

Living in A Stained Glass Fishbowl  
1 Thess. 1:1-10

**Intro:** We live in scary times. Sometimes I wonder if there will be a tomorrow. Everyday we hear reports from Iraq about soldiers and Iraqi's dying. If that isn't the lead story on the nightly news then it is news about some terrorist threat or how the terrorist might be planning another attack. We even hear that the next attack will come and it will be bigger and more deadly than 9/11. It sure makes one stop and consider some thing's:

It's a time when we're forced to think about our relationship with Christ.

It's a time when we're forced to reflect on the hope we have in Christ.

You can't turn around today without hearing about some kind of suffering: The Tsunami in Dec, the 19 year old who was kidnapped and killed this week; it seems that something happens every week that causes suffering. With all the suffering going on the church today more than ever needs to be a beacon of hope to the world. When catastrophe hits people look to the church for answers and hope. 1 Thes. speaks about real hope in the midst of suffering. It's a book written to a young church; a church started by Paul; a church that people were turning to.

Warren Wiersbe's commentary on 1 Thes. Is called "Be Ready". That really sums up the Book as well as these current times. We need to be ready. First we need to be ready ourselves to go to heaven, then we, the church, needs to be ready to give answers to the questions of suffering people.

### Read/special

How many of us have ever had a fishbowl?

You might remember last week I made mention that as I was growing up I used to think that the universe was in a big fishbowl setting on a table in God's living room. He would set there day after day watching us as we lived out our lives here on earth. I know now that the earth isn't in a big fishbowl and that God doesn't just set and watch us as we live out our lives. I know that He is active in our lives and involved in our everyday life.

As Christians, we live in a spiritual fishbowl hence the title of my message, "**Living in A Stained Glass Fishbowl.**" People are constantly examining us and looking at us, especially now; every thing we do everything we say and every move we make is being watched by the world to see if we are living our lives the way they think the Bible teaches. In other words, we are being watched to see if our life backs up our lip, if our walk is a good as our talk. They let us know when we mess up, consider some of the famous preachers from the past who have messed up, (Bakker, Swaggart, New Era), their mistakes were broadcast on the nightly news.

The problem is we're often times oblivious to the fact that we are being watched which means that they may be seeing the wrong things. George Barna has found in many of his recent surveys that there is really no difference between believers and unbelievers in many of the moral issues of life today. That's tragic – it's no wonder Christianity isn't growing like it should.

This was definitely not the case with the Thessalonians. Here was a church who realized they were being watched. They gave the spectators quite a performance and their reputation spread. Paul hears about their reputation/testimony and writes them. It is a lesson for us to heed. Our reputation is at stake. The world is watching us.

They need to see a difference in us.

Background: There church was fledgling church (?Paul only 3 weeks there), familiar with persecution (Paul kicked out, riots, founding pastor gone) It was like being a Christian in Afghanistan or Iraq. You would think they wouldn't be too concerned about their reputation. The opposite is true.

Here is a church whose reputation was faultless. They had an incredible testimony. We can learn a lot from their example. What should others see when they look at our church?

When people look at our church today they should see...

- I. **A CHURCH FULL OF GOD'S ELECT (v.1-4).**
  - a. The Word *church* means "a-called-out people."
  - b. Being called out makes you one of God's elect; Election is a complicated topic.

