

Bristol Conference 1977-01 msg.and Man of Model Ch.

by Stan Ford

The sermon explores the characteristics of the Thessalonian church as a model of faith, resilience, and community in the face of adversity.

Duration: 43:52

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Acts 17:6, Romans 12:13, Philippians 4:19, James 5:16

Topics: "Gospel Message", "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power and importance of the gospel message. He recounts various instances where the gospel was preached and had a profound impact on people's lives. The preacher also highlights the need for churches to be actively spreading the gospel and turning people's lives around. He shares a personal story of a young man in Hungary who faced persecution for preaching the gospel but remained committed to his mission. The sermon concludes with a reminder that prayer and caring for others are essential components of spreading the gospel effectively.

Transcript

I want to read, if I may, those lovely verses in 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians, please. The first chapter of 1 Thessalonians.

We'll be staying in this book over the course of the week and sing a little of that which God has to say to us from its page. Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in Jesus Christ, I'm sorry, which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and in the sight of God and our Father.

Knowing, brethren, beloved, your election of God, for our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word with much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything.

For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath. The Lord will bless the reading of his word, I'm sure. Shall we ask his blessing? It is, O God and Father, this morning with deep thanksgiving that we render to thee the thanksgiving of our heart for all thou hast supplied to the sons of men.

We praise thee that thou hast given us thy Son, and with him thou dost offer to those that know him all things richly to be enjoyed. Thou hast given to us thy Holy Spirit, that he may take of the things of Christ and reveal them to us. Thou hast given to us our Father's word in our mother tongue, that we reading may be able to understand.

Now we come and ask that at this moment thou wouldst give to us that message that thou wouldst have us receive, that going from this place we may be doers of the word, and not just hearers, for Jesus' sake. Amen. It's a joy to be back with you again, among friends.

As we consider in these coming days something of the wonder of Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica, I believe I will be saying that which all of you will be in complete agreement with when I remind you that the man who, led of the Spirit, penned these words was surely the greatest of great men. It seems to me when I think of the Apostle Paul that I think of one the world will never see his like again. A man that's cast a long shadow upon the history of this scene.

A man to whom God gave to us the great revelation of the church, that which will last forever and be for the honor and glory of the Christ of God. When he walked that day into the city of Thessalonica, he had walked some 80 miles with a back that was sore and ankles that were aching. For had he not in Philippi, prior to this scene, been beaten with rods? Had not his feet been placed in the stocks? Had he not, did he, during the hours of the night, suffered the very torment of an earthquake? And yet this man, while no doubt you and I would have sat by the side of the road and rested, walked those 80 miles, that the very message that had taken him to prison, the very message that had meant physical suffering, he might continue to tell to others in Thessalonica.

Oh, the thrill that comes to the heart of God's people when they realize that there is a message that enables them to endure, enables them to continue, when it seems that so many things are against them. As I think of him in Thessalonica, I am not unmindful that it seems as though he was but there two weeks. The Acts of the Apostles, making record, says that he was there over three Sabbaths, and I will not get into the academic argument as to whether it's only mentioned that he was there three Sabbaths, or whether indeed the Lord sought to deceive us a longer.

I only know this, that during that period of time, great things were done. And I'm going to spend my time this morning, if I may, around verses 7 and 8 of that first chapter. And I wonder if I may give to you a free translation, though I confess it is a very free translation, for I am not an academic.

But may I give you a free translation of those very wonderful words of verses 7 and 8? Your zeal was so great and sincere that you, in your turn, became a model. For even in power-weight countries, the tale of your conversion is told with wonder. I believe those of you who know a little Greek will grant that at least this is a free translation, but it is a translation.

I think you will grant that I'm justified in placing it in the way I have. When speaking of the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul could say, and ye became a model. A model.

Brethren, sisters, we have represented over the course of this week many different assemblies and churches. I've been thrilled as, moving around, I've looked at your little badges. I know this, this afternoon, I'm going to put my hand up for the person who came the furthest.

