

Going Together (2017)
Being the Church | 1 Thess 1:8-10
Southern Hills Baptist Church
May 28, 2017

WELCOME

Good Morning to you! Just getting in some practice with the whole morning thing. If I keep saying it, I will eventually remember it, right? I hope you had a restful Saturday and I hope you are ready to be challenged and equipped from God's Word for the week ahead of you.

Being the Church Recap

We are in the middle of a series called Being the Church where we are taking time to consider from God's Word what it means for us to Be the Church. We are the church, you are the church, but what does that mean? What are we called to? We have considered a number of callings that are upon us as the church already. We are called to Learn God's Word Together. We are called to Live Life Together. We are called to Fight Sin Together. And tonight we will consider the calling upon the church to Go Together, to take the Gospel out into the community around us and even to the ends of the earth.

If you have your Bibles go ahead and open up to 1 Thessalonians 1 as we will be there in just a moment.

INTRODUCTION – SHARING GOOD NEWS

Let me take a quick poll... Anyone here enjoy sharing good news with people? Most of you, huh? That is great! Rachel and I love to tell our kids good news. When we have something exciting to share it is not uncommon for us to race for the privilege to tell them that we are going to the zoo or going to get ice cream or whatever it may be. It is fun to share good news.

Good News at Work

This week at work we ran into a huge obstacle on a project I am leading. It was potentially a million-dollar obstacle. My boss was stressed as the situation was really out of our hands and no one wants to have to go back to our executive team and ask for an extra million dollars, right? We were working on some possible mitigating workarounds for the problem when his phone rang and someone told us that our million-dollar problem no longer existed. The info we had been given was bad and the concern that was hanging over us vanished with that news. My boss was ecstatic of course. It was wonderful to watch the stress of that problem that loomed lift off of him. In that moment I thought to myself, it was probably pretty cool to be the guy on the other end of the phone telling my boss that our million-dollar problem had vanished.

How great is it to be the one who gets to deliver good news? It is a true joy.

Our Calling: Share Good News

This is one of the reasons it is such a delight to be part of the family of God, to be part of the church. One of the callings that is upon us as the church is the calling to go out into the world and share the Good News of the Gospel. **If you enjoy sharing good news with people your joy should run over as a believer because there is no greater news than the freedom, forgiveness, eternal reward, love, grace, and mercy that is found in Jesus.** Additionally, this joyful calling to share the Good News of the Gospel is one that is central to our mission as followers of Jesus. There are few tasks more important in your Christian life than that of sharing the Gospel with others.

What a wonderful thing! How cool is it that one of the primary missions, one of the primary callings upon the Christian is to go and share good news? The good news that my boss and I got this week, instantly

melted stress, but you know what, it is nothing in comparison to the Good News of the Gospel. There is nothing, there is no news, greater than that of the Gospel and you, church, are called to go and share it. God has given us a mission of joy!

Roadmap

Tonight we are going to consider 3 ways in which we are called as the church to go and share the Gospel.

Opening Prayer

Let me open up our time in God's Word by asking God to work in our hearts through His Word.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Your Gospel is good news, would you help us to live out of this reality? Give us a burning desire and passion to make your Name known, to share the Good News of Jesus with others. May we see our words as tools we use for this call. May we see our lives as a platform for this message. May we see our love for one another as a proof of the goodness of the Gospel for others to behold. Work in our hearts powerfully through your Word for your glory and our joy.

We pray these things in Jesus name and for His fame,

Amen

OUR TEXT

Let's turn our attention to God's Word. In 1 Thessalonians Paul is writing to a church that had been changed by the Gospel and was gladly going out and sharing the good news that had changed them.

1 Thessalonians 1

[1] Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. [2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, [3] remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. [4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. [8] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. [9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

CONTEXT

Paul is writing a letter to the church in Thessalonica and as he opens up he commends the church for their growth. This church was made up of people who had been authentically changed by the Gospel. They did not simply make a profession of faith and go back to life as usual. The Gospel changed them from the inside out. Paul tells us that when they received the Gospel they patterned their lives after Paul and more importantly Jesus. They did this even in the tough times. Their faith was costly. Paul says they received the Gospel in much affliction meaning that they were persecuted and rejected for their new found faith. This suffering did not detour them, however. They pressed on in their faith, eager to share it with others.

