

4 up till verse 8. Again, that's 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, beginning at verse 4, reading until verse 8. Now, last time we did a brief over, we began with a brief overview of the context for 1 Thessalonians, for those of you who weren't here. The epistle to the Thessalonians is written to a town, to a city, a very prosperous trade city in the northern part of the Aegean Sea, known as Thessalonica. And Thessalonica had a lot of different influences on it, a lot of Roman influence. Though they were a free city, they could govern themselves pretty well.

And when Paul had planted the church there, he'd only been there a few months before he was driven out by an angry mob stirred up by some of Paul's enemies. And these enemies were so persistent that when he went to a neighboring town, Berea, when they heard he was there preaching, they came and they drove him out of there too, all the way from Thessalonica.

And so Paul, feeling kind of bereft of these Thessalonians, feeling as though he didn't get a chance to really to teach them the whole counsel of God, he's worried about them. So when he finally has some rest in Corinth, he sends Timothy to go check up on them.

And when Timothy returns from checking up on them, he gives Paul a largely positive report. And in response to this positive report, Paul responds with this letter, the letter of 1 Thessalonians. Now, last time we were looking particularly at Paul's attitude toward the Thessalonians, how we felt about them, how we interacted with them, and what that can tell us about how we should interact with the Church of God. Well, today we're going to be looking more at what the Church of Thessalonians has to say to us, particularly what their example has to say to us. Why does Paul thank God for the Church of Thessalonica?

What sort of virtues does he bring out? And what does that matter to us? Well, we're gonna see that as we read this text. Before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Father in heaven, as you open up your word, we pray that what we know not, you'd teach us. What we have not, give us. What we are not, make us. For the sake of your son, Jesus Christ, amen.

1 Thessalonians chapter one, beginning at verse four. For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake, and you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only 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. This is the word of the Lord, and may he add his blessing to it.

Many of y'all have probably heard a testimony before. How many of you have ever heard someone give a testimony? Most everyone has. Most of you are nodding your head. I forgot this is a Presbyterian church. We don't raise our hands. Obviously. But yeah, all of you are kind of nodding your head. All of us have probably heard a testimony at some point, and they can be really encouraging. I remember when I was on a summer team, one of the things we had to do is we had to give our personal testimony.

And I felt kind of sheepish about it because I never knew a day where I didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. And so I didn't have the classic conversion story testimony. But as I looked into it, as I studied God's word, as I prayed about it, and as I talked to some spiritual mentors, I found that when we talk about a testimony, we normally think of a conversion story, and usually the more sorted the past, the better the testimony. But testimonies are much broader than that. The real definition of a testimony really comes from Hebrews chapter 11. the great hall of faith. And you'll notice there's a lack of conversion stories in there. There's some, but most of it is testifying to how God has been faithful to them in their lives.

And that's something all of us can testify to. And the question becomes in our minds, what is a, like, how do we do a powerful testimony? How can we build a testimony? Should we even start strive to build a testimony? And do testimonies even matter? On our text today, we're gonna see what a powerful testimony looks like. We're gonna ask the question, what is a godly testimony like? What is a godly testimony like?

And we're gonna look at this passage under three major headings. First, the cause of a godly testimony. Second, the means of a godly testimony. And third, the result of a godly testimony. The cause of a godly testimony, the means of a godly testimony, and the result of a godly testimony. So first, the cause of a godly testimony.

We see that in verse four. For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you. If we're thinking about the ultimate cause for why any of us can testify to the good work God has done in our lives, it all comes down to this. It all comes down to the fact that God has chosen us. It is not we who sought after God. God sought us out.

See, at this church, you'll probably notice that we talk about election. We talk about predestination. We don't do that because we think it's a fascinating doctrine, or because we think it's cool, or because predestination's a really long word, so it sounds really smart. We do it because it's in the Bible.

And what the scripture tells us about our salvation is that while it is true, in a certain sense, that our salvation began with a choice we made, that in the truest sense, our salvation began with a choice God made. That before the foundation of the world, before any of us was born, before God said, let there be light, He had decided, according to His own counsel, for his own reasons, that out of the sinful mass of humanity, those who would fall in Adam, he would take out and save some, a people for himself, a people who could praise him, not simply as creator, but as redeemer, a people that would cry out, worthy is the lamb who was slain for us. It's beautiful. And that is the ultimate cause, and God has worked that out in our lives, yes, but it's all stemming ultimately from that choice.