I mostly get that prize when I'm here. I only know this, that you've come from so many places. You represent so many churches.

May I ask a question? Could I say of your church at your Thessalonica that you are a model church? Would men and women look at you and say, there is a church that I can recommend men and women to behold, for it is a church that has been founded upon the word of God, and that church is showing forth the fact that those that gather there believe the word of God in all places? Well, it is that model church that I want to talk about, if I may. I want, please, to say my usual three things. I want to say a little bit about the physical environment of that church.

May I repeat that? I want to say something about the physical environment of that church. But then, of course, you would expect me to ask you to consider with me not only the physical environment, but the spiritual environment of that church. Oh, thank God, the physical environment of churches doesn't mean very much, but the spiritual environment of that church, oh, what that means.

But then I want to go a step further as we look at chapter one, and I want us to think not only of the physical environment, and I want not only to think of the spiritual environment, but I want to talk of the prayerful environment of that church. I want us to see how here was a church that had a link with the Almighty God, who believed that when God said, make your request known, He was willing to answer those requests. He didn't make a statement like that, that God's people might be taunted, and even haunted.

First of all, then, let me say a word about the physical environment of that church. The church of the Thessalonians. The church that was situated in a cosmopolitan city of some 70,000 people.

And amongst those 70,000 people, there were those who found their homes in the city, their families in that city, their friends in that city, their work in that city. Why, I said it was a cosmopolitan city, and so it was. For there were Jews there, and yet there were Greeks.

There were rich there, and yet there were poor. There were learned there, and yet there were some unable to write. In that city of Thessalonica, there was master and slave, there was bond and free, there were young and old, there were male and female.

It was a city just like the city in which you're found. Of course, there were, in the city, immigrants. There were men that had come from other countries, and the apostle Paul was one of those.

I only know that in an environment like that, there was something done for God. You see, as I've moved a little in your country, and I've moved in many other countries, I sometimes get a little tired of hearing people say, if only we lived in the Bible Belt. If only, maybe speaking on a land where the Christian faith is not the predominant faith, if only we lived in Christian England, or Christian America, too old for that.

And yet, and yet, you see, it was in a city just like your city that the model church was found. It is useless for any one of us to stand aside and say, good old sir, if only our city was a little better, our church could be the finer, the stronger. Nothing could be worse than the city in which this church was found.

And yet, praise God, there was a church there. And the Bible dares to say this of that particular church, that it was a call-out people. It was a call-out people, constituted as a local assembly.

I'm so glad of that. I'm so glad God calls all men to himself through Jesus Christ. I'm so glad the church of God knows no barrier.

For we bow our hearts and our heads and say, Lord, we bless thee for such a church as this. And to that church, with the problems that you face, and the problems I face, to that church, the apostle writes his first letter. He later will write, now I must be careful, he later will write six letters, six other letters, he later will write 12 other letters.

Not quite sure where you place the epistle to the Hebrews. I only know that later he was to write many letters, but this was to be his first, and he wrote it with the authority of a spiritual father, with the love of a nursing mother. He wrote it, indeed, with the devotion of a Christian teacher.

In other words, he wrote it as a man who himself had vital links with the Almighty. A man who knew God, and could therefore teach God's people. It seems to me, as he writes, he reminds them of three things, three very important things.

For as he writes to the church at Thessalonica, he reminds them that they have been initiated into a new relationship. He reminds them that they have been introduced into a new realm. He dares to tell them that now they have become involved in a new responsibility.

Has your church, has your church become, indeed, initiated into a new relationship? If it has not, I dare suggest to you, it is not a church. For the first qualification of a church is that it shall have as its membership those who have a new relationship with heaven. Those who can now say they are in God, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the relationship of which the Savior himself spoke. When to Nicodemus on that dark night he said, you must be born again. You must be born again.

You must be brought into a new relationship, initiated into that relationship by new birth. Now please, I look around, and most of you I know, that there may be someone here this morning, and you have never been brought into that new relationship. Wasn't it thrilling, as Brother Andrews reminded us in introducing the dead, that what God has for us is new? There's nothing secondhand with God, you know.

