

A CHURCH THAT MODELS CHRIST

NASA once did their moon walk training in Arizona – an old apache approached them asked what they were doing – after they told him, he scribbled a note in his native tongue for them to take to the moon. None of the local Apache people would tell NASA what the note said, but finally they found someone who could decipher the message: *“Don’t believe a word these men tell you, they are here to take your land!”* –

A. **The mission** Jesus gave the apostles was – to use a military term – to establish “beachheads” to beat back *“him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”* (Heb 2:14), but not for land—for souls.

1. In Paul’s journeys, he would often by-pass smaller towns on his way to larger cities as he advanced the gospel of Christ (Acts 17:1-4).
2. When souls in these larger cities were turned to Christ, they would take the gospel into the smaller cities & outlying regions.

B. **The church** at Thessalonica was a “beachhead” church & a model church for us (1 Thess 1:1-10).

1. Paul said they were imitators of the apostles, & as such they became examples to all other churches (6-8; 2 Thess 1:4).
2. There is nothing wrong with a church being well known, just as long as it is known for the right reasons.
3. The trouble is that most churches simply want to draw attention to themselves.
4. But the Thessalonian church was known for imitating Paul who imitated Christ (6; 2 Thes 3:9) – and that truly made them a model church.

C. **What kind** of model are we? What would others be saying about us?

1. “They are a church that is truly concerned with setting a proper example before others. They are a church that motivates Christians in other places to do the Lord’s work.”

[Let's notice three things Paul stated that others were saying about the church of the Thessalonians.]

I. THEY HONORED GOD'S WORD (5-6; 2 Thess 2:13)

A. The Thessalonian church had the highest regard for God's word (apostles).

1. Paul was not a good speaker (1 Cor 2:1, 4; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6), & yet his word was received as the very word of God it was.
2. God's word does a greater work than does any man's ability to teach it.
 - a. Have you ever listened to someone teach the Word, & all of a sudden the power of the message was greater than the speaker's own persuasiveness?

Once, after a preacher had finished his lesson, a man was baptized into Christ. After the service the **man** came up to the preacher & said, "I want you to know that what you said really moved me." And the **preacher** said, "I want you to know, the reason you were moved is because you opened your mind to the word of God. Because the power is always in the Word, & not in any eloquence on my part." The **man** responded, "You must be right because you're really not that good a preacher."

B. The Bible doesn't just tell about the power & authority of God & His Son.

1. The Word of God contains & releases that power when it is honored.
2. A model church will honor God's Word above all else: over the reputations & abilities of the messengers, & over the social customs & religious traditions of men.
3. Do we honor His word? Do we put into practice the Lord's teachings despite our personal feelings (give examples)?

[Next, a model church will not keep that power to itself.]

II. THEY ECHOED THE GOSPEL (8)

A. “The word of the Lord has sounded forth from you.”

1. From the Greek we get English word “echo”.
2. Paul’s word meant *to reverberate, like thunder*.
3. They became transmitters of the gospel throughout all Macedonia & Achaia.

B. The Thessalonians understood the value of a human soul & so they looked for ways to sow the seed of the gospel into the hearts of men.

1. And apparently, from the reading, they inspired others to do likewise.

2. Is there more we can do “*to sound forth the word of the Lord*” ?

3. Like the Thessalonian church, we too can be a “beachhead” church.

[What does Paul say next about a model church?]

III. THEY WERE CONVERTED (9-10)

A. The Thessalonian church was a “turned around” people.

1. No, they were NOT confused, they were converted to Christ, & everyone who knew them, knew that He was their priority.

B. Paul told us how they demonstrated their conversion (turning) to Christ.

1. They *Turned From Idols* –

- Thessalonica was 50 miles from Mount Olympus. They could see the mountain where the Greeks said all the gods lived.
- You would have to be very courageous to say, “There are no gods on that mountain. Let me tell you about the True God.”
- Do we have idol gods in America?
 - There is a god of lust for money, sex, power, recognition.
 - The Greeks had gods for these things, which they worshipped on the mountain.
 - But every one of us struggles with something in our lives that is competing for the affection we should be giving to God.

- A converted person (Christian) says to himself, “This is competing with God for my affection. I’m going to eliminate it from my life, & I’m going to begin serving God.”

2. They *Served The Living God* –

- Someone who is converted to Christ is not someone who has just stopped doing bad things.
- A converted person is actively serving the Lord – and everyone around him knows it.

3. They *Waited For The Return Of The Resurrected Son Of God* –

- The grounds for expecting this event, Paul said, was that God had raised Jesus from the dead.
- The empty tomb assures us that Jesus is coming, & apart from accepting that fact there is no hope for anyone.

4. *They Anticipated The Jesus Would Deliver Them From God's Wrath Against Sin –*

- But the coming of Jesus is not the only major event approaching; Paul spoke about “the wrath to come” (1 Thess 5:2-3; 2 Thess 1:6-10).
- Paul stated that Jesus will deliver those who are truly converted from the heat of God's anger.

[One who is converted to Christ, has torn down his idols so that he may begin serving Christ & waiting eagerly for the deliverer to come & take them home (cf. Gal 2:20).]

CLOSING

- A. **A church** – with members who honor God's word, & who echo the gospel, & who are genuinely converted to the Savior – is a model church.
 1. It will have an impact on this world; its labor is not in vain, & because it is influencing other Christians to do what they are doing.

2. We have recently had a great opportunity to be a model church, in our effort to help the church in Jamaica.

B. **By this lesson**, I don't mean to imply that we use some human innovation to advance the gospel.

1. If we want to be a model church then we need to remember that the role of a model is to sell the pattern.
 - a. You don't go to a fashion show to purchase the model wearing the clothes, or even the clothes the model is wearing – you want that pattern!
2. I mentioned earlier that most churches are selling themselves – that's the wrong pattern.
3. To be a church belonging to Christ, we must promote HIM WHO IS THE PATTERN: the world must see Christ living in us before they will open their ears to the message.
4. Our prayer this morning is that we will strive to be a model church in the same way the Thessalonians were a model.

C. **If you want** to be a part of a people who attempt to model God's ways, then do as the Thessalonians.

1. Believe the gospel, turn from your idols & be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, and then begin serving the living God.