

Rev George Macaskill: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Now let's turn in our Bibles to the chapter in God's Word which we read. First Thessalonians chapter 1 and I want to look at read again and read verses 4 to 7. First Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 4 to 7. For we know brothers loved by God that he has chosen you. 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 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. So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

There are several amazing things about this letter to the Thessalonians. At first of all I find it amazing that this church of the Thessalonians it was planted after three Sundays of preaching. If you turn to the book of Acts chapter 17 you'll see there in verse 2 that Paul preached for three Lord's days. He preached the gospel and it was a church was founded after three weekends of preaching. Isn't that something? Isn't that challenging? I don't know about your presperry but we had a discussion a few years ago about effectively planting a church in a new place and we said well we've got to have at least a three-year plan and someone said that's far too short. You need to think of nine to ten years to plant a new church.

Well after three years the man who said ten years is more like it seems to have been more accurate but here we go back to the Bible. After three weekends of preaching the church of Thessalonica is founded and planted by Paul. Don't let anyone tell you preaching doctrine doesn't plant churches.

[3 : 07] Here it is here but you know something more amazing than that the fact they were planted after three weekends. It's really the fact that a church in Thessalonica survived after the founders were chased away with their lives. Carry on reading Acts chapter 17 where you'll read about the Thessalonian church being founded and you'll find they drove Paul and his brethren away. They were persecuted out of the place for planting a church. There they were all alone. No apostle, no minister, no elder, no deacon, not even a mature Christian. Can you wonder, no wonder is it, why Paul wondered where it is still going on, where it is still in existence, where they're still meeting together.

Chapter three just turn the page you'll find what Paul was like. He was biting his nails wondering are these people still worshiping Christ? Chapter three therefore when we could bear it no longer we were willing to be left behind Athens alone and we sent Timothy our brother to you.

Paul said I was so anxious about you, I was so anxious about you I would rather be left alone in Athens and I sent the only one with me Timothy to find out how are they getting on there in Thessalonica and they're still following the Lord and they're still reading his word and they're still meeting together do they still love Christ and he's biting his fingers until Timothy comes back and he does come back and he says good news they're still worshiping the Lord.

One or two problems of course but they're still worshiping the Lord. He's excited, he's chuffed and he writes them this letter but you know something else I find quite amazing he calls them a challenge. What do you think of that? I'll be honest with you I would much be more inclined to say they're not a challenge come on no apostle no elder no minister come on they're not a church they're just a bunch of Christians meeting together.

I challenge you what makes a church? I'm not going to answer this question because I can't do it very well to be honest but listen what is you what what point does a group of Christians meeting together at what point do they become a church there's an exercise for you and if you get a nice simple answer let me know but you know what's probably the most amazing thing of all it's the ones of our text or part of our text for we know brothers verse four for we know brothers love by God that he has chosen you that's quite quite a statement you know 11 months before these words were

written these people were bowing down to idols would you be inclined are you like me be rather inclined to see not so quick Paul not so quick are you absolutely convinced they are [7 : 49] Paul says yes I am Paul says yes to 11 months ago rebound down to idols man they haven't you haven't burned a stack of pizza with them yet she don't know them well enough to make that statement to say I know them they elect of God but when Paul wrote that he was moved by the Holy Spirit to use the right words so let's see what we can learn you see somebody isn't merely chosen if I came to you and said hey you know Fred Smith's story has been chosen he's elected I was elected you'd say what would you say you'd say what do you mean chosen for what elected for what you see there's no term the Bible that elect it when the Bible speaks about the elect of God when it speaks about the chosen of God it refers that the term is chosen to serve God chosen to to to believe you're nobody is just chosen nobody is just elected they're chosen to do something or be something they're not just chosen the full term is chosen chosen to repent chosen to believe chosen to follow Christ chosen to be obedient chosen to be different so that people can see there's a difference with you you know there's a verse in the Bible and it says the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch and that was 10 years if I've worked it out accurately I'm not perfect as you know but I've worked it out properly it was 10 years after Christ rose from the dead before disciples were called

Christians actually 1126 by the way if you want to look it up 10 years before the term Christian was formulated and isn't it interesting it's not a church that gave them the name Christians you know that it was the people of Antioch 10 years after Christ's reason and by the way Antioch was Christ ever there was he and yet the people of Antioch are the first people to call disciples Christians there you are think of that what made them call them Christians they saw they were different that's what they saw well I want to ask or look at two things for the rest of our time what made Paul so confident that he could say we know you're chosen by God well I suppose in one simple answer we could say well they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God what made them turn to God from worshipping idols or let's put it the way you and I would put it did he how were they converted secondly let's look at some marks that distinguish them from others first how are they what made them turn from bound down to stocks and stones and idols to serve the living and true God well just read the Bible just read again our chapter how did it all begin they were converted the same way surprise surprise the same way as everybody else is converted no different but how is that you might ask well fast they heard and believed the gospel verse 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and the Holy Spirit our gospel came to you how did it begin someone went to them with a gospel hallelujah for missionaries someone went to this pagan group bowing down to idols with the gospel that's how it began someone went with a gospel you do support missionaries don't you but they believed what they heard you see wouldn't me I hope I'm wrong I hope I'm wrong maybe there's someone here this morning and you've heard the gospel but you haven't believed you haven't believed these Thessalonians bowing down to idols heard the gospel and they believed so Paul saying you were chosen to believe do you believe the gospel here this morning

