

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0:00] Father, your word is life. As we're going to see this morning, your word is powerful. Your word accomplishes things. Your word is not just doctrine and theory.

It is life itself. And so God, as we read your word and think about your word and ponder your word, I pray by the power of the Spirit, won't you speak to us? Won't you birth a life in our hearts?

Give us faith. Help grow love and hope in us, we pray, by the power of your word. So Jesus, speak to us in your mighty name we pray. Amen. Today's scripture reading is taken from 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 1 to 10.

Please follow along your Bible. If you don't have a Bible, please do still grab them from the front of the stage or at the back near the door. Our passage is on page 927 in the Church Bible.

Hear, then, God's word to us today. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1:07] Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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.

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.

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, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

[2:22] Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word. Great. Thanks, Betty. Do keep your Bibles open. We're going to be looking at some of these verses, and also some verses in the next chapter, so it would be helpful to keep your Bible open as we look at this now.

Friends, I wonder if you have ever bought anything, maybe at a really good price, a fantastic deal, only to wonder afterwards whether what you bought was genuine, or whether you were scammed. I was recently given a pair of shoes by a friend of mine in South Africa. I was visiting him, and he told me about this really fancy, expensive pair of Nike sneakers that are apparently very, very rare and very expensive, and he got them for a deal online somewhere, and when they arrived, they didn't fit him, and so he passed them on to me, and he said to me, I'll give them to you on one condition.

You must promise to wear them. They're a little bit out there, but I accepted. I'm not wearing them today, in case you're looking. Anyway, so when I got home, I Googled these shoes to see what's so fancy about them.

I mean, what's the big deal? And the first thing that came up was a YouTube video saying, how do you know whether your Nikes are genuine or not? And then a guy went through all the pros and cons, and look at the sign, and look at the stitching, and look at the coloring, and I must confess, by the end of that, I'm not so sure where my shoes lie.

[3:53] They may be genuine, they may not be, but they were a gift, and I don't particularly mind. But what happens if you genuinely did pay an exorbitant price for something? What happens if you paid a very high price and invested in something only afterwards to find out that you were conned, that it was a scam?

It wasn't genuine. Maybe you bought a very expensive piece of artwork, and you know exactly where it's going to go in your house, and a few years later, you find out it's not genuine at all. Well, think of the story of the Netflix show, *Sour Grapes*. I'm not sure if any of you saw that. A charismatic young wine connoisseur conned wealthy top auction houses and other connoisseurs out of millions of dollars by mixing cheap commercial wine and then relabeling it, putting in old corks, making it look like vintage Bordeaux blends from France, and selling it at exorbitant prices. Well, I don't know how many of you are buying Pablo Picasso artworks or 1970s Bordeaux blends wine, but I'm sure we all know that sinking feeling we have when we've invested something, maybe our heart or maybe financially or emotionally, we've given ourselves to something, and then afterwards you start to wonder, was I conned?

Was that a scam? I don't know if you've had that sinking feeling where maybe you've invested money, you've sent money, you know, done a wire transfer somewhere, and after you've thought, gosh, I hope that is real.

[5:23] I hope I haven't just sent that money to some internet scammer. But what about faith in Jesus? What about our Christian walk? What about the gospel?

If you're someone who considers yourself a Christian, have you ever questioned the authenticity of your faith? Maybe you've been disappointed by Christians from time to time. Maybe you've been hurt by the church.

Maybe you've read up about the sex abuse scandals in the church, and particularly in the Catholic church previously, but even more recently in the Protestant church as well. Maybe you've been let down or betrayed by church leaders, church members, and it's caused you to question whether what you've been taught and what you believe is genuinely true.

Whether this whole Christianity thing is real. Maybe it's just a con. Maybe it's all one big scam. And if you've ever had those thoughts, how would you know?

How would you test it? How would you test the veracity or authenticity of the Christian faith? How would you know whether what you've always thought is true really is true? Well, those questions kind of lead us into the passage that we're going to be looking at today.