There are no jungle cells with God, no yard cells with God. What God has is completely new. He gives us a new covenant and a new testament.

He gives us a new life and a new spirit. He gives to us hallelujah one day, a new heaven and a new earth. He reminds us there's dawning a day when a new creation will be seen by all.

God gives something new, but tonight or today he's offering to any who know not Jesus Christ, he's offering to you a new relationship, to be linked with God. For there were many in the city of Thessalonica who went in their way to the synagogues on their Jewish palaces. There were many that went in their way to the heathen shrines on their holy days.

Now Paul stands in the middle of the city of Thessalonica, and says there's a new relationship. Each one of us can be related with the almighty God through Jesus Christ. I think that's wonderful.

But what calls that new relationship? What calls it? Well, he leaves us in no doubt, does he not? He starts off, first of all, by telling us it is called because there was a new message, the message that he calls the gospel, the gospel, the good news. That's where it all begins. As into this scene he comes, he had preached it to Ray Gunder in Pinnipot.

Women by the waterside had listened as he told forth its truth. Some had heard, and God had opened the heart of them, and they had asked the Saviour to come in. He preached it by the roadside as a poor girl possessed with a demon had mocked the things of God.

He preached it in a prison and sung it as well, Mr. Quartermaster, sung it as well in a prison. Now he has walked this 80 miles, and he dares to stand and say the back is sore and the legs are chafed, but it's the same message. It's good news, it's good news, the best news in the world.

I said the other evening I'm not quite sure where it was, but I regret that you never sing from redemption hymns. For if you did, I'd give out number 111, or I would. Whenever we meet, we always say, what's the news? What's the news? Say, what's the order of the day? What's the news? Oh, I have got good news to tell.

My Saviour hath done all things well, and triumphed over death and hell. That's the news, that's the news. Oh, the wonder of it all.

He came with a new message, the gospel. But there was not only a new message, but there was a new challenge. For verse 5 says, it came in power, it came in power.

If you will remember, this is the very chapter that tells us of people who had turned the world upside down, and they come here. Is that tremendous? That when the gospel is preached, and preached in the power of the Spirit of God, it is not long before that church sees the area around turned upside down. Friend, is our church a model church? Are we turning folk upside down? Of course, really, turning them the right way up.

For sin turned them that other way, but we turned them upside down. I only know this, that it came as a challenge. It came not only as a challenge, but it came as a change.

For verse 5 tells us, it not only came in power, but it came in the Holy Ghost. It came in the Holy Ghost. Oh, what a change when the Spirit of God comes into a man's life.

What a tremendous change. What is it we sing in the lovely Believer's Hymn book? Just as they wholly ventured, on the atoning blood, the Holy Spirit entered, and they were born of God. The greatest proof that Jesus Christ is real, is the proof of a life that's changed.

And here's a model church, and they changed them. But would you notice the gospel not only came as a new message, it not only came as a new challenge, it not only came as a new change, but oh, praise God, it came as a new conviction. For you will notice, please, that verse 5 says, it came not only in power, it came not only in the Holy Ghost, but it came with much assurance.

Oh, bless God for words like these. What a conviction. Those folk in Thessalonica heard the Apostle Paul as he propounded the truth of God.

They listened to this man as he told of a Christ who died, was buried, and the third day rose again. They listened to the gospel, and the more they pondered it, the more they thought of it, the more they became

assured that this was a God. And then I say this with real love, that I've been in the service of God long enough, and I've been saved long enough, to look back to the time when I'm in the assemblies of God's people, it was so frequently said, well, there's one thing about those folk, they're a little bit peculiar, that they know and love thereby.

Oh, that this may be true today. Oh, that it may be said, and I believe it can be said, oh, that it may be said today, that it comes, this message of the gospel, with much assurance that we believe our beliefs, and we possess our possession. But it came not only as a new message, and a new challenge, and a new change.