Their changed lives demonstrate to us how we can be a church that "Goes Together."

SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OUR WORDS (vs. 8)

The first way our text shows the Believers in Thessalonica sharing the Gospel was with their words. Verse 8 tells us,

1 Thessalonians 1:8

[8] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

Loud Thunder Clap, Traveling Rumor

Paul's description of how those in Thessalonica shared the Gospel is powerful. The phrase "sounded forth" in the Greek stems from the word "**ἐξήχεται**" (**ex-ha-ka-tai**). This word isn't used anywhere else in the New Testament, but we can examine how it used in other Greek writings in the same time period to get a deeper understanding of its meaning. It was often used to describe **loud noises that traveled great distances, like claps of thunder**. It was also used to describe **rumors that went viral and became known by everyone**.

Everyone Heard

This is how Paul described the Thessalonians sharing of the Gospel. Everyone around them heard it, just like everyone in the same area would hear a loud clap of thunder. And the Gospel traveled everywhere, like a viral rumor that everyone was talking about. Paul even says that there was nothing for him to go and say in Macedonia and Achaia b/c those areas had been saturated by the Gospel due to their faithful sharing of the Good News.

Could Paul even say that to us about the streets we live on?

Plan A, Only Plan

Church, this is one of the calls that is placed upon us. We are to go out and share the Good News of Jesus, the Gospel with all people. This is a joyous calling, we have been commissioned to go and tell people the greatest of news that will forever give hope and joy. This calling is Plan A of how God will spread the truth of His salvation and there is no plan B.

Romans 10:14

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

This calling is essential.

Yet, We Struggle

Yet, yet, we struggle with this mightily, don't we? Why? For so many reasons. We are afraid.

- We are afraid of rejection.
- We are afraid of not fitting in.
- We are afraid of failure.

Let's think through these common fears together briefly... Let's acknowledge them and talk about how we can fight them off so that we may go and Be the Church, sharing the Gospel with others.

1. Fear of Rejection

The most common fear is of that of rejection. You believe that the odds are that you will share the Gospel with someone and they will reject it. Those odds are probably correct as **Jesus Himself tells us narrow is the gate to Heaven and wide is the gate to Hell**. More people will pass on Jesus than will embrace Him. So perhaps this only serves to confirm your fear and cause you to bite your tongue when God presents you will opportunities to share the Gospel with others. You don't want to face rejection.

Yes, Rejecting You Too

Yet, our calling is to share the Gospel so what can we do to overcome this fear? I could tell you that people are not rejecting you, but are rejecting Jesus, so you should separate your feelings from their rejection, but I don't think that is honest or right. When Jesus is our treasure, our highest love, to see Him rejected is to feel rejection yourself.

Rejection, Suffering, and God's Design

What I will tell you is that this is part of God's design for your life. Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 8...

Romans 8:16-17

[16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Jesus faced far more, infinitely more, rejection than you will ever know. You will experience some rejection in this life in His name and that is ok. You are following in the footsteps of the Savior who was rejected for your salvation. The good news is that just as you experience rejection, like Jesus did, one day you will also get to experience the glory that Jesus walked into after His resurrection. That future is held out for you as well.

Love of Neighbor Compels Us

Additionally, love of neighbor compels us to open ourselves up for rejection. We understand the damaging and damning impact of sin, right? We understand that apart from Christ we will have to give an account and pay a reckoning for our sins before a Holy God. Eternal destinies are on the line with the Gospel. Can we really in good conscious look at our neighbors and co-workers and think their eternal destiny isn't worth the possibility of my hurt feelings? Yikes! May God forgive us for all the times we have and may God strengthen us to never have that selfish and passive attitude again.

Rejection Summary

So sure, you will face rejection, but truly this is a part of God's design in your following Jesus. There is a lot more I feel like I could say here about the spiritual strengthening that comes from rejection, but we have to move on for time. Even in the face of rejection, share the Gospel, follow Jesus' example, love your neighbor.