if you do you've been chosen to believe because I tell you there's some others whether they're in here or not I'm not sure but I'll tell you there's plenty out there they've heard the gospel and they say don't believe it I don't believe it they say so if you believe what you've heard in the gospel God has been at work in your heart it's the work of God the Holy Spirit to empower you to believe that's how it all began here but there's another clue another thing which our verses our text tells us verse six tells us that they received and embraced the word verse six for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit and if you turn the page to chapter 2 verse 13 again we read it and we also thank God constantly for this that when you received the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is the word of God which is at work in you believers you see there are some people and they say oh I'm all for Jesus I'm all for Jesus I love Jesus I believe just but I'm just not into this book I'm not into reading I'm not into not into the Bible

I love Jesus no problem well let's be sure what we're saying because our Bible's telling us here these Thessalonians after 11 months Paul could say I know you're the chosen of God because when you heard this word of God you received it not as the word of men but as the word of God and you remember Jesus said on another occasion whoever will be ashamed of me are my words or my words you see some people are all for Jesus to say that oh they're a bit embarrassed about what he

said here a bit embarrassed about what he said there you can't you're not truly believing Jesus unless you believe all he said if you're ashamed of him or of his words then he says I'll be ashamed of you and the great day when it will be very very important when it will be all important that day when you will need him as your saviour and then actually we can't bypass chapter 6 verse 6 we've read that as well they heard and they believed the gospel first secondly they received and embraced the word of God the Bible the revelation you see it's all very well to see I love Jesus but tell me where do you get information about Jesus that you can rely on do you just make it up where do I get accurate information about this Jesus who claims he can forgive my sin I want to know about him where do I get information about him in the word of God and let's see there's a third thing verse 6 you became imitators or it could be translated followers of us and of the Lord or when you received the word in much affliction you became imitators of us and of the Lord it's just saying we identified with the apostles and disciples of

[18:51] Jesus you see if we believe in our heads if we believe with our minds that Jesus is the saviour and do remember Christianity begins with the mind it is not all in the mind but it begins with the mind and it goes into the heart so if you believe with the mind or the head and you build and your love in your heart the Lord Jesus that should affect your feet and your hands so that you imitate you imitate Christ and the followers of Christ you you follow them and you see they followed and imitated Christ and the apostles there has to be a result a response with our lifestyle it's not all in the head it begins in the head it must be also in the heart there is not all in the heart it must affect the way we live and the first thing they did was identify with the apostles and the Paul and the apostles today just the equivalent of say of say joining the church you see there are Christians who say

I'm nothing to do with the church I'm all for Jesus but don't speak I have nothing to do with the church or you've nothing to do with the church why does the bible then interchange the word the word for Christ the word grew we read in acts meaning the church grew it is exceedingly important you see well these people they identified with the church and it's exceedingly serious to neglect the church of course the church is not perfect and you'll never find a perfect church but listen the church is what Christ founded and it is the only institution in the universe that will outlive this world it's the only institution in the universe that's guaranteed a future and isn't it strange the world they're forever saying oh the church will not be in existence in five ten years time church is finished they've been saying it my friend for two thousand years and the church is getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger worldwide okay growing small in certain places but worldwide is extending more seminaries more colleges more universities are devoting themselves to the teaching and preaching of Christ than anything anything anyone else in the world well let's look at secondly now at some marks that these people were truly the chosen of God we've looked at how they became followers of Christ how they were converted now let's look at marks of them what did their conversions make them do that made for example as we mentioned already the people of Antioch to name the disciples of Christ Christians well verse nine of our chapter we read is number one they served the living and true God very significant wording there you see because they were serving idols before wood stone metal isn't it sad something you make with your hands they were bound down and worshipping it isn't it sad isn't the wording you turn to serve the living and true God not the dead and cold metal or wood or stone now you're serving a living and true God you know we're saved to serve you can get that from verse nine how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God not just to be blessed by him some people's notion of God

Jesus is I say it reverently and sadly but this seemed to think of a most sort of Santa Claus in the skies where he's just there for our convenience something goes wrong and you pray to him and you sort it well we'll come to notice in fact we'll just move on to that point a second mark of the true converts is they're willing to suffer for their beliefs willing to suffer for their Christianity again I think we find it in verse six you received the word in much affliction but if you turn over the page to chapter 2 verse 14 it's more powerful for you brothers became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus the Aaron Judea for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets they were willing to suffer for their Christianity are you I'll tell you what I asked myself how much am I willing to suffer for Christ how much am I prepared to do without for Christ's sake what are we prepared to do without now in chapter 3 verse 3