[6:31] And today we are starting the book of 1 Thessalonians. For the next couple of weeks, we're going to be going through it. And the book of Thessalonians is a wonderful, wonderful book of the Bible. It's very encouraging.

And the way it comes about is it's a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to this young church in the city of Thessalonica. And we find the background in Acts chapter 17. And the story is this.

The Apostle Paul, along with two other guys, Silas and Timothy, traveling through the province of Macedonia, they come to the city of Thessalonica or Thessaloniki.

It was the main city in the province of Macedonia, this Roman province. It still exists today, the city of Thessalonica. You can go and visit there in Greece. And having arrived, they go to a Jewish synagogue and they start to reason and discuss with the people of their day.

And they look at the Old Testament scriptures and they show to them how Jesus, the one who died and rose again, is the Messiah, the Christ that they've been waiting for. And many people, both Jews and non-Jews, Gentiles, believe and they follow Jesus.

[7:36] And there are little church forms in the city of Thessalonica. And so this church is brand new with new Christians. But many people in the city don't like what Paul is doing and what he's saying.

And so they get a mob together and they go and they attack some of the Christians. They drag them out of their houses. They bring them before the authorities and they accuse them of having started a kind of public nuisance, a political insurrection.

And so he has this church that's brand new, just three weeks old, and already they're under attack, already they're under persecution. And the people of that city, the new Christians, say to Paul and Timothy, we know what these guys are like.

They are dangerous. You better get out of here. And so Paul and Timothy and Silas flee the city of Thessalonica in the middle of the night. They go to a nearby town called Berea and then down to the city of Athens and they escape.

But Paul is really worried about this church. He'd only been there three weeks. How's it gonna do? Is it gonna stand? Is it gonna be strong? Is it gonna fall apart? Is the suffering and the opposition gonna disrail this church?

[8:44] How are they gonna do? And so Paul sends Timothy, his sidekick, to go back to Thessalonica and find out how they're doing. And so Timothy goes and he stays there a couple of weeks and then he comes back to Paul and he brings a report.

And this is what he says. The Thessalonians are doing well. They're standing strong. It's hard.

There's lots of opposition. There's lots of persecution. Lots of suffering.

But they're doing well. They're holding on to Jesus. But they are a little bit discouraged. They need some encouragement. And so Paul, rather than saying, whew, that's good news.

Let's move on. Paul writes this letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, encouraging their faith and strengthening them. And his message in this book is this. Despite the real difficulties you face and despite the sudden departure of your leaders, Paul wants them not to be discouraged, not to give up on faith in Jesus, but to see that the Lord has been and still is at work in them.

Even though Paul's not there, that Jesus is at work in them and he will continue to be so as they continue to hold on to him. And friends, that's true for us as well today. That the Christian faith sometimes is hard, sometimes disappointing, sometimes discouraging, sometimes leaders let us down or the church disappoints us.

[10:03] But if we will hold on to Jesus and hold on to the gospel, God himself will be at work in us and through us as we continue to hold on to him. And so that's what the book of Thessalonians is about and our passage today.

And so let's dive in and look at a couple of things in this passage. I hope you've got it open with you and let's see. And so first thing, Paul wants them to know is this. Remember how the gospel came to you.

Remember how the gospel came to you. Before we look at this passage, I want to just read to you from Acts chapter 17, which I referenced a few minutes ago. So in Acts, Luke, who wrote Acts, wants to tell us how this church was born.

And look what he says here. He says, For three Sabbath days, he, that's Paul, went to the synagogue, reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

And a great many of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas. Now, when you read that, it can give the impression that these guys became Christians simply because they were well-reasoned or well-argued.

[11:16] Maybe Paul was a very persuasive debater, a very persuasive orator. And he spoke very eloquently and they thought, Yeah, that sounds true. Sign me up. I'll become a Christian. But actually, look at our passage in 1 Thessalonians.

Look at verse 4 and 5, what Paul writes. He's now reminding them how the gospel came to them. And he says, For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.

