

## SPREADING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE CONTINUALLY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1:8

#### Introduction

You're probably wondering why 1 Thessalonians 1:8 is one of my favourite bible verses? Why not a verse from a gospel where we encounter Jesus up close and personally? Or a verse from a NT letter that draws our attention to his magnificence?

We must not forget the many teaching points about Jesus. And this includes what it means to follow him. I'm going to focusing on an aspect of following Jesus from 1 Thessalonians 1 today.

When reading this letter, we see that Paul longed for the Thessalonian Christians to stand firm in the gospel message they heard from him. He also urges them to keep going, knowing that Jesus will return.

Paul starts his letter by thanking God for their active faith in verses 1-10. He even calls them examples or role models to all believers! What a striking claim to make and a prized word of affirmation to receive! That's why this verse is one of my favourites. This begs the question:

How can we be examples to all believers?

We'll explore this question with these three points:

- 1) Spread the gospel message
- 2) Spread it continually
- 3) Spread it throughout the world

By the end of my talk, I long for us to want to be Christian role models and so yearn to spread the gospel message, and for it to echo on and on it on and on throughout the hills and valleys of Northbridge, Sydney and beyond.

#### PRAY

*We thank you Heavenly Father, for inspiring all Scripture by the Holy Spirit. Help us by your Spirit so to hear your holy word that we may be and keep going as your church in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Body**

Paul has already given us one way these Thessalonian Christians are examples to all believers. In verse 6 he highlights their joyful trust in Jesus even under loads of persecution. But he continues by breaking it down further in verse 8:

*<sup>8</sup> The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it,*

Do you notice what Paul says first?

*The Lord's message rang out from you.*

The first step in becoming examples to all believers is to:

**Spread the gospel message**

This might sound obvious to you and me. But you'd be surprised and saddened at how many churches don't do this! This is based on the gospel message these Thessalonian Christians heard from Paul. And it came to them not only in word but by the power of God and with deep impact. To the point that it transformed their view of the world and way of life from the inside out. So, from the moment they first believed the gospel message, they were the ones to go out and share the all-important news that Jesus is Lord and Saviour of the world. And they did it because we see Paul thanking God for their active faith, and he encouraged them to keep going later in his letter.

Do you see yourself spreading the gospel message? Do you see us as a church spreading the gospel message? At first, these Thessalonians Christians seem too impressive for us. But what they're doing is prayerfully working together and doing the hard but delightful work of spreading the gospel message.

I'm glad to say that when I look at what we are being and doing in this place we have it on our hearts to spread the gospel message. And so, like Paul, I can be thankful to God for all of you. But I'm sure there are some of us who can learn from these Thessalonian Christians now. For those of you who are nervous or who have drifted a little, remember that we're not all the same. And that's a good thing. That's because it takes many Christians with varied gifts to work together to spread the gospel message in Northbridge and to our family and friends.

Can you pray? Pray to God that you and we spread the gospel together. Can you organise people and events? Put up your hand and organise the many parts people play in events we run, such as New Resident Visiting in Northbridge, SRE in Northbridge Public School, St Mark's Preschool Afternoon Tea's and Services, the Open House and Christianity Explored courses. Can you share the wonders of God's grace? Ask a mature Christian here to help you share the gospel message, knowing that Jesus was raised from the dead to be God's king and delivers all who believe from God's coming judgment.

Can you see that we're meant to spread the gospel message? And when we do, we're examples to all who believers?

This is what Paul says first. We're to spread the gospel message.

Knowing that these Thessalonian Christians and now us are meant to spread the gospel message, it makes sense that we:

### **Spread it continually**

This is probably harder to view from the verse. But it comes through clearer when we think carefully about the verbs or as my Kindergarten teacher used to say, 'the doing words'. And that's a good bible reading tip – be attentive to the verb and what it's doing because this will give you more food for thought, and ultimately help us understand what God is saying and desires.

When we hear a phrase like:

*The Lord's message **rang out**  
your faith in God has **become known***

this points out the ongoing and continual effort of the Thessalonian Christians in spreading the gospel message. What this means is that we should put the gospel message on repeat. So, we shouldn't be thinking that we can have one year on and one year off! The gospel message is something that we should be sharing again and again and again. Now whether this was formal public speaking or informal word of mouth kind of stuff Paul doesn't say. But he speaks of both "the Lord's message" and "your faith in God", which points to both verbal and non-verbal ways of getting the gospel message across, and the two go hand in hand.

