

The Transforming Power of the Gospel

Video: Plastic Jesus There is a real problem if we claim to have come to faith in Jesus, but our lives don't reflect this in any way. As we saw last week, real faith will always impact how we live.

If we are in a life-changing relationship with God through faith in Jesus, then this starts a process of transformation in our lives. It is not complete in any of us. So none of us are anywhere close to being perfect. But this process will continue throughout our lives until we see Jesus face to face.

And unlike the guy in that video, this transformation was obvious in the lives of the believers in the church in Thessalonica. As we thought about last week, Paul wrote that in his prayers, he remembered, **"Your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."** 1 Thessalonians 1:3

But how did this happen? How did these people, living in that pagan city, surrounded by immorality and idolatry, come into this life-changing relationship with God? Well in this next section, we will see that it was through The Transforming Power of the Gospel!

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10: **"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."**

1. Starting With God's Choice

The process of transformation in these Christians did not start when Paul visited there on his 2nd missionary journey. Instead, Paul said about God, **"He has chosen you."** 1 Thessalonians 1:4

Now I know that this idea of God choosing or electing some to become his children causes all sorts of problems and challenges. We struggle to get our head around it. We battle over what it really means and we wonder how we should apply it.

a) God's Chosen People

But it's a truth that is clearly taught right throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, Moses said about Israel: **"The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."** Deuteronomy 7:6

And in the New Testament, the church is described in a similar way. And as we saw in the Gospel of John, this is what Jesus taught: **"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit."** John 15:16

And so if you've trusted in Jesus today, then you can rejoice that, as Peter wrote, **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** 1 Peter 2:9

What an amazing truth that should encourage us, and give us such confidence and assurance today. Before the creation of this world, way back in eternity, God chose us to belong to him, to know him, to live with him, to live for him, and to bring him glory!

b) In Love

But why? Why did God choose Israel to be his people? Why did God choose these people in Thessalonica to be part of his church? And why did God choose us to be united to him?

Well, it wasn't because we were anything special. Paul made that really clear to the church in Corinth when he said that **"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him."** 1 Corinthians 1:27–28

God's election is never a reason for pride or boasting. It isn't based on anything that we have done or would do. It is not because we are more open to trusting in Jesus, or because we would choose him later. It is not because of us.

It is only because of him. Moses told the people of Israel: ["The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the Lord loved you."](#) Deuteronomy 7:7–8

God didn't choose them because of their strength, their resources or their commitment. He simply chose them because of his love for them.

And this is what Paul declared here to the Thessalonians. They were chosen by God because they are ["Loved by God."](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:4

This is the ultimate reason why these people were part of the community of God's people. It wasn't based on anything they had done or would do. It wasn't because they were better or more valuable than others. It was simply based on God's love for them.

And that is the truth that should humble us today and fill us with such gratitude, awe and worship. God chose us to belong to him, simply because he loves us. Not because we were loveable, but because he is love.

2. Preaching with God's Power

So this life-changing relationship with God started with God's choice. But that didn't mean that Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was unnecessary.

In fact, Paul said that he only knew they were God's chosen people ["because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Election does not mean evangelism is unnecessary. Rather it makes it indispensable. It is only through the preaching of the gospel that God's hidden choice of his people can be revealed and become a reality in peoples' life.

a) A Convicting Message

But Paul was careful not to suggest that he was taking the credit for this. He knew that his ministry was essential for these people to come to Christ. The gospel came to them through his words.

The preaching of the gospel is essential if people are going to be saved. ["How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"](#) Romans 10:14

But Paul also knew that on his own he could achieve nothing. In his own strength he could save nobody. If people were going to come to Christ, the gospel must not just come with words, ["But also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:5

This is what God does when his people faithfully declare the good news of Jesus:

- It is God who works in power to break down the barriers of unbelief.
- It is God who convicts people of their sinfulness and their need of a Saviour.
- It is God, by his Holy Spirit, who opens blind eyes, brings people to faith in Jesus and brings them into the new life in Christ!

This is why we can confidently share the gospel. Not because we are confident in our ability to convince people, but because like Paul we can say, ["I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."](#) Romans 1:16

b) A Consistent Life

But these Thessalonians were not just transformed through Paul's convicting message. They were also impacted by his consistent life. He said here, ["You know how we lived among you for your sake."](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Paul didn't just preach with words. He also preached with his life. That didn't mean that he lived a perfectly obedient life. His message was not that he was some kind of sinless saint.

But it did mean that he lived a transformed life. People could look at Paul and see a life that had been changed by Jesus.

- They could see the evidence of his faith in Jesus, the one he used to reject.
- They could see the reality of a supernatural love – even for Gentiles, who he used to hate.
- They could see the endurance and courage that came from his hope in Christ – even in the face of intense suffering.

But again, Paul refused to take the credit for this. In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 he wrote: [“I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”](#) ¹⁰ [But by the grace of God I am what I am.”](#)

How we live is an essential part of what we preach. We need to live a life that is consistent with the message that we share, about God’s love and grace for sinners.