Paul's reminding them here, what is the basis of their faith? What is their faith built upon? And the gospel himself is the reason why they became Christians, because God came to them and revealed himself to them and saved them.

The scripture that Benson read to us earlier, Benson's with the youth now, Ephesians 1, God opened the eyes of their hearts that they saw God and encountered him in the gospel, and God changed them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, you know, we humans are forgetful people. We often forget just what has happened recently. I don't know if you've ever experienced this in the office. Maybe you have somebody and you give them lots of chances and you give them lots of opportunities and you really help them along in their career.

[12:35] And then just a month later, they're complaining, life is so unfair. Nobody helps me. Everything's good. Everyone else gets a chance. No one gives me a chance. Has that ever happened to you?

Okay, not to you. If you think earlier in this year, we went through the book of Numbers, right, as a church, and there we saw it again. God rescues his people out of Egypt.

He saves them by the blood of the Lamb, brings them out of the hellhole of Egypt on the way to the promised land, and just a few weeks in, what are they saying? Oh, it was so much better there. God

is so unfair.

God is so unkind to us. They're forgetting just the ways that God has sustained and carried and provided for them. And friends, on this journey of faith, we need to be reminded again and again what God in His gospel has accomplished in us, especially when things get tough.

And one of the signs that maybe we're not in such a good place spiritually is when we forget just where it is that we've been rescued from, just how great a salvation God has brought to us, and how God has broken into our lives.

[13:37] And so, look what Paul says here. He wants to remind them the bedrock foundation of their entire Christian journey does not have human origins. It's not human initiative or Paul's persuasion.

It's something that was entirely of God. He says, brothers, we want you to know that He has chosen you. There's assurance and confidence that you belong to Him.

You can know that with conviction. Why? Because the gospel came to you with power, with the Holy Spirit, with much conviction. God Himself was writing and speaking to you in your heart. It wasn't Paul's eloquence. It wasn't the power of persuasion. This wasn't a con job or a bait and switch situation. This wasn't some promise of prosperity or an easy life.

A Christian, says the New Testament, is not someone who is religious or moral or trying to be good. A Christian is someone who's encountered God, the Holy Spirit, the power of God in the gospel, in the Lord Jesus, in a way that changes them and brings conviction.

[14:40] In fact, so powerful was this conviction that it did two things for the Thessalonians. I don't know if you noticed. Firstly, it made them embrace suffering and hardship and affliction. You see that?

Look at verse 6. He says here, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. When God's word came to them, the power of the Spirit, they were utterly convinced, even though they knew it was going to cost them dearly.

In fact, later on in, I think it's in chapter 3, Paul writes this and he says the same thing to them. He says, this is 3 verse 3. He says, you yourselves know that we were destined for the suffering because when we were with you, we kept on telling you beforehand you were to suffer much affliction.

Such was the life-changing power of the gospel that these guys encountered, even though they knew that they were going to suffer and be persecuted and be thrown in jail and arrested and suffer for their faith, following Jesus was not going to make their lives easier because they had met Jesus, they had encountered God in the gospel.

What else could they do? They believed and so they followed him. It's kind of like when in the gospels, I think it's in John chapter 6, Jesus, at one point, lots of people are leaving Jesus and they say, we are done with this Jesus guy and Jesus turns to his disciples and says, what about you?

[16:05] Are you going to leave me as well? And Peter says, you have the words of life. Where else must we go? We know it's going to be costly. We know it's dangerous but what else can we do?

You are the Messiah and Paul says the same thing here. They've encountered God. God has changed and the gospels come to them. What else are they going to do? But notice the other thing here. Look at what else happened when they encountered the message of Jesus.

Look at verse 9. Paul writes here and he says, for they themselves report the kind of reception we had amongst you, how you turn to God from idols to serve the true and living God.

Now we may think, okay, so they gave up the Roman and the Greek gods and they became followers of Jesus. People change religion all the time. Big deal. But actually in the Bible, idols is always about a deep-seated security and identity.