- c. Not to go into great deal on the topic of election for our purpose today but simply stated God's elect are Born-again believers.
- d. If you are saved, born-again, then you are one of God's elect.
- e. Here are some facts about being one of God's elect or born again.
  - i. **Salvation begins with God.**
    - 1. 2 Thes. 2:13
    - 2. John 15:16
    - 3. Eph. 1:4.
    - 4. The entire plan of salvation was born in the heart of God long before man was created or the universe formed.
  - ii. **Salvation involves God's love.**
    - 1. Paul called these saints "brethren beloved"—not only beloved by Paul (1 Thes. 2:17), but also beloved by God.
    - 2. God's love made Calvary possible (Rom. 5:8); there Jesus Christ died for our sins.
    - 3. But it is not God's love that saves the sinner; it is God's grace.
    - 4. God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve.
  - iii. **Salvation involves faith.**
    - 1. Eph. 2:8
    - 2. Paul, Silas (Silvanus is the Roman spelling), and Timothy brought the Gospel to Thessalonica and preached in the power of God (1 Thes. 1:5).
    - 3. Some people who heard the message believed and turned from their vain idols to the true and living God (1 Thes. 1:9).
    - 4. The Spirit of God used the Word of God to generate faith (Rom. 10:17).
  - iv. **Salvation involves the Trinity.** As you read this letter, you discover the doctrine of the Trinity.
    - 1. Christians believe in one God existing in three Persons: God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three Persons are involved in our salvation. This will help you escape dangerous extremes that either deny human responsibility or dilute divine sovereignty—for both are taught in the Bible.
    - 2. As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the world began.
    - 3. As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross.
    - 4. As far as God the Holy Spirit is concerned, I was saved on Easter Sunday 1977, when I heard the Word and trusted Jesus Christ.
  - v. **Salvation changes the life.**
    - 1. How did Paul know that these Thessalonians were elected of God? He saw a change in their lives.
    - 2. The person who claims to be one of God's elect, but whose life has not changed, is only fooling himself.
    - 3. *Those whom God chooses, He changes.*
    - 4. Faith, hope, and love are the three qualities of the Christian life, and the three greatest evidences of salvation.
      - a. *Faith* must always lead to works (James 2:14-26).
      - b. *Love* is also an evidence of salvation:
        - i. Rom. 5:5
        - ii. 1 Thes. 4:9
        - iii. John 14:15
      - c. *hope*, waiting for Jesus Christ to return 1 Thes. 1:10
        - i. The return of Jesus Christ is the dominant theme of both of these Thessalonian letters.
        - ii. Unsaved people are not eagerly awaiting the Lord's return.
        - iii. In fact, when our Lord catches His church up into the air, unsaved people will be totally surprised (1 Thes. 5:1-11).
    - 5. Faith, hope, and love are evidences of salvation.
    - 6. A local church must be composed of saved people. One problem today is the presence, in the church family, of unbelievers whose names may be on the church roll, but not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Every church member should

examine his heart to determine whether he has truly been born again and belongs to God's elect.

- II. **A CHURCH FULL OF LIVING EXAMPLES** V.v.5-7. From the very beginning of this church, Paul looked to them with joy and gratitude as Christians worthy of the name. They were examples in many ways.
- a. **They were examples in the way they received the Word (v. 5).**
    - i. The Gospel came to them through the ministry of Paul and his associates.
    - ii. Holy Spirit used the Word in great power, and the Thessalonians responded by receiving both the message and the messengers.
    - iii. In spite of the persecution in Philippi, Paul and Silas had been "bold ... to speak ... the Gospel" (1 Thes. 2:2); and the people believed and were saved.
    - iv. They never lost that eagerness for the Word of God (1 Thes. 2:13).
  - b. **They were examples in the way they followed their spiritual leaders (v. 6a).**
    - i. The word "followers" is actually "imitators."
    - ii. These new believers not only accepted the message and the messengers, but they also imitated their lives.
    - iii. It is important that young Christians respect spiritual leadership and learn from mature believers.
    - iv. Just as a newborn baby needs a family, so a newborn Christian needs the local church and the leaders there.
      1. Heb. 13:17
      2. It is not enough for us as mature believers to *win* souls; we must also *watch* for souls and encourage new Christians to obey God's Word.
  - c. **They were examples in the way they handled suffering for Christ (v. 6b).**
    - i. In turning from idols to serve God, these believers angered their friends and relatives, and this led to persecution.
    - ii. No doubt some of them lost their jobs because of their new faith.
    - iii. Just as the Jewish unbelievers persecuted the believers in Judea, so the Gentile unbelievers persecuted the Thessalonian believers (1 Thes. 2:14-16).
    - iv. Faith is always tested, and persecution is one of the tests (Matt. 13:21; 2 Tim. 3:12).
  - d. **They were examples in the way they encouraged other churches (v. 7).**
    - i. Christians either encourage or discourage each other.
    - ii. This principle applies also to churches.
    - iii. Paul used the churches of Macedonia as a stimulus for the Corinthian church to give to the missionary offering (2 Cor. 8:1-8).
    - iv. Even though they were new believers, the Thessalonians set a good example that encouraged the surrounding churches.
    - v. In every way, the church at Thessalonica set the example.
    - vi. The secret was found in their faith, hope, and love; for these are the spiritual motivators of the Christian life.
- III. **A CHURCH FULL OF ENTHUSIASTIC PEOPLE** V. 8
- a. Their "work of faith and labor of love" expressed itself in their sharing of the Gospel with others.
    - i. They were both "receivers" (the Word came to them, 1 Thes. 1:5) and "transmitters" (the Word went out from them, 1 Thes. 1:8).
    - ii. Each believer and each local church must receive and transmit God's Word.
  - b. The verb *sounded out* actually means "to sound as a trumpet."
    - i. But the Thessalonians were not "tooting their own horns" like the Pharisees (Matt. 6:1-4).
    - ii. They were trumpeting the Good News of salvation, and their message was loud and.
    - iii. Wherever Paul went, the people told him about the faith of the Thessalonian believers.
  - c. It is the responsibility and privilege of each local church to share the message of salvation with the lost world.
    - i. At the end of each of the four Gospels and at the beginning of the Book of Acts, there are commissions for the churches to.
    - ii. Many congregations are content to pay a staff to do the witnessing and soul-winning.
    - iii. But in New Testament churches, the entire congregation was involved in sharing the Good News (Acts 2:44-47; 5:42).
  - d. A recent survey of church growth indicated that 70 to 80 percent of a church's growth is the result of friends witnessing to friends and relatives to relatives. While visitation evangelism and other methods of outreach help, the personal contact brings the harvest.
  - e. God has chosen the church that we might be witnesses today.
    - i. The fact that we are God's elect people does not excuse us from the task of evangelism.