Paul warns them for no one should be moved by these afflictions for you yourselves know that we're destined for this and the other versions would say we're appointed to a friction if you're chosen by God you're appointed to afflictions you cannot get through life without having some trouble to go through whatever you do don't get discouraged because life is full of troubles I heard actually this very morning this morning I heard of someone who said you know I'm questioning all this life was plain sailing until I became a Christian what am I doing wrong and that he fly he got was something like you're probably doing everything just about right because we're appointed to afflictions

I don't know why it is but God has said if I'm preparing you for glory if I'm taking you to heaven the only way you can be made perfect the only way you could be made like Christ Jesus is if you endure afflictions and that's what's so worrying about somebody to say oh that Christianity I packed it all and too many problems for me that's the way you were certified through suffering through trouble and here's Paul writing to them I said there were one or two problems and they're aware but they were still following the Lord through thick and thin through afflictions through suffering through trouble and my friend you can't get to heaven except through suffering you see some Christians make the mistake of saying well I'll become a Christian whenever I become a Christian life of plain sailing not what the Bible teaches get this straight our heaven is not on earth our heaven is in glory and I tell you you will not be two minutes in heaven and you will wonder what on earth was I worried on earth about why did I make a fuss of that little problem I had how small that problem won't be for you taste the glories of heaven third mark they were eager to spread the gospel verse eight for not only as the word of God sounded out forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone for everywhere they were evangelistic are you evangelistic here's a mark of people have been chosen by God they're evangelistic eager to spread the gospel this small fledgling church the small fledgling church it was an example of evangelism to the big churches in Macedonia and Achaia a new young fledgling church an example of outreach you know personally personally I have done very little frontline foreign mission work but I've been in Thailand and I've been in Malawi and it's absolutely amazing we went to teach pastors we went to teach pastors and then at the end of the week there was a question time and I found it amazing in both places in Thailand it was in the Thailand jungle a village had given up Buddhism and turned the leader turned to be a Christian and he wanted the whole village to be converted to Christ and we were teaching their their pastors there and at the end this came to a question time when we're saying to him look what's what's the best way how can we help you best is it worth while coming out to see you or would you rather us print books for you or what and the first question was how can we best take the gospel to the village through the trees there now in all our teaching to them we never said one word about outreach not one word about evangelism but that was in their hearts they say oh we'll cuticate this wonderful good news out and we never said a word about evangelism but they came up with it how can we reach the next village in the jungle with this good news what's the best

[31 : 01] way to do it they asked and it was the same in Malawi again teaching pastors we never mentioned evangelism we never mentioned outreach when it came to a question time it might have been a second question it might have been a second the first of the second I can't remember they said what's the best way to get to miss and beat with this gospel that place that they're very little christianity Mozambique the next neighbouring country to them and they want to know how to go in there first question one of the first questions they asked amazing but here's it here eager to spread the gospel but our times just about up I think to wait for his son what's the fourth mark on serving the Lord spreading the word suffering now for waiting for his son from heaven now now if you do not believe that Jesus is coming back you're not a christian every christian who's received the word of God believes Jesus is coming back to this world there is a lot of disagreement amongst christians about the timing of his coming back but that's secondary here is the apostle confident that these people were chosen with God and he uses this word in the last verse of the chapter to wait for his son from heaven we all know he's coming back

I find it very challenging are we waiting for him to come back are we are we waiting there's a denomination of christians and I'm told that they when get up in the morning the first thing they do is go to the window and take back the curtains and they say look out I wonder is he coming back today it's just a little tradition they have it's quite like what we've got here are we waiting and it's interesting the word the Holy Spirit prompted Paul to use you see there's three different words he could have used when he said waiting for his son from heaven yeah there's three different kinds of

waiting as some of you may well know there's a kind of waiting you do when you wait for the biopsy report you know what kind of report anyone I'm sure there's some you don't know what that's like doctor says I'm not sure what that lump is we'll have to take a biopsy and we can't give you the all clear till we get the result you're waiting for the result but what kind of waiting attention will it be negative or positive that's not the word that the Holy Spirit gave to Paul to when he put this in writing another kind of waiting a prisoner has been found guilty and he's been condemned but his punishment the judge says

I'll give it to you in 10 days I'll let you know waiting for the sentence to be passed what he knows it's going to be bad he's not just sure how bad so he's waiting with foreboding that's not the word the Holy Spirit prompted Paul to use when he's speaking about Christians waiting for Christ the word the Spirit gave to Paul waiting for Christ is the word that we would use today for a bride waiting for her wedding day oh I can't wait for it excited enthusiastic are we excited about the return of Christ are we waiting with enthusiasm for him are we Paul says

I know you're the chosen of God because of the way you're waiting for Christ to come back and may these things be true of every one of us let's just bow our heads in prayer