2. Fear of Not Fitting In

Another common fear that hinders many Christians in their effort to share the Gospel is the fear that we will no longer fit in with those around us once we cross that and start to engage people around Jesus. Once we do that we will become a social outcast. People will think we are weird. People will look at us as the crazy religious person who takes the Bible too seriously.

Why We Aren't Supposed to Talk about Religion

Everyone has had that fear, right? You just want to fit in. You want to be accepted. You want people to like you. And our culture tells us that one of two things that you don't bring up in polite conversation is religion. It makes things uncomfortable we are told and it is rude some would even say. Your religion is personal so leave it there and don't push it on others. These thoughts ring in your head when opportunities to share the Gospel arise and you start to believe that you will become a social outcast if you start to talk about Jesus. Thus you bite your tongue and talk about weekend plans instead. You just want to fit in.

Who Do You Want to Fit in With?

Here is the real issue. **Who do you want to fit in with more? Your neighbors, co-workers, friends or Jesus? Who's acceptance are you really driven by?** Here is what Jesus says about finding acceptance with Him...

John 15:14

[14] You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Don't Want to be Associated with Jesus?

What are we so afraid of exactly? Are we really afraid of being associated with Jesus? Are we afraid of people thinking that Jesus is the great treasure of our lives? Are we afraid of people thinking that we want to live for Him? Isn't that what we want people to think?

Acceptance with the World and Jesus - Nope

I know, I know, we want that, but we also want to be accepted by everyone. Here is the deal, life doesn't work that way. Jesus was literally perfect and He wasn't accepted by everyone, in fact He wasn't even accepted by most. How often did Jesus attract a large crowd only to run them off with the hard words He spoke? Many times.

Fitting In - Summary

So sharing the Gospel is hard because you just want to fit in. I get it. Here is a way to fight that fear. **Be afraid you won't fit in with Jesus.** Church, we are called to go and share the Gospel.

3. Fear of Failure

There is one other fear that I think is normal amongst Christians that deters us from sharing the Gospel. We are afraid of failure. Let me make an honest admission before all of you. Here is something you probably don't want to hear your pastor to say, but I'll say it anyways in pursuit of transparency... I often believe, feel like I stink at evangelism. I'm just not good at it.

Hard to Keep Swinging at Failing Efforts

I am going to guess that I am not the only person who feels this way. I know that these thoughts sometimes invade and cause me to question the point of me sharing the Gospel. **It is hard to keep swinging away at something you don't feel like your good at. No one enjoys perpetual failure, right?**

Not My Job

Here is where I go when I need to combat these thoughts. I go to God's Word and am reminded that the salvation of souls is not my job, sharing the Gospel is. God will give the growth when God is ready to.

1 Corinthians 3:5-8

[5] What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. [6] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. [7] So neither he who plants nor

he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. [8] He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

Note a few things from this text that should give you encouragement in your calling to share the Gospel. We are called to plant and water, meaning it is our job to go and share the Gospel, it is our job to go tell people the good news. **It isn't our job to cause heart change, that is God's work. You are never responsible for the faith of another when it happens, God is. He is the one who gives the increase. Meaning my success in Evangelism isn't dependent upon how people respond to the Gospel. I'm successful if I but share the truth of the Gospel with others.**

Different Roles, Same Effort

This point is even furthered in verse 8 where we are told that the one who plants and the one who waters are one, or in other words, if you share the Gospel with someone and they don't respond to that truth, you are given credit, just as the person who comes down the road and shares the Gospel again and gets to be there for the harvest when that person responds in faith. You see, that person's faith wasn't about the Gospel presentation in that moment, it was God choosing to give the growth, the increase in that moment.

Failure - Summary

So we need to **measure our success by our faithfulness to tell people of Jesus and His salvation, not by how many respond in faith, that is God's business.** We can't do that, so don't measure yourself by something that only God can do.

Summary

Church, we are called to go out and share the Good News of the Gospel with the world around us. Don't let fear stop you in this calling. **Fear is a tactic of Satan to stop you from one of the highest and most important callings in your life. The fear that slows us down from sharing the Gospel is a lie.** Our loving Heavenly Father has called us to go, thus we can know it is a calling that is for His glory and our good.

