



1 Thessalonians 1:1-10  
Living as Followers of Jesus  
“Dummies for Jesus!”

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October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Today we begin a journey over the next several weeks going through Paul’s letter to the church in Thessalonica, a letter we know as 1 Thessalonians. Around A.D. 51 Paul went to Thessalonica with two of his ministry buddies (Timothy and Silas), and taught about Jesus. He persuaded a number of Jews and Greeks that Jesus was the Messiah, and the church there was born in that city. But some people were upset by the fruit of his ministry, started a riot, and drove Paul and his companions out of Thessalonica. You can read about that in the first few verses of Acts 17. Sometime later, Timothy went to check on the Thessalonian believers, and see how they were doing in their faith. He came back with a report to Paul. This letter to those Thessalonian Christians is Paul’s response to the report about how they are doing in their discipleship to Jesus. It answers some questions they had, but mostly encourages them in their discipleship to Jesus, to keep the faith and keep up their good work living as followers of Jesus. With that brief intro, let’s **read today’s passage** right here at the start, and then dive into what it means for us today.

I actually want to start today in the Gospel According to Matthew. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus says to Peter and the rest of the disciples, **“I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven” - Jesus (Matthew 16:19)**. It’s a stunning claim, really. One interesting detail about it, and the Greek is clear: it’s more than one key he’s giving. Jesus doesn’t say why, but I think it’s so that we can give away keys. He gives you and me the “keys” to the kingdom of heaven so that we can keep one copy for ourselves and give away the rest so that other people can unlock the door and come on in.

Now, here’s the thing: **No one wants to receive a key to a thing they don’t want or a place they don’t want to go.** You could offer me the keys to your business, and I wouldn’t take them unless your business was better than mine (and I already know it’s not, so I wouldn’t take your keys). You could offer me the keys to your house, and I wouldn’t take them, either – unless your house is nicer than mine. Or on the water. It could be shack on waterfront property and I would trade keys with you – my kids can sleep in tents. 😊  
You could offer me the keys to your car, and quite frankly, I probably *would*

take them, because just about anything is nicer than a 2004 Ford Explorer that's so rusted out even the manager at the auto repair place – who makes money by me keeping my car – even he says I should really move on from it!

So, you see, the problem with trying to give away the keys to the kingdom of heaven is that: **No one is going to take the keys you have to offer if the thing they access, doesn't seem better than what the person already has access to.** And so, two statements are then true. First, an awful lot of people here on the Eastside have keys to some pretty sweet stuff – from cars to homes to businesses they own and paychecks that make them wealthy and pay for all that stuff. But a second statement is also true: *the kingdom of heaven is actually far superior to any of that!* Amen? But people don't always perceive or believe that to be true. So, we have the opportunity to demonstrate to people why a relationship with Jesus Christ and having the keys to the kingdom of heaven is better than the keys they've got right now.

And in this morning's passage to the church in Thessalonica, we see how one church did this with Jesus as their example, as well as Paul, and did it well. Everything that Paul says they did is built around this phrase that Paul writes in verse 7, **“You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. 1:7).** They were a model, or an example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus throughout their region of Greece – which is Macedonia – and beyond to the other region of Greece at that time, which was Achaia. They became an example for other Jesus followers of what it means to be a Jesus follower. They modeled the life of discipleship to Jesus, and did so in a way that others were attracted to it.

How many of you like to shop as I asked you discuss when greeting your neighbor a moment ago? It's ok to be honest, if you like to shop. Probably at some level, we all do, as long as it's shopping for the right thing. Of course, a lot of shopping now is done on our phones or computers. But for those times when you actually go out to a store, you probably know that the big department stores like Nordstrom and Macy's, or Saks, Bloomingdales, or Neiman-Marcus...they all put up amazing window displays. Not as amazing today as they did like 40 years ago or more...but still, they're pretty impressive.

Anyway... **One of the great things stores use to help them sell stuff in those displays is dummies.** By “dummies” I mean “mannequins.” Now, no one looks at those window displays and says, “I want the dummy.” We want what the dummy is wearing. We might say the dummy is the vehicle that’s used to sell the keys; and they make them very desirable. Things I didn’t know even existed are suddenly something I can’t live without. The shirt isn’t folded up...the pants aren’t hanging on a hanger...the fancy watch isn’t just laying there. You can see how everything really looks and fits and makes you want to buy it. Mannequins are the perfect models.

In Romans 13:14, Paul literally writes, “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus.” That’s what Paul is saying the church in Thessalonica has done. They’ve been really good dummies for Jesus. **They’ve been good models of the Christian faith; they’ve made it desirable.** And so, people all over the region are inspired, and they know about Jesus, and are coming to faith and living more boldly for him, because of the faith that they have put on and modeled in Thessalonica. They were able to give away keys to the kingdom, and new churches began, the faith spread, people were inspired, and God moved in powerful ways. Similarly, we are called to be dummies for Jesus – to put on, display, and model Jesus in such a way that people will want a key for themselves to the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, we might wonder: What are some of the ways they were good examples and modeled Jesus? That’s a great question. There are a number of things we’re told of in these verses. **First, Paul mentions three things in verse 3: “your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The first two sound very similar – work and labor – but they have very different meanings. The second one means *labor*, as in hard work. Originally the word meant “beating”. In a positive context it’s simply hard work, tiring, like your body feels beaten up after you’ve done this kind of work. But we see that their hard work is motivated by love. The fact is Christian love is never easy. Jesus says that if we loved him we’d do what he commands. That’s not easy. Jesus’ death on the cross was an act of love. That wasn’t easy. Love is hard work –

that's true in our marriages, in our parenting, in our other relationships...and it's true as a model disciple of Jesus.