It's what we put our hope and our confidence and our security for the future in. The idols, when the Bible talks about idols, it's not just statues. It's the idols of our hearts. It's the things that we look to for a sense of self-identity and self-worth and security and hope for the future.

[17:17] It's why the Bible says that when things go wrong in our life, yes, it's disappointing. But when our idols are challenged or touched, it can infuriate us. It can crush us.

In fact, that's actually what happened in Acts 17, right? Paul goes and he preaches the gospel and some people say, oh, I'm not so sure. But some people are so threatened that they want to kill these guys.

Why? Because the idols of their hearts have been threatened. Well, look what happens here. Paul tells these Thessalonians that when the gospel came, it wasn't moralistic self-help.

It wasn't human persuasion. God's predestining, electing love, being poured in their hearts by the Holy Spirit so changed them, it recalibrated the things that they lived for, the things they found their hope and their identity and their security and their well-being in.

It recalibrated everything they trusted and what is most important to them, even at the cost of great persecution. So, here's the question for us. Friends, has the gospel come to you in that kind of way?

[18:23] Is your Christian faith built on the bedrock of the gospel or is it just religious moralism, trying to be a good person, trying to improve your life in some way?

Friends, it's very easy to be religious and think you're a Christian. It's one thing to come to church and think, yeah, I'm a Christian, but have you encountered the living God in a way that has challenged and dismantled the idols of your heart in a way that you can say, persecution, suffering, I know what I believe.

Have you encountered God in the power of the Holy Spirit in a way that has changed you and anchored you and solidified you? Paul wants them to know how the gospel came to them and changed them.

But that's not all Paul wants them to know. He also wants to show them how the gospel has been at work in them. So, look at verse 2 and 3 with me. Paul wants to see how the gospel has not only come to them but been at work in them.

Verse 2 and 3, Paul writes this, he says, we give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[19:38] Now, I hope you recognize there the threefold kind of foundation Christian virtues that Christians have spoken about for hundreds of years. Faith, hope, and love, right?

Okay, the Bible talks about these three things often. John Calvin said this is the briefest definition of true Christianity, faith, hope, and love. But Paul here isn't encouraging them to pursue these things. He's not saying, right, now that you've become Christians, I'm sorry I'm no longer there but let me give you some advice. I want you to pursue faith, hope, and love. If you can do those three things, you'll be a great Christian. That's not what Paul does.

He's commenting on the fact that he sees this at work in them already. He's heard from Timothy. Timothy has come back and he said, let me tell you about the Thessalonians. They overflow in faith.

They are bounding in love. They are steadfast in hope. He's commending what he sees in them. And the New Testament constantly tells us that what indicates an authentic faith and an authentic Christian church is not external behavior necessarily.

[20:43] It's not, definitely not how nice a building is or how good looking Alan and the people in Stager or how wonderful the kids' ministry are, as wonderful as they are. What indicates a true and authentic church and a true and authentic faith is something far more internal.

It's these foundational values. It's genuine faith and trust in God. It's steadfast hope in the midst of opposition and persecution. It's an authentic love for those that are different from us, maybe even those that rub us the wrong way.

But notice these virtues, these characteristics, they aren't in a vacuum. They're not just random faith, hope, and love. What does Paul say? He says, I remember before our God and Father your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ or by the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the result of knowing and encountering Jesus and trusting and loving the Lord Jesus that these things will be birthed in them. Belief in the Lord Jesus that doesn't grow faith and hope and love in us is questionable at best.

But notice something else here. These virtues are productive virtues or they are outward focused. They do something in the people who inhabit, in whom they inhabit.

[21:58] These aren't just philosophical ideas or religious ideas. No one went to a Bible study and said, how should we learn to have more faith and hope and love? These virtues actually do something in the people.

They are gritty. They are earthy. They are practical. Look at what Paul writes here. He says, he commends them because their faith has resulted in hard work. They're not being lazy. Their faith has actually propelled them to work hard. He says, your love has prompted them to labor or serve those around them. And their hope has led to endurance and steadfastness even in the midst of persecution and hardship.