Our 1 Thessalonians passage that we opened in tonight has more for us to consider around the call to share the Gospel. Let's reread verses

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

[9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OUR LIVES (vs. 9-10)

Sharing the Gospel with our words is essential, but that is not the only way in which we are called to share the Gospel. The Thessalonians were commended by Paul about the reports that were circulating about them. **They had not only professed a love for Jesus, but they were living lives consistent with that profession.** They had turned from worshipping idols to setting their love and hope in Jesus alone. This was their testimony amongst other groups. People saw real, marked, measurable changes in their lives.

2 Quotes

Let me share two quick quotes on this topic, one not so good and another very helpful.

Use Words

The first quote is accredited to Francis Assisi, although I think that is inaccurate, nevertheless it is well-known and it states...

“Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”

-Unknown

You’ve heard this stated before, right? There is something beautiful about it. There is something true about it. There is also something ugly about it.

The Ugly – False Assumption

The ugly aspect of this quote is that there is a false belief that lays at the foundation of this thought that holds that you can share the Gospel fully with your life and example. This is not so. **As we read in Romans 10, words will always be necessary.**

The Good – Our Lives Reflect Reality

What is good in this statement, however, is **the assumption that our lives can serve as a platform to display the Gospel at some level. That is true. While our lives can’t communicate the fullness of the Gospel, they can validate the truth of the Gospel as they display the impact of the Gospel.** The Gospel is more than a thought we hold in our head, it is the Good News that Jesus saves through His precious work and changes us from the inside out. Thus someone who has truly been saved will live differently. They will grow and change and display the impact of the Gospel.

Lost Men Read You!

Another quote that I find helpful is...

Lost men don’t read the Bible, they read men who read the Bible.

This is true. The world is watching you. It is watching you how live and how you respond to all of life. It will notice

- How you talk about your family
- How you talk to your family
- How you respond to tough situations at work
- How you interact with the person in the office no one gets along with
- How you treat your kids and your spouse
- The kinds of TV shows or movies you tell them you watch
- How often you look for ways to serve others
- How you spend your weekends...

They see it all. They take it all in. They are looking to see if the Gospel you have shared has had the kind of impact that you have claimed.

Shinning Forth the Goodness of God

God intended for your life to testify to the power of the Gospel.

Matthew 5:14-16

[14] “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the

same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Our lives are to point others to God. We are to be living testimonies. **How much damage has been done to the cause of the Gospel by Christians living like the world unapologetically?** How many people here have heard someone else say they might be interested in church and the Bible if it were not for all the hypocrites? Now, I recognize this is often just an excuse people use. All humans are hypocrites. None live perfectly or even consistently with their own moral code they have set. Yet, there is a real problem of people who claim the name of Christ and live for themselves and like the world.

Validation of the Truth and Power

God intended for us to be like a city set on a hill. We shine light into the dark abyss offering hope where there is none. Our lives are to be a validation to the truth we speak, thus our lives have to stay in sync with the message of the Gospel and when we do fall short, because we all will as sinners, we need to be quick and open about our repentance.

Does Your Life Affirm the Truth of the Gospel?

So the question you must ask yourself is whether your life is consistent with the message you profess to others. Does your life validate the Gospel truths you claim have changed you?

- Do you live as one who has been changed by the Gospel?
- Do you live as one who treasures Jesus above all else?
- Do you live as one who holds the Bible as your authority?
- Do you live as one who finds their greatest joy in knowing God?

You could answer “yes” to any of these questions, but the world is looking to your life for proof, will they find it?

Summary

Church, you are called to go into the world and share the Good News of the Gospel, validate that good news with holy living.

Transition – Specific Application

Now, there is one specific way that our lives are to reflect the impact and truthfulness of the Gospel to the world around us that I want to examine together. We have seen that we are to share the Gospel with our words, we are to share the Gospel with our lives, and one way that we share the Gospel with our lives is through the Unity we have as a church.

SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OUR UNITY (Jn 17:20-26)

Our passage in 1 Thessalonians does not speak to this directly, but I believe it is implied, it is a specific application of sharing the Gospel with our lives. Let's turn over to John 17:20 to read through a prayer from Jesus that spells this out a little more specifically. What we are going to see is that how we live with one another or how we do life together matters. **It is a reflection of God to the world** and thus it ought to be something that we consider and strive to do well.

High Priestly Prayer

John 17 records Jesus' high priestly prayer. He is praying in the moments leading up to his arrest and false trial. This is an incredible prayer that we will have the joy of walking through in detail when we go back to our study of John in the month of July. Until then listen to what Jesus prays for...

John 17:20-26

[20] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. [25] O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. [26] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

The focus of Jesus' prayer is for the unity of the church. Notice he prays for all believers, those who were there with him and those who would believe in Him in the future. He prays that they would be one, that they would be unified, just as He is one with the Father. He explains that the unity of the church is important in order that others would believe upon Him as well.

What is the Unity Jesus Prays For?

What is Jesus praying for when He asks God to unify the church? He is praying that we would **live from the same values and mission all from a place of love. We are to all be in pursuit of the same thing and on this journey together in a way that show great care for one another.** The difficulty of bringing any group together is the diversity of background, opinions, preferences, priorities, and desired approaches. What Jesus wants is for our love for God to be so great that we are willing to come together, compromise on the smaller things, all in an effort to go live out our calling together. It is our overarching love for Jesus that brings us together.

The Result of Unity – Evangelism

Jesus shared that the result of this Gospel-centered unity will be the display of the impact of the Gospel on community. As others see this Gospel-centered unity some will be drawn in to learn more and come to faith. **Many will be impacted by seeing how the Gospel has allowed a group of people to compromise on opinions, preferences, priorities, and so on for the sake of the Gospel. They will see a genuine love that has been created amongst a group of diverse strangers and recognize a real power at work they need to know more about.**

Church Life Matters

The way we live together and how we love one another matters. It impacts the way the world sees Jesus. This is yet another reason why we believe this series is so important. **Being the church is not just something that we strive to do b/c it helps us in our pursuit of God, but it is also vitally important in how we reach others with the Good News of the Gospel.** One commentator I read stated that evangelism can never be at its fullest effect until a church living in unity serves as the backdrop.

We Gather for Reasons Bigger than Us

The reason we gather here on Sundays is bigger than any of us, right? **Which means there are going to be times when you are going to have to set aside your preferences and your personal priorities as we strive to stay on mission in a spirit of unity. Are you ready to do that so that Jesus may be glorified** as the great treasure of Southern Hills and so the world around us may see the impact of the Gospel upon our community? My prayer is that you are.

We are far from a perfect people. There are flaws we will all have to overlook in one another and work through together. But the amazing opportunity before us is that **as we strive to live in unity in pursuit of Gospel mission we can display the love, beauty, and power of Jesus to the world around us.**

CONCLUSION

The church is a group of people who have been changed by the Gospel. **There was someone who cared enough about you to bring you the truth of the Gospel** in word and with a life that backed it up, hopefully with a church that showed Gospel-love in the background. You have now been called to go and do the same. Your words, your life, your relationships in the body of Christ are your primary tools that God has given you. You are called to use them all.

Tell the Gospel

You have found grace that abounds, hope that is eternal, love that runs deeper than you could dream up all in the Gospel. It would be wrong to be quiet about this good news. Go and tell others of the hope you have found in Jesus.

Live the Gospel

As you do, ensure your life demonstrates the impact of the Gospel. Don't speak of a love for Jesus while you are living out of a love for self. Live your life in such a way that it validates the truth and the power of the Gospel.

Unify Around the Gospel

You can specifically do this with the way that you live in unity with the church. We are a diverse people, from varied backgrounds, with differing perspectives, we have wide-ranging preferences on many issues, yet we should make it our aim to live in unity with one another because we have recognized the calling before us is greater than us.

May we pursue all of this out of a heart that longs to see Jesus exalted and made much of in Round Rock and around the world.

Let's Pray.