It is one of the reasons why sharing the gospel is so challenging. It is not just about what we say when doing evangelism! It is also about how we live all the rest of time: our attitudes and actions, how we speak to people and how we treat them, what we do when other people hurt us and when we hurt them, how we respond when things go well and when they go really badly, our lifestyle, our priorities our ambitions.

But it is absolutely essential. If people’s lives are going to be transformed, we need to share the convicting message of the gospel and live a life that’s consistent with it.

3. Trusting in God’s Son

But, thirdly, this life-changing relationship, didn’t just require God’s choice and Paul’s preaching with God’s power, it also required the Thessalonians to respond by trusting in God’s Son. Paul said that, [“You welcomed the message.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:6

This welcoming of the message included both repentance and faith.

a) Repentance

Paul said that [“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:9

Many of these Christians used to be caught up in the idolatry that was rife in that city. But they had turned away from the many, false and lifeless gods that people had made, and instead they had turned to serve the one, true, living and Eternal God, the Creator and Sustainer of this universe.

In our day, many people still superstitiously pray to lifeless idols. But many other have more sophisticated God-substitutes in their lives. People serve the false gods of money, power, sex, family, career, sport, entertainment, alcohol or possessions.

But if we want to experience a life-changing relationship with God, we need to repent of this.

- We need to turn from trusting in all of those false gods for our security, significance or self-worth.
- And instead we need to turn to the true and living God, accept him as our Lord and commit ourselves to living for him.

b) Faith

But these Thessalonians did not just repent. They also turned to God [“to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:10

The message that these Thessalonians welcomed was about Jesus. Look at how Paul talked about him, just in this chapter. He declared Jesus to be

- The Son of God (v10) – the one who is equal with the Father.
- The Christ (v3) – the anointed one, God’s chosen King.
- The Lord (v6) – the one who has the right to rule in our lives.
- The Risen One (v10) – the one who died on the cross for our sins and rose again on the third day to declare his true identity and his victory over sin, death and hell.
- The Saviour (v10) – the one can rescue us from God’s wrath, his righteous anger, which we all deserve to suffer under because of our sin.
- The Coming One (v10) – the one who is coming again to take all who’ve trusted in him to be with him forever in heaven!

This is the gospel. It is the good news of Jesus. And these Thessalonians experienced his salvation when they welcomed it.

They accepted the truth of the gospel. They believed that Jesus is the Eternal Son of God who left heaven to become fully

human, to live a perfect life, to die a sacrificial death, to rise again, to ascend to heaven and to come back again as King.

But they did more than just accept the truth of this. They trusted in Jesus as their Saviour. Paul spoke here about [“Your faith in God.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:8. That’s why they were eagerly waiting for him to return. They knew that he was coming back for them, because they were trusting in him.

And this faith was real because it transformed their lives. Paul wrote, [“You became imitators of us and of the Lord.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:6 They followed the example, the teaching and lifestyle, of Paul, Silas and Timothy, as these men followed Jesus. They were not saved by what they did. But the vitality of their faith was demonstrated by what they did.

And this brought them incredible joy, despite all the suffering and struggles it brought into their lives. [“In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

This is the joy that Jesus alone can give. It’s not based on circumstances or comfort or ease. Rather it’s the gift of God’s Spirit, a gift that nothing and no-one can take away. It is the joy of knowing that we’ve been fully forgiven, declared righteous in God’s sight, adopted as God’s children, and nothing and no-one can separate us from God’s love.

Have you experienced that transformation? Do you have the joy of his salvation in your life? Have you repented and trusted in Jesus? Are you eagerly waiting for his return to take you to be with him forever?

4. Building God’s Kingdom

If not, then you can do this today. But if you have, then we will go public with this! We cannot keep it to ourselves. These Thessalonians didn’t just put their faith in God’s Son, they were involved in building God’s kingdom.

a) A Model to the Church

First of all, they were a model to the church. [“You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:7

Other Christians in other parts of Macedonia (where they lived) and Achaia (the neighbouring province) looked at this church and were inspired and encouraged to follow their example.

Just as they’d been impacted by the apostles as they followed Jesus, so other people were impacted by them.

b) A Message to the World

But this went even further. [“The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.”](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:8

These believers didn’t just welcome the gospel of Jesus. They didn’t just believe in it. They echoed it. They passed it on. Like amplifiers or a relay station, Paul’s message reverberated from them, out into the world.

Of course, everywhere sounds a bit like hyperbole from Paul. But the impact of this church is still spreading throughout the world. People are hearing the gospel and being impacted by it through their acceptance of it and their faith in Jesus.

And this is God’s plan for each and every one of his people. True disciples of Jesus are also disciple-makers. We’re not all called to have the same role or ministry. We’re not all called to reach out in the same way or to the same people. But, if we’re living for Jesus, then we are called to impact the lives of those around us.

Jesus said to us, [“You are the light of the world.... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”](#) Matthew 5:14, 16

Conclusion

So this is the transforming power of the gospel.

- It starts with God’s choice, his election of his people in love.
- But this choice is revealed when through the preaching of the gospel in God’s power
- People respond by trusting in God’s Son.
- And this so transforms their lives, that the gospel flows out through them, to continue the building of God’s kingdom.

Have we experienced this transforming power in our lives?