It came not only as a new conviction, but I want to ponder a moment, for it came as a new cost. It came as a new cost. Oh, notice the close, notice the close, please, of that message as recorded in verse 6. It came in much affliction, came in much affliction.

I have a strong feeling that we are living in a day when it doesn't cost us very much to be a Christian. We are living in a day when the average person will not interfere with us, if we dare to stand up and say we love the Lord Jesus. There are some countries to which I go, and I believe in the course of these coming days, Mr. McKenzie will be sharing with us a little of the work of God in the mission field.

He will be telling us something of what He, with His own eyes, has seen, and His own heart, has appreciated of the laborers of those in other countries. We look around in my own land, and I know it can be true of your land. Really, brethren and sisters, we have it so easy, don't we? I spent most of last year in Africa, and I only know this as I saw some of those dear Christians facing some of the problems they have to face.

I only know this, that if we had to pay the cost that they had to pay, maybe we'd be a little more like the Thessalonian church, a little more model churches. And yet we're not asking that God shall give to us the pain and suffering that they endured, and that which other Christians in other lands have to endure. But suddenly, before I came here, I was away in Belfast, and had the privilege again of speaking with, well, a young fellow I call one of my young men, because some of you know over the years I've taken a number of undergraduates with us, and they have spent maybe some years, two, maybe three years with us.

Dr. Lennox is a professor of mathematics in the University of South Wales. I knew him as a student in Cambridge, and he came and travelled some time with me. He had just returned from Hungary, a young man with a tremendous knowledge of the words of God, and tremendous ability in teaching its truth.

And there, as we were together, for he took a day off that we might be together, he told us of what his eyes had seen in Hungary, and he said, Stan, I can't ask the saints to pray for me. I can't even tell them publicly what I've seen, for I want to go back. And if I say too much, my visa will be taken from me.

But he spoke in that communist land of leading this crowd of young men, and every night there were 450 young men in a communist land, spoke of leading them through the first and second book of Kings. They didn't start until nine at night, but they weren't able to get there. Most of them had to cycle miles to be there.

There, in gatherings like ours, 450 young men willing to endure for the sake of Jesus Christ. Not one of them would be able to reach any standard in the work that they'd laid their hands to. Only one schoolteacher amongst them all, because that's one thing they will not tolerate.

A schoolteacher that is not a member of the Communist Party. Young men who, in their work, knew that they could never reach a higher standard than the lowest grades, although their academic qualifications would take them to the top, but they refused to be members of the Communist Party. We have it a little easy, don't we? We have it a little easy.

I only know this, that the Apostle Paul, as he stood and spoke to them, they found their hearts drawn to him, and they were prepared. They were prepared to stand with him in his suffering, and endure his suffering. They were linked, one with another.

They were linked, one with another. Do you know, that's a lovely expression. One, another.

Whenever there's one, there's another, in the Church of God. Whenever there's one, there's another. I say, I know you don't normally shout hallelujah, or amen, or there's hardly a grunt in you.

So please, let me ask that you all enter into it. Let me quote just a few words, and I'd like you all, brethren and sisters, please, I'd like you all just to say, one another, at the appropriate time. Maybe it'll drive the point home.

Do you remember what the Word of God says? It says that we should love. What did you say? My Bible says we should prefer. Prefer one another? Well, it doesn't mean that.

Well, that's what it says. I say, my Bible dares to say this, that we should care for. When I open and I listen to what this man of God wrote, he tells me that we should serve.

Serve one another? What, him? Well, that's what it says. My Bible says that we should show hospitality one to another. My Bible dares to say that we should pray for one another.

We should forbear. May I say it again? When there's one, there's another in the Church of God. And here, the saints of Thessalonica, they were prepared to pay the cost and stand and suffer where Paul suffered.

If he was rejected, they'd be rejected. The model church, all that we might care one for another. You know, maybe I shouldn't say this in America, but in our Bible reading at home some years ago, one of our brethren had purchased Grant's numerical Bible, and we had Grant's numerical Bible for about ten weeks.