Now, you may ask the question, well, why? What motivated God? Why did God choose to save some? Was it something in the person? Some would answer that question as, well, God foreknew that some people would believe. Some may say, well, God foreknew certain works that you might do. But that's not the answer the Bible gives. That's not the answer Paul gives here. Why did God choose us? According to verse 4, it says, That's the ultimate reason. The ultimate reason why God chose you is because He loved you. He loved you. This goes all the way back to the Old Testament, too. Think of Israel in Deuteronomy 17. God talks to Israel and he says, I did not choose you because you were the mightiest of nations. You were the fewest. Think back to Abraham.

He was childless and God chose him. I didn't choose you because you were more righteous than the other peoples for you are a stubborn people. God says, I chose you because I loved you. You may ask the question, well, why did God love me? Ah, now you're asking the right question. Now you're asking the appropriate question. Why did God love me? In the words of the hymn we sang, why was I made to hear your voice and enter while there's room when thousands make the wretched choice and rather starve than come? T'was your sweet love that drew me in. That's the answer.

So the ultimate reason why any of us have a testimony, the ultimate cause of our testimony is the fact that we can testify to what God has done in our lives is because of God's gracious choice. And but that choice didn't work out immediately in our lives. It's not as though we were walking along and all of a sudden, bam, lightning struck and we were insta Christians. Rather, God worked it out in our lives through means.

And the primary means by which God works out his electing purposes, the way he draws those he has chosen to himself, is through the preaching of the word. And that's what we see in verse 5. Because our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. He's describing his preaching and teaching ministry. Now there's some debate here as far as how we should translate the conjunction at the beginning of verse five. The ASV renders it because, the NASV renders it for, and the ultimate question comes, is verse five describing the reason that Paul knows that the Thessalonians are elect, or is he describing why he thanks God for the Thessalonians? In other words, is this verse five describing the reason why, how you can know someone's elect, or is it describing the circumstances in which people are converted? Well, both are certainly true. It's certainly true that if you are elect in the spirit, then the word will come with power and with the spirit. We know that.

But I don't think that's what Paul is particularly saying here. I think Paul, especially if you look at the second part of verse five, when he starts talking about his and the other apostles' conduct among the Thessalonians, his concerns appears to be more on his preaching and the nature of the preaching, not the nature of the Thessalonian reception of it. And so Paul is talking about here the means by which this electing purpose of God is worked out in the Thessalonians, and it was worked out through their preaching. Paul preached. That's why we preach. We are following the apostolic example. Now, what characterized this apostolic preaching? Well, Paul gives it to us in one word, power. This preaching was characterized by power.

It did not come in word only. Paul didn't go to Thessalonians and reason them into the kingdom of God. He didn't corner them with logical thought processes and get them to admit that, yeah, I guess Jesus is the Messiah, whoop-de-doo. Rather, the preaching came with power, a convicting power, a power that went beyond the mere words that were spoken.

And where did this power come from? Well, he tells us, with power, that is, in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives preachers power. That's why it's so important to pray for preachers. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, myself, Mac, and anyone else who steps into this pulpit is just noise. Maybe entertaining noise, maybe less entertaining noise, but noise. It is only by the Holy Spirit that hearts can be changed. lives can be changed, that Christians can be built up. It's the Holy Spirit who gives preachers power. And how does that power manifest itself? Well, it manifests itself, according to verse 5, in full conviction. Full conviction.

What Paul is describing here is similar to how the gospel writers describe Jesus preaching. What did the gospel writers repeatedly say about the teaching of Jesus? Why did the people listen so much to Jesus and not to the scribes and Pharisees? Well, over and over again, the gospel writers say that it was because Jesus was one who spoke with authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus taught with the authority of one who speaks the word of God.

And you may say, well, I was all good for Jesus. He is the word of God. He's the son of God. All of his words were infallible. Preachers can't preach with that kind of conviction. What does Paul say in Romans? Those of you who teach, those of you who give prophecy as those who give who are speaking the word of God. You can read that in Romans chapter 12. We are to speak as those who are bringing forth the very Word of God, and that's the power. That is how the power of the Holy Spirit manifests itself in that full conviction.

No preacher can speak about the eternal fate of souls on his own authority. I'm a 26-year-old man who's seen very little of the world. I have no authority. It is the Holy Spirit speaking through the Word that has authority. And that is the authority, that is the power that changes lives. What is the cause of a godly testimony? Its cause is election, preaching.