- ii. On the contrary, the doctrine of election is one of the greatest encouragements to evangelism.
- f. If salvation were the work of man, we would have every right to be discouraged and quit.
  - i. But salvation is the work of God, and He uses people to call out His elect.
  - ii. "He called you by our Gospel" (2 Thes. 2:14).
  - iii. The same God who calls for the salvation of the lost also established the means to salvation; the preaching of the Gospel.
- g. We need more churches today where the people are enthusiastic to share the message of salvation with others. Today there are 2.5 and 4 billion people in our world have no visible witness of the Gospel in their midst, or no church body.
- h. In spite of the outreach of radio, television, and the printing press, we are losing ground in the work of reaching the lost.
- i. Are you an enthusiastic Christian? Are you enthusiastic about witnessing?

IV. **A CHURCH FULL OF EXPECTANT PEOPLE** Vv. 9-10

- a. Their **work of faith** made them an elect people, because they turned to God from their idols and trusted Jesus Christ. Their **labor of love** made them examples and enthusiastic as they lived the Word of God and shared the Gospel. Their **patience of hope** made them an expectant people, looking for their Saviour's return.
- b. In these verses, Paul related the second coming of Christ to their salvation.
  - i. Because they had trusted Christ, they looked for His return with joyful expectancy and knew that they would be delivered "from the wrath to come" (1 Thes. 1:10).
  - ii. Paul repeats this truth in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, and he expands it in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.
- c. When they worshiped idols, the Thessalonians had no hope.
  - i. But when they trusted "the living God," they had a living hope (see 1 Peter 1:2-3).
  - ii. Those of us who have been brought up in the Church cannot understand the bondage of pagan idolatry.
  - iii. Before Paul came to them with the Gospel, these people were without hope and "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).
- d. Christians are "children of the living God" (Rom. 9:26). Their bodies are the "temples of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16), indwelt by the "Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:3). The church is "the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15); and for His church, God is preparing "the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22). The living God has given us a living hope by raising His Son Jesus Christ from the dead.
- e. Two points about the Lord's return:
  - i. First, Jesus Christ will come in the air for His church (1 Thes. 4:13-18). This will usher in a period of Tribulation on the earth (1 Thes. 5:1-3). At the close of this period, He will return to the earth with His church (2 Thes. 1:5-10; Rev. 19:11-21), defeat His enemies, and then set up His kingdom (Rev. 20:1-6).
  - ii. The word translated "wait" in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 means "to await someone with patience and confidence, expectantly." Waiting involves activity and endurance. Some of the Thessalonian believers quit their work and became idle busybodies, arguing that the Lord was coming soon.
  - iii. If we really believe the Lord is coming, we will prove our faith by keeping busy and obeying His Word. Our Lord's Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27) teaches that we must "occupy" (be busy) till He returns.
- f. Christians are waiting for Jesus Christ, and He may return at any time. We are not waiting for any "signs"; we are waiting for the Saviour. When Jesus Christ returns we shall receive new bodies (Phil. 3:20-21), and we shall be like Him (1 John 3:1-2). He will take us to the home He has prepared (John 14:1-6), and He will reward us for the service we have given in His name (Rom. 14:10-12).
- g. A local church that truly lives in the expectation of seeing Jesus Christ at any time will be a vibrant and victorious group of people. Expecting the Lord's return is a great motivation for soul-winning (1 Thes. 2:19-20) and Christian stability (1 Thes. 3:11-13). It is a wonderful comfort in sorrow (1 Thes. 4:13-18) and a great encouragement for godly living (1 Thes. 5:23-24). It is tragic when churches believe it and preach it—but do not practice it.