

## Readings for Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020

### **1Thessalonians 1.1-10**

**Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.**

**We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The 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, for 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, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

### **Matthew 22.15-22**

#### **Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar**

**Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"**

**But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied.**

**Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.**

## Reflection:

We start now to look at a new letter of Paul, written to the church in Thessalonica.

To give you a little background, Thessalonica was in a region called Macedonia, now part of Northern Greece. It was, and still is an important port.

It was made a free city in 43BC, around 100 years before the letter was written. It was made a free city because it had given support to the Emperor Augustus.

Paul, with Silas and Timothy went to Thessalonica on Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, and it was where they went following their imprisonment in Philippi.

As so often happened with Paul, his teaching led to conflict, and he, Silas and Timothy left Thessalonica for Berea.

He then sent Timothy back to support the Christians in Thessalonica and was given a good report, though there was concern about the status of those who had "fallen asleep in Christ".

You will note that in the letter, rather than "I", Paul writes "we" and it is considered likely that the letter was a joint piece of writing from Paul, Silas and Timothy.

So, that is a brief introduction to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.

Now, I have never had a great sense of balance, as my family will happily tell you. Falling down the stairs has been a regular occurrence, as well as falling over. I can climb a ladder, but once at the top I'm usually clinging to tightly to actually do anything once I'm there.

Even at school, even though I was sporty, playing rugby, cricket and football for the school, ask me to walk along a balance beam, and I would be in trouble. Some of you may have sympathy, you take a couple of steps, and you feel your weight going to one side, so you shift it, then you're falling the other way! You throw a foot forward trying to get to the other end, but that sends your weight too far forward, you lean back, and suddenly you're on the floor with a PE teacher shaking their head and muttering "Wallace, what will we do with you".

Well, a faith can be a bit like that can't it. We try to walk the right way, the narrow path, but winds buffet us, temptation, doubt, apathy, all kinds of things assail us, trying to knock us off the right way.

Most often I find, what keeps me straight (or as straight as I can go), is the example of those around me. In this letter Paul tells the Thessalonians that they have become an example. The word that is used is Typos, which is a mark or impression made by striking something with a patterned image (where we get the word Typewriter).

So Paul is telling the Thessalonians, that they are an image, an example, of Christianity, to those in the region. Macedonia and Achaia – Macedonia being Northern Greece and Achaia southern Greece.

But how did they become this example? We see 3 important aspects:

- 1) Work of faith – this isn't work to salvation for themselves, but an outpouring of faithful service of Christ.
- 2) Labour of love – two used are kopou and agape – meaning hard work, intense work, and love that seeks the welfare of the other person.
- 3) Patience of hope – perseverance – keep on keeping on.

Those three, a desire to serve Christ, that overflows in serving others, a willingness to work hard because you see the need of other, and to keep on going in the midst of troubles make them such an example to others.

And where do these traits come from, where does the strength come from?

Firstly, from hope in Christ. We hear later in the letter that the Thessalonians have had struggles and problems. Yet their hope for salvation, possible through the death and resurrection of Christ, means that not only do the Thessalonians keep on, keeping on, but that they do so with joy.

Secondly, they cling not just to hope, but also to the fact that they themselves work in the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have witnessed this, not just in the powerful teaching of Paul, Silas and Timothy, and possibly seen miracles performed.

But they would also have felt that same Holy Spirit working in their lives, through their own empowerment.

Finally, they are imitating the example they themselves were given by Paul and the others. Paul would have told them of his own sufferings, and yet, as he tells them in

**the next chapter, that they didn't preach to please men, but to please God. They didn't look glory, and they supported themselves through hard work.**

**In other words, the Thessalonians would have seen the integrity of Paul, Silas and Timothy, they would have seen their love, and felt the power of God in their teaching.**

**And so the Thessalonians themselves, putting their confidence first in Paul and the others, feeling the power of the Holy Spirit in their own selves, and holding onto the hope of salvation, are able to be an example themselves to those around them.**

**And in this time of testing we are in, and which seems to be never ending, we to can be an example. It won't be easy, especially if the most we can be an example to is six at a time.**

**But, at a time like this, as people try to walk that narrow path of faith, the winds of doubt, of apathy, of temptation will be blowing as strong as ever, and if they can look around and draw strength from you, if they can see in your life, faith, love and patience, then they might find the encouragement they need to stay on the right path.**