The first word, *work*, is the Greek word, *ergou*, which means work or vocation. Faith is a vocation, and a full-time one at that. And we don't take a vacation from our vocation of faith. We don't clock out from faith in Jesus. There's nothing in Scripture that gives us that option. And lastly, we see that they're able to do both the hard labor and this vocational work because they've *endured*; it's sort of a descriptive word about their work and labor: they have both been marked by endurance. And this endurance is inspired by hope in Jesus Christ. Jesus is at the root of their work, their labor and their endurance. They lived their faith "24-7, 365" and as a result the word got out about their faith and about Jesus Christ, and keys to the kingdom of heaven were given away.

Then, in addition to their work, labor, and endurance: **We also see in verse 6 that they became "imitators of us and of the Lord," and that they "received the message...with joy."** So, Jesus sets the example of how to live in a way that displays the goodness of Jesus, and Paul modeled it for them as well. They simply followed these examples that were modeled for them, and they did so with joy. Then Paul gets to the phrase in verse 7 where we began. He writes that because of these things, "you all have been dummies for Jesus"...I mean "you all have been an example to all the believers." They've been mannequins for Jesus, displaying the abundant life he brings, the forgiveness he offers, the joy and hope of eternal life with him and inspiring others in their faith.

**He then writes in verse 8 that "The Lord's message rang out from you..."** The way they lived for Jesus sounded the message of Jesus...it rang out. It wasn't hidden, muted, or muffled. "Rang out" means a clear proclamation and a clear calling of people to the Kingdom of God. It is *the* voice to listen to. And it rang out clearly and confidently from them, in a way that *attracted* people to Jesus by *displaying* the goodness of Jesus and *inviting* people to receive the keys to the kingdom of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ.

The last thing I want to highlight about how they lived their faith is in verse

9, “...you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). In their day, idols would have been literal wood or stone carvings that represented different pagan spiritual entities that were worshiped. This seems somewhat foreign to us, though we still see them to some degree. We see Paul dealing with this later in Acts 17 when he speaks to a group of people in Athens about all the idols around town, even an idol that’s labeled, “to the unknown god.” You talk about covering all the bases, right? Today, the idols that are worshipped tend to be things (though if you look closely in your neighborhoods, you’ll see idols in the “carved stone” sense) such as money, power, control, tradition, technology, our career, fashion, sex, sports – from kids’ sports to professional leagues – the entertainment industry, and things like that. **When we turn away from them so they aren’t what we live for and don’t have control over us, and instead give our lives over to “the one true God” (verse 9) so Jesus really is Lord of our lives, then we are a model and example for others.** The power of Jesus is made known through our lives which used to be devoted to one thing, and now is devoted to Jesus.

You know, many people can recognize when something in their life has gotten power over them – drugs, alcohol, work, their kids’ sports schedules, social media, and so forth. There’s so much that can take over our lives. What a lot of people *don’t* know is where to turn in order to be freed from that. What we turn *to* is just as important as what we turn *from*. These people in Thessalonica turned from idols to the one true God, modeling for their neighbors, and now for us, where to turn. Some of us here this morning, even some of us who would say we are Jesus followers, let alone those here who aren’t – some of us are captive to something other than Jesus.

There’s something, maybe a couple things, that really is what drives us, has control of our schedules, our hearts, our finances, our minds... **It may not even be something sinful in and of itself – like a phone or a hobby or a job – but it’s sitting on the throne of our lives that belongs to King Jesus. And that’s not right.** We need to free up that throne, so Jesus can sit there and have sway in our lives every moment of every day. When we live with him as the King of our lives, not just our Savior but our Lord, with a life transformed by the Holy Spirit, not only are we in right relationship with the

God who created us, but we also demonstrate the desirability of a relationship with Jesus Christ and how good it is to have the keys to the kingdom of heaven. This is an eternal kingdom we're talking about!

So, with our vision of being a church where we are each on mission to lead people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play, this passage really hits home. **This passage gives us a first-century example of the kind of church we're seeking to be, and the kind of disciples of Jesus we're seeking to cultivate.** It starts by encouraging and leading one another in a deeper discipleship to Jesus because we all need to be led toward him. We all have room to grow closer to Jesus. We do that in different ministries of the church from worship to classes to small groups. And then wherever we are, we want to be dummies for Jesus...I mean, mannequins for Jesus, so other people would want the keys to the kingdom of heaven through their own faith in Jesus.

While there undoubtedly are growth opportunities for all of us – from our own relinquishing of idols in our lives to deeper connection to Jesus to being a better mannequin for Jesus out in the world – while those growth opportunities certainly exist, there's so much that is good that is already happening. People taking risks and stepping out in faith, and taking on new leadership roles in the church...serving in ministries for the first time...I've heard of people getting to know their neighbors – going for walks with them, conversing with them, inviting them to different ministry opportunities here at Rose Hill, praying for people....There are a number of ways you all have embodied this passage, even as we recognize there's room for growth in it, too.

And so, like Paul says to these early Christians in Thessalonica, I just want to say: Thank God for all of you. For your faith, for your work, labor and endurance in the faith, as you live it each day. Let's keep imitating Jesus and other disciples who model the faith well; let's keep turning from idols to Jesus; keep letting the gospel message of salvation and forgiveness for sins and eternal life through faith in Jesus...keep letting that message ring out through your joy-filled life. Like this church we read about in today's passage, let's keep being models for others, dummies for Jesus, so people

would want some of the keys to the kingdom of heaven that He's entrusted us with. Let's Pray...Amen.