Conversational reading, of course. And as soon as it was open for conversation, Mr. Grant, in his numerical Bible, says, and one of our dear brethren, he shouldn't have marked you because it wasn't considering one another, or forbearing one another, or preferring one another. But one of our brethren, after about ten weeks, looked at him and said, listen, brother, if you knew the numbers on the saint's hand as well as you know the numbers in your Bible, you'd be a better Christian.

Of course, you'd never say that in your church, would you? But isn't it true? Oh, please, it's wonderful to know the numbers in the Bible. Don't misunderstand me. Don't misunderstand me.

Thank God for Grant's numerical Bible. Thank God for every Christian that has been helped heavenward through it. But if you sit on your seat and all you do is read Grant's numerical Bible, when there are numbers on the saints' hands and you never visit them, I say, you're not preferring one another, or loving one another, or caring for one another.

Oh, here is their physical environment, the church in Thessalonica. Would you notice their spiritual environment? Their physical environment, they were in Thessalonica amongst these people. Their

spiritual environment, they were in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I'm not going to spend much time about that, because that's what I'll be speaking about the next time I open my Bible here. But isn't it grand? There was a time when they were in the world, there was a time they were in sin, but now they're in God and in the Lord Jesus. That is spiritual environment.

You see, 16 times over in this epistle, the Apostle Paul says, Beloved brother, dear brother, 16 times over. I think that's a lovely word, brother, don't you? I think sister's a nice word, too. But I think brother's a lovely word.

To be able to look in someone's face and say, my brother. You know, the Apostle Paul never forgot that, did he? You see, he was on the road, was he not, to Damascus when he saw that light, when he heard that voice. He was on the road to Damascus when he was smitten to the grass.

And then one, one morning, there came to the very place where this blind man was found, a person called Ananias, somewhat shaking at the knees, somewhat wondering, and he walked in and he said, Brother Saul. Oh dear, dear, dear. No wonder he calls the saints brother 16 times.

He remembers the time when it brought such joy to his heart that although he persecuted the church, although he'd seen Stephen stoned to death, there came a Christian and called him brother. You know, it's nice to call one another brethren, sisters. I sometimes arrive, as my friend Mr. Mackenzie will, I sometimes arrive in lands where I can't speak one word of their language.

And I get off the plane and I make my way to the barrier. There will be some dear brethren or sisters standing there waiting for me. And you know, it's almost the first thing they always say.

Uh, Brother Ford? You know, Ford's an international name. Why, they can say that in any country. Ah, but it's not the Ford, it's the brother, isn't it? I say, how about our church? Model church? Is it brethren and sisters? Do we love one another? Then, speedily, I come to the close.

There is not only their physical environment, there is not only their spiritual environment, but there's prayerful environment. You see, he remembers to pray for them, and then they remember to pray for him. You know, the first time I came here, those years and years ago, we had the little children's meetings and we sang a little children's chorus.

And some of you are still singing some of those children's choruses, but one of the silly ones we sang went like this, echo, echo, echo, echo is my name. I go wherever children go and always say the same. Echo, echo, echo, remember I am near, and never say a thing you don't want God to hear.

But it's true. I found out years ago, if I say something nice to you, you'll say something nice to me. But if sometimes, you know, I've got the right to do it, no one else has, but I say something that's not very nice to you, do you know it comes back? It's like a yo-yo.

It comes back. And when we pray for one another, then we can ask hope to pray for us as well, can't we? And they prayed one for another. Oh, their prayerful environment.

You see, if you pray for someone, you can't pray for someone without caring, and you can't care for someone without visiting, and you can't visit someone without helping. It goes together. A dear brother and his wife in Irvine in Scotland some years ago had passed through very, very difficult times.

Sickness had come, he'd lost his job, and with a little pension, oh, it was so difficult. But the saints were of the kind, you know, every week they'd send a get well note, you know, one of these little things with a nice little bit of poetry, send it up. But one of the brethren there took his pen and signed his name on the card the dear brother came, and then he put his hand in his wallet, and he took out five crisp pen notes.