And Paul's point here is, see what the gospel has done in you. Jesus Christ came to you. This wasn't just religious teaching. It's done something in you. It's produced work in you.

It's changed your hearts. See how differently you love one another. See how you serve one another. See with what perseverance and endurance you have because God's word, the gospel, has done a work in you.

[23:03] And Paul actually says the same thing in chapter 2. If you've got your Bible, look at verse 13. He says, and we thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, that's the gospel, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of man, but what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you.

The Greek word for at work there is the word where we get our English word energy. I don't know how to pronounce it in Greek, but it's the same root word. We get our word energy. This gospel has a power, a dynamic to it that is an energy that actually does something in us and works in us.

And Paul says to these Thessalonians, how do you know your faith is authentic? Well, it's actually changing you. It's making you more gracious, more loving, more faithful, more steadfast.

And all this without the founders of the church. You know, the church was started and three weeks later, the planting founding pastor said, we're out of here.

You know, Tobin Miller started Watermark 16 years ago and was here for five and a half years and did a great job and then moved back to the U.S. Laid a wonderful foundation. But imagine Tobin came in.

[24:16] Who was here when Watermark was started? Okay, Asken, Celeste, the Laos, I think, Brian and Grace, yeah, Soda. Imagine, Henry, imagine three weeks Tobin says, okay, we've got to start this church, Watermark Church and then three weeks later, okay, best of luck guys, I'm out of here and leaves.

And without the founders, without the pastors, without the leaders, here is a church that is abundant. Why? Because the church wasn't based on the leaders on any human wisdom but God, the gospel, was at work in them because even in their absence, the gospel continued to work in them.

Yes, their initial acceptance of the message of Jesus was an act of faith but even now, in the midst of opposition and persecution and prison, they continued in the faith as the gospel did its work in them.

One scholar called Gene Green writes this, he says, this Christian faith was not a philosophical discourse on the way to the virtuous life or self-help seminar on how to overcome personal issues as it is in our day.

This was the word of God, the power of God, the presence of God, the person of God in verbal form, powerfully transforming their lives.

[25:29] So friends, can you see the gospel at work in you? Have you seen God by the power of the Spirit changing you, being at work in you?

Do you see evidence of growing in faith and hope and love? Is your faith productive, causing you to love others, serve others? Are you growing in steadfastness and perseverance in the midst of difficulty and opposition?

One of the things that I love about this church, the very best church in the whole world, it's not our nice venue, as nice as it is, except the mom's room is a little bit full at the moment.

Sorry, Annabelle. It's not the fancy leaders. One of the things we've said again and again is we're not trying to be a fancy church. We're not trying to be a mega church. We're not trying to be a popular church.

We want to be an authentic church. I look around the room and I see faces of people who, over the last nine years, God is at work in you. I see your love growing more and more.

[26:29] I see your faith holding on to Jesus when it's been hard. I see your steadfastness and your perseverance when it would have been so easy to give up and walk away. God is at work in you.

It may not be fancy. It may not have a billboard. Your name might not be on lights. God, by the gospel, is at work in us. See what the gospel has accomplished in you. Well, there's one last thing that Paul wants us to see and he wants us to see how the gospel is continuing to work not just in us but through us.

The gospel comes in us and then works through us. And so look at this. Paul has this final encouragement. Look at verse 5 to 8 with me. He says here, verse 5, Our gospel came to you, then verse 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 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

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 about you.

Now, notice two things in this section. Notice how firstly the gospel came to them, they received it, and then the word of forth sounded forth. Okay, so the gospel came, they absorbed it, received it, it did a work in them, and then it went out from them.

[27 : 52] And that's the way it always is. The gospel came, but it didn't stop with them. They didn't say, Oh, it's so nice. We saved. Wonderful. We're going to go to heaven. Actually, it came to them and then it went out. And God worked through them to others.

And so that all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, these two Roman provinces, heard about their faith and were encouraged and strengthened. Their faith was a witness to others. But notice something else here, that each time Paul speaks about how the gospel came to them, there's an example there.