Third, godly example. Godly example, we see that in the second part of verse five. You know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. Now, I won't get into this super deeply because Paul is going to really delve into this in chapters two and three. But just briefly, we do want to touch on this.

Those of you who are in leadership in this church, elders, you are an example. You are an example to this church, to all the members here. It's not a question of whether you will be an example. It's a question. It's not even a question. The fact is you are an example. That's part of your role. What kind of example are you giving? Because that example is going to echo throughout the church. Those of you who are parents, you are examples to your children. Grandparents, to a certain degree, you are examples to your grandchildren.

God works through those examples. They are part of how he brings people to faith, how he builds people in the faith. They are in part the cause of a godly testimony. So what is a godly testimony like? Well, first we've observed its cause. Now we should observe the means of a godly testimony. The means of a godly testimony. Look with me at verse 6. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord. That's the first means of a godly testimony. The first one Paul mentions here is imitation. Imitation. Makes perfect sense.

If one of the causes of a godly testimony, is to leave an example, are the examples that exist in God's church, then it makes total sense that one of the means by which you apprehend a testimony, by which you grow in your testimony, is to follow those examples, to imitate those examples. And there are three real sources of examples that I want to touch on here. The first is the examples in scripture, the examples of the men of God in scripture.

One of the repeated themes of the Apostle Paul throughout his letters, but especially here in his letters to the Corinthians, is imitate me as I imitate Christ. There's a real sense in which we are to imitate men like the Apostle Paul. We see that also in Hebrews chapter 11. We are to imitate the faith of those men from the hall of faith.

When we read the Old Testament, we are to look at the lives of those men, and insofar as they obey Christ, insofar as they depend on Christ, insofar as they are faithful to God, we are to imitate them. Now, yes, this idea of imitation has been abused in the church, where you look at the Old Testament simply as an allegory for your own life. That's not what we want to do. But we ought not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

It is important for us to imitate godly men in their faith. And that goes beyond the godly men listed in scripture. It goes to those in church history. We can look back on faithful men, faithful martyrs, missionaries, pastors, common godly men and women. We can imitate them. We should. It's one of God's means to build us up. And that also extends to the church. Do you know a godly man or woman in the faith attending Second Presbyterian Church? I know several. Imitate them. Not in an idolatrous way, but look at their life and compare and examine. Imitate them as they imitate Christ.

It's biblical. So what are the means of a godly testimony? First one Paul lists is imitation. The second, and the primary means, is the word, is the word. Look at the second part of verse five, or verse six rather. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, for you received the word.

That is, the Thessalonians were those who received the preaching of Paul. Later, Paul will say they received the preached word, the gospel, the instruction of the apostles, the New Testament, essentially, not as what it really is, the word of God, not as merely the word of men.

You want to grow in your testimony. You want to be able to testify to others about what God has done in your life. You want to grow in your faith. Listen to good godly teaching. Read God's word. For God blesses the reading and especially the preaching of his word to the conversion and growth of souls. It's one of the reasons that we emphasize the preaching of the word and the teaching of the word so much.

It's not a preference. It is the means God has given us to grow in the faith. It is the means, one of the means, of building a godly testimony. So we have the means of a godly testimony, imitation. We have the preaching of the word. And third, trial. Trial. It says, and you became imitators in us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. They received the word in much affliction. Remember the context of 1 Thessalonians.

Why did Paul have to leave the Thessalonians so quickly? Well, because persecution got so bad that Paul had to leave. Paul had to get out of town. Do you think that persecution, that opposition, died down as soon as Paul left? No. It may have died down slightly, but it was still there. the affliction continued. Perhaps not that Christians continued to be arrested and flogged and that sort of thing, though that may have happened, but certainly they were disenfranchised, they were ostracized, they probably lost business, may have lost some property. They've faced real persecution.

But this idea of affliction being a means by which God builds testimonies goes beyond persecution. It goes to any kind of affliction in your life, any kind of trial. We know from James chapter one, count it all joy when you encounter trials of various kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and endurance, proven

character. See, it's one thing for the world to hear you give testimony about Jesus, to tell, for them to hear you talk about the gospel, how much Jesus has changed your life, how Jesus died on the cross for sins, how he rose again for our justification.

That's one thing. And they might say, yeah, he says that now, but wait until the world really gets him. Wait until he has to face some hard things. Then that religious crutch, it'll be nothing. He hasn't really seen life the way I have. But then you talk to a Christian who's been through hard times, who's experienced deaths, tragedies, pain, suffering, that diagnosis, that treatment, and all of a sudden, that testimony becomes a lot more powerful, doesn't it? It's not pleasant.

