we are going to come to the Lord's table together. Zach is going to come up and lead us in a song or two. And I want to encourage you to practice thankfulness, to practice gratitude.

This table is a Christian meal. And so if you are a Christian and you know you've heard the gospel, maybe the power has been working in you to disrupt you.

Maybe you've come to that place where you're ready to respond or you have responded, this is a place for you. If you're not quite there yet, look, there's no judgment from us. All right?

[44 : 13] Just sit in your chair, enjoy the music, sing along if you can. As you come to the table, here's what we're saying thankful for. The two elements, clearly, one represents the blood of Jesus, one represents the body of Jesus, one, his blood was shed for us so that we might be able to be forgiven.

One represents the body broken for us so that ours wouldn't be broken. Like in that there is enough to say thank you, isn't there? So let's pray and we're going to sing.

And as we're singing, as Zach is leading us, our thing here is just to get up out of your chair and come and self-serve. This is between you and the Lord.

And so if you are a Christian this morning, you're invited to this table. And let's just say thank you.

Father, thank you for the message, the reality of that. Thank you, Lord, that you call us to respond.

[45 : 20] Lord, and in thankfulness we do. Lord, we do that afresh again today. Lord, we thank you, Lord, that this is a table, a table with a seat for us.

And you invite us to come and dine with you. Lord, and before we dine, we say grace, we say thank you for this provision.

Lord, we thank you, Lord, that the punishment that should have come to us and it should have been our blood that was shed.

Lord, you took on our behalf. The body that was broken should have been our bodies, but you, your body was broken on our behalf. The king was killed for us.

and we're thankful this morning, Lord, that not only that we can receive forgiveness of those sins, because the penalty has been paid not by us, but by you.

[46 : 37] But Lord, we thank you, Lord, that you didn't stay in the grave. Lord, and you proved that you are the king, even over death, and that you give us new life.

Lord, and we pray, Lord, as Christians or not yet Christians, Lord, we want to thank you for that power, that wrestling in our minds and hearts, that to a degree all of us feel regularly.

Lord, help us, Lord, to come to a place, Lord, where we are confessing before you our need of you and our inadequacies, our dependency on you.

Lord, we thank you for that work. Lord, we thank you, Lord, that you haven't just given us a message and say, well, just believe it, but you're actively at work in our hearts and minds drawing us to yourself.

Lord, and we pray, Lord, that we would not receive the grace of God in vain. Lord, we pray, Lord, that we would obey the gospel, meaning, Lord, we would hear the gospel message and we would respond.

[47 : 57] And maybe that's for some a first-time experience and what a good experience that is this morning. Lord, but we just want to come to your table.

We want to say thank you. thank you for forgiveness of our sins. Thank you for giving us new life.

Thank you for giving us a reason to say thank you. And Lord, we pray, would you make us even more aware this morning of the reasons to say thank you and gratitude.

Would you stir that up in our hearts as we take these elements that are just grape juice and bread, but they mean so much more. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

Amen.