Do you see yourself spreading the gospel message continually? Do you see us as a church spreading the gospel message continually? This also seems too impressive for us. But the ongoing nature of sharing the gospel message is meant to be a focus of our efforts as a church, just as it was for these Thessalonians Christians.

This is our church calendar for the first half of 2023. Let's see what on! There are two Twilight Picnics, a Pathways Service, A Week of Prayer and Fasting, a Kids Church Planning Day, New Resident Visiting. Oh, and another Twilight Picnic. What do you think? I'm pleased to see a good number and variety of events that have been planned and for us to be part of. And that's just in January!

When I see these events and hear of your personal stories, I'm yet again glad to say that there is a focus on and putting the effort into spreading the gospel message to young and old, in word and in deed. The challenge is for us to keep going, as Paul urged these Thessalonian Christians. And in the words of this hymn: to

*Tell the old, old story,  
Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and his glory,  
Of Jesus and his love;*

Can you see that we're meant to spread the gospel message continually? And when we do, we're examples to all believers?

This is what we should be doing. We're to spread the gospel message continually.

Knowing that these Thessalonian Christians and now us are meant to spread the gospel message and spread it continually, we're encouraged to:

### **Spread it throughout the world**

This point is the implied result from the "rang out" and "Become known" phrases in our verse today. But it's clear from the rest of the verse that Paul is delighted that the gospel message has been shared by these Thessalonian Christians beyond their town, and that the news of their faith is known more and more. To the extent that Paul has heard about them from other believers!

This third point also makes sense knowing where we've come from. The gospel message is meant to be spread. It's meant to be spread continually. And now we hear that Paul is thankful that it has extended beyond them, reverberating throughout the hills and valleys of Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond.

The gospel message was always meant to reach to the ends of the earth, and we're called to do the same with the gospel message today.

Do you see yourself spreading the gospel message continually throughout the world? Do you see us as a church spreading the gospel message continually throughout the world? Now don't get me wrong! This doesn't say that we're all meant to pack up our bags and fly to the deepest darkest far-flung places in the world! But we're meant to engage in the work of seeing the gospel message spread beyond us and throughout the world.

However we take part, the important thing is that we take part in seeing a world that knows Jesus together. Even if we're helped by many missionary organisations who select, train, send, and support missionaries that we might know to a greater or lesser extent. I'm thrilled to see that our church has many missionary partners, some of which we have sent out over the years. And I'm just as glad there are regular opportunities to pray to God for our mission partners together. I pray to God that we keep going.

Can you see that we're meant to spread the gospel message continually throughout the world? And when we do, we're examples to all believers?

This is the third thing we learn from our verse today. We're to spread the gospel message continually throughout the world.

Toward the end of the verse, Paul speaks of other Christians beyond the region knowing about the continually lived-out and outward-looking faith of these Thessalonian Christians. They didn't do this for themselves but to encourage fellow believers to show God's heart so that everyone everywhere would know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

I know of other churches who know and are encouraged by our active faith in Northbridge and beyond. And this is not by accident! But by the love and care we show to each other as we grow in our faith together. In his pastoral letter, Simon said that if someone came to St Mark's and wanted to meet up with someone to grow in the faith of Christ, they would be spoilt for choice. I agree with that. But let's hear from a Christian who serves elsewhere: *"the people at St Mark's have a wide reputation for loving one another deeply, as well as liking one another, and loving Jesus wholeheartedly."*

You are an encouragement to many Christians, just as these Thessalonian Christians are to many, including me. And the challenge ahead for us as it was for these Thessalonians is: to keep going.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, today we've explored:

**Being an example to all believers**

This verse may seem daunting to us. But it doesn't have to be. It's meant to encourage us to spread the gospel together, as those saved by him, and who are waiting for him from heaven. These Thessalonians Christians encourage me to spread the Lord's message and express my faith in God alongside you, to do this continually, and in a way that goes forth in all directions throughout the world.

We can be an example to all believers. Today we've learnt that by:

- 1) Spreading the gospel message
- 2) Spreading it continually
- 3) Spreading it throughout the world

we will be just that.

**PRAY**

*Heavenly Father, we thank you making yourself known to us, and for making a way of salvation through faith in your Son. Help us to imitate these Thessalonian Christians. Help us to keep going with spreading your gospel message continually throughout the world. And we ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*