But one of the reasons God sends us trials is because they're one of His means to build a godly testimony. Because when the world sees a Christian enduring a trial with a joy that they cannot explain, that says something. That's a testimony that can be heard, but how can we do that? How can we experience trials? How can we experience the kind of terrible pains that this life can bring our way?

With joy. Well, Paul gives us the answer. You receive the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Once again, it is the Holy Spirit who brings this joy. A peace that passes all understanding. Not a superficial positivity that says everything's okay when it's not. But a joy that can weep. But weep with hope. That can mourn, not as the world, but as befits a child of God.

So we've seen the cause of a godly testimony ultimately It's the election of God worked out through the preaching of the word and godly examples. We've seen the means of a godly testimony, how it comes by imitation, by the preaching of the word and through trials. But what is the result of a godly testimony?

Why does it matter? Well, look with me at verse seven. So that you became an example, to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere.

The first thing we should notice about the result of a godly testimony is that it goes far beyond what we could imagine. It goes far further than we could imagine. Think about what Paul is saying here. Thessalonica was one city-state in the region of Macedonia.

And Paul is saying the fact that you're enduring trial, the fact that you've received the word in the way you have has been an example. Your testimony, the stories about how you have been faithful to Jesus Christ has gone far beyond, has gone far beyond your city. It's gone to your entire region. But not only has it gone to your entire region, it's gone to Achaia. That is Greece, the area south of Macedonia. The Thessalonians have had a reach far beyond their local community. Why? Because they have a godly testimony. And that godly testimony has a reach.

You never know, brothers and sisters in Christ, how far your reach is. I don't think any of us do, and any of us ever really will. We never know what God is doing with our testimony, who might tell our story, who might hear about our

story, who might even just see us on a park bench somewhere praying, and God might use that. We never know how far our church's testimony on a corporate level might go.

It might go beyond this state. Beyond this country, we know it has through the recorded sermons. We get reports. Sometimes the number one country that listens to sermons from our church is not the United States. Friends, a godly testimony has a reach much further than you could imagine. And it is also much more powerful than you could imagine. Look at what else Paul says at the end of verse eight.

For not only 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. So that we need not say anything. In other words, so many people had heard about the testimony of Thessalonians. that Paul would start to tell their story. And they'd be like, oh yeah, I've heard about the Thessalonians. I've heard that those crazy people in Thessalonica, they've completely turned around. They're completely different. What happened to the Thessalonians?

You know, I was really struck by the power of a testimony as I was hearing about a podcast, a famous podcaster, Stephen Barlette. He had on his show, in a Christian apologist named John Lanoue on his podcast. Now, I'm sure a lot of us, myself included, hadn't heard of Stephen Barlett before, but he's one of the biggest podcasters in the UK. Huge audience.

And while he was interviewing this Christian apologist, he said something I thought was almost a little unexpected. He said, you know, towards the end of the episode, he said, you know, the best argument you've given hasn't really been any of the evidence you've given or the logical arguments you've given. Those have been very interesting. Honestly, the best argument you've given has been you. He said, that's true of pretty much every Christian I've had on this podcast. They have a peace, a joy. I just can't explain. That's a testimony. That's a powerful testimony.

Friends, You have opportunities that Mac and I don't have. As soon as people hear that you're a pastor, that you're studying to be a pastor, they expect you to talk about the gospel. They expect you to be really religious. And honestly, your testimony isn't as impactful for them. But those of you who are not in full-time ministry, you have an opportunity we don't have. You think people come to church because they hear, oh wow, there's really good preaching there. Not really. People start coming to church because of that coworker, that friend, that family member, where something's different about them.

They have a peace, they have a joy, they have a testimony. And what is the cause of that testimony? Ultimately, it's the electing purpose of God worked out through the preaching of the Word and God the examples. What is the means of that testimony? How is that built in people's lives? Well, it's built by imitating those examples, by receiving that Word, and by enduring trial with the joy of the Holy Spirit. And that kind of testimony results in a reach far further than you could imagine. and a power far greater than you could expect.

Let's pray. Our Father and our God, thank you that we ultimately don't make testimonies, that we merely tell of what you have done, that like the apostles, we cannot help but speak about what we have seen and heard. Lord, give us courage. Give us the joy and the peace, a peace, Lord, that passes all understanding, a peace that makes the world say, wow, they've been with Jesus. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.