He tucked them in the envelope, and then he wrote at the bottom of the card the lovely words of Philippians 4 and 19. Our God shall supply all your needs. And he sent it off to brother Kane, and by return of post, he had a little letter.

Dear brother, your notes on Philippians 4 and 19 are the best ones I've ever had. I say, do you want these notes? Well, for what they're worth, have them. But when you pray, you visit, and when you visit, you care.

Prayer is not just in a prayer meeting thing. Lord, bless brother So-and-so. Bless brother So-and-so.

You know, it's no good saying, Lord, you know, brother Deathwater's going to preach on Sunday. You can't pray for that and not be there, can you? One little story like that. It was during the war, there was found in the city of Leeds in the north of England, a factory that produced more than any other factory in Great Britain, as far as its size were concerned, with factories of a similar size.

And so there came up on the city of London, a member of the particular branch of production, the Ministry of Production, Kane to find the secret. When he got to the door of the office, he rang the bell, and it was open by an office boy. And before you could say, Jack Robinson, he was taken in to sit down before the manager of the factory.

After talking a little with the manager of the factory, he then said, I'd like to go out onto the floor. And he went out onto the working floor. He spent some time going from one bench to another and speaking with those that worked.

And he was amazed how they were all working. There was no slacking. Something was being done.

He comes back and he sits down in the manager director's office and expresses his appreciation for what the factory was doing. How the country appreciated in this desperate time that they were producing so much. He said, but you know, there's something a little peculiar.

Wherever I went in the factory, I saw a word by every bench that's there on your desk. It was by the office boy's seat. That word, I Adam.

I Adam. He said, you know, I know Latin and I know Greek, but that's not it. Is it a foreign language? I Adam.

No, he said, but it's the secret of our success. It's a little acrostic. I. I. It.

Am. All. D. Depends.

How. Much. Am.

Me. It all depends on me. Is your church a model church? There's everything in our God.

We will see at the next talk that our source of supply is ever available. But it all depends on me. Shall we pray? Maybe in the few moments here, there was someone who says, Lord, oh, I don't know what word

you'd use.

I don't want to read into it what isn't there. Maybe there's someone who's saying, Lord, I'd like to yield my life afresh to thee. I just want to be that man of whom it can be said, well, it depends on me and I do all I can.

I want to be a member of a church that's a model church. And it can't be a model church unless I'm a model member. Oh, God, we pray that someone here may say, take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee for Jesus' sake.

Amen. I did say a young preacher. That's all right.

Number 314. How I praise thee, precious Savior, that thy love laid hold of me. Number 314, shall we stand? How I praise thee, precious Savior.

I don't know whether he's going to need any help from our junior general chairman, welcome to Dead Wild Knight. They're going to explain a very sophisticated, highfalutin innovation toward getting into the dining room and being guaranteed a certain seat. Now, he's going to explain it.

I'm going to sit down, but I don't understand it. Maybe I will when he gets through with it, and if we can use it, we'll use it. How about it, Ron Wimple, and say howdy to your friends out there.

This is great, and we really appreciate you all being here. We look forward to seeing you, and I'll tell you what, one of the biggest privileges to us is just getting to know a whole bunch more people. So we hope you have a real comfortable time this week.

These grounds here are dedicated to the Lord, and this is one of the best purposes that we can have by having you folks here. So we trust you have a good, refreshing, both physically and spiritually refreshing week while you're here. Now, this isn't quite as complicated as it all might seem to be.

These numbers represent tables in the dining room. Each of these slots has the right number of seats for each table. Thirty minutes before the meal starts, this board will be out in front of the dining room on the front lawn.

So when you come ahead of time and you want to save seats, you'll come to the board, and the first table that you'll be taking from is table one. Suppose you want to have four seats reserved for yourself, you and your party. You'll take four of these little numbers.

Take these with you.

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