

Be a Model to Believers

† **Welcome the message** (vv.5b-7)

† **Serve God, waiting for His Son** (vv.8-10)

In the name of Jesus, God's model Son, dear fellow believers:

We journey to our community today by way of Thessalonica on Paul's Second Mission Trip. But first we must go back centuries earlier, far to the south and across the Mediterranean to Egypt. The new Pharaoh Ramesses II (1279 – 1213 BC [?]) was determined to make a lasting name for himself. So he ordered his stone carvers to level the embossed surface of monuments to previous rulers and inscribe his own name into each cartouche. Deeply impressed letters could not be effaced as easily as the raised embossings of his predecessors. All he needed was to knock down the old and carve in the new.

Ramesses considered himself a god. But today I am proclaiming to you the one true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who sent apostles like Paul into all the world with the Good News of life eternal. What pharaohs tried to accomplish with stone carvings, our God has done in our hearts and souls. He has not used a cold hammer and chisel, but the fire of God's Word, so that here in our community we could also **Be a Model to Believers**. Look at the Thessalonian Christians and see how it begins for us as we...

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At first the Word of God is a hammer that hurts our pride and rattles our nerves. The Master Carver needs to do some serious work on our raised up images before He can inscribe His love in our hearts. We find a compelling example in Saul of Tarsus who studied in Jerusalem and became a hardcore Jewish rabbi. Saul was so raised up in pride that he persecuted followers of Jesus Christ to their death. All this violence until the crucified and risen Jesus knocked Saul to the ground in blind terror, forgave him his sins in Baptism (Acts 22:16), then sent him forth as Paul, Christ's Apostle to the Gentiles.

What stubborn opinions does the Lord have to chisel away in our hearts and lives before He can get to work on His own beautiful image? Is it your self-reliance, your intellect, your neglect, your pride in your own goodness and strength? Does it take a hammer or a bulldozer to level the name you want to make for yourself? Are you old-school stone or high tech titanium? Nothing is too hard for the Law of God. Will the work be finished before Judgment Day? Will you escape God's *"coming wrath"* (v.10)?

Nothing impressed Paul more than God's grace toward him. God sent His own Son as the Jewish Messiah to fulfill the ancient Jewish prophets who foretold the coming of the Righteous One. By His holy life, by His innocent suffering and death on the cross, Jesus Christ brought eternal life and His own glorious Name to all. Just as He suffered to bring glory to God, so He allows us to share in His suffering.

Christ was pounding His image into Paul by persecution and imprisonment in Philippi. The carving continued in Thessalonica where a Jewish mob forced him to flee at night. But all this was God's way of helping Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica to **Welcome the message** and **Be a Model to Believers** the world over. *"Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."*

Can we do better to be a blessing in our own community than to **Welcome the message** like the Thessalonians? New Life happens here. Now it's our turn to thank God for leveling our pride and inscribing His love in our hearts. One fine example was Don in the August issue of *Forward in Christ*. A southern gentleman, small business owner, Don was neither outgoing nor elected to any church board. But he quietly and effectively used his connections to reach his best friend and family, doctor and his

wife, current and former employees and their families. Through one former employee he reached her a tennis coach, mom, in-laws, a neighbor, a lady getting her nails done next to her daughter. Countless customers and extended family connections all helped Don bring to his pastor's adult instruction class ten of his connections and at least a dozen other opportunities to share the clear **message** of law and gospel. ¹

In so many ways you can reach people your pastor will otherwise never meet at Christmas parties and family functions. Whether as individuals or through New Life outreach activities, the key ingredient is that loving concern which God has shown for us in Christ to **Welcome the message**.

*On my heart imprint Thine image, Blessed Jesus, King of grace,
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures Have no pow'r Thee to efface.
This the superscription be: Jesus, crucified for me,
Is my Life, my hope's Foundation, And my Glory and Salvation.* ²

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When we have Christ's life and hope inside us, when our whole existence rests on the solid foundation of God's Word, then the storms of life cannot disturb the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. While others wring their hands and obsess over losses, we're busy magnifying the Lord for all His grace and goodness toward us. As we magnify the Lord for others with the lens of our lips and lives, we minimize our troubles. We're too busy praising God to be down or depressed. Instead, the power of Christ's Gospel helps us **Be a Model to Believers** as we **Serve God, waiting for His Son**.

We saw a great **Model to Believers** last spring when a tornado smashed into Hugo. The death of a little boy whose family home blew into the neighborhood pond cried out for comfort to survivors. Since our sister mission has been worshiping in the elementary school which became the emergency Red Cross shelter, Pastor Matt Hennig offered to be there for counseling. He read Psalm 46 to several families to encourage them with Good News about our loving God who is greater than sin and tragedy. Congregation members volunteered for cleanup. "People have their earthly dreams shattered, their homes torn apart, and then suddenly," says Pastor Hennig, "God opens their eyes to their eternal mansion waiting for them in heaven." ³ In storms and stock market crashes, we eagerly **Serve God, waiting for His Son**.

How closely can we imitate the **Model** Thessalonians? *"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, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."*

We're impacted by idols too, like *Convenience* who chooses murder of the unborn instead of chastity. Politicians and businessmen worship the *Beast* when they think government is some kind of "messiah." Doctors and lawyers worship *Skill*. Most praise *Money* to save from all problems, but it can't even save itself. Daily God calls us away from idols to new life in Christ, loving God and our neighbor.

Our congregation is focusing on community outreach efforts to shine the love of Christ to others. None of us wants to be known as the church of the narrow-minded and exclusive. We have experienced the eternal loving kindness of the Creator who redeemed our souls and sanctifies our lives. We want to share this love with everyone we can by the Internet, radio and TV, outreach events and especially in a personal way, so that everyone can enjoy God's spectacular rescue *"from the coming wrath."* Go about your daily business, but while going, don't be too busy to help disciple all those ethnic groups with sin-forgiving Baptism and the solid teaching of God's **Message**. Good stewards in God's community, **Be a Model to Believers** for whom Christ died and for whom He is coming soon in grace and glory. Amen.

¹ Jonathan E. Scharf, "Connecting to Our Communities," *Forward in Christ*, August 2008, pp.16f.

² TLH 179 – Text, Tune, Setting: public domain.

³ "Congregation helps community recover from tornado," *Forward in Christ*, August 2008, p.26.