So he says, our gospel came to you and you became imitators of us. You received the word and then you became an example to the believers. The word sounded forth from you and your faith or your witness, your example sounded forth and went forth everywhere.

So as the gospel came to them, it changed them and then it went out from them. And every time Paul speaks about the word, the gospel came, it did something in them and they became examples or worthy of imitation.

Now, what does that tell us? Friends, it tells us that genuine, authentic faith, it may be deeply personal, it's my faith in Jesus, but it's never private.

[29 : 03] It never just stays with me and Jesus. It's one, it's communal. So my faith in Jesus hopefully is a blessing to you and everyone else, but also to the city out there. Our faith in Jesus doesn't just stay with us.

It comes to us and then it goes through us to both our community, our family, to our city and to the ends of the earth. And just think about, think about this in the Bible.

Think about in Genesis 12. God says to Abraham, I will bless you. Five times. I will bless you. I'll bless you. I'll bless you. I will bless you. I will bless you. And then he says, and you will be a blessing to the whole world.

Now, of course, he's talking about how Jesus the Messiah is going to come through him, through his descendants and that will bless the whole world. But God's blessing to Abraham didn't stop with Abraham. It went through Abraham to the whole world.

Well, think about what God says to Israel. Israel, you are my chosen people. I have set my love upon you. I have elected you from before the foundations of the world. Now you go be a light to the nations, to the ends of the earth.

[30 : 05] Bring my light to the Gentiles. Well, think about what Jesus says to the disciples in Acts chapter one. Wait here in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon you, the promise from my Father.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth. When God works in us, it's never meant to stop with us. It goes through us.

God's work through us. And so what does that look like? Friends, maybe it means opening up your home, inviting a student or a youth or a young adult that maybe doesn't have family in Hong Kong around for a meal and just loving them, blessing them.

Maybe it means coming to church early, looking for who's who's had a tough week, coming and just encouraging them, sitting with them, praying with them. I saw a few months ago a lady came to church who had just lost a daughter.

Absolute tragedy. Came 15 minutes early, was sitting by herself. Traumatic experience of having had to bury her daughter. And someone else in the congregation wasn't serving, wasn't on duty,

just came and sat next to them and spoke and prayed with them.

[31:09] What an amazing blessing. Just coming to church early to serve and bless those around them. Friends, maybe it means reaching out to somebody in the community, getting to know them, praying with them, meeting up with them.

Maybe it means serving in kids ministry, joining the army of kids ministry or youth ministry or students ministry, shaping the faith and the lives of the next generation. Maybe it means serving with our mission partners, sons and daughters, inner city ministry, adopting a compassion to national child.

At the very least, praying for the members of your CG, blessing them, that God's work in you can flow through you to those around you. As we come to a close, I want to just tell one brief story.

Something that happened this week. A couple of years ago, we had a wonderful member of Watermark. His name was Dave. And Dave left Watermark six years ago to move to Taiwan.

And he married a fantastic lady, Julie. They had a child and they moved back to the U.S. and Dave was a great member of the Watermark Church. But Dave tragically this year passed away.

[32:13] A tragic accident and he passed away in the U.S. And some members of Watermark, particularly Sam and Joe and Henry and Carla and Edie and Joyce, decided we're going to arrange a memorial service for him here in Hong Kong.

I know he doesn't have any family here, but he's got other friends here. Let's arrange a memorial service. And they arranged a memorial service. And not only that, they raised some funds for his wife and his son.

And just really blessed and remembered Dave. Well, the family of Dave was so touched that they wrote a letter to us at Watermark this week just to thank us for the love and care that we had shown to Dave.

And I want to just read a couple of lines from it. This is what Dave's father wrote. It's a bit longer, but he just says this. A few quotes. Ultimately, I think we are grateful for one primary reason.

Watermark was being a true church in ways that we really see in today's world. We saw the kindness of Christ in ways that surprised us through the body of Christ in the time of great personal darkness and loss.

[33:15] You saw Dave. You cared for him as a church. You pointed him to his Savior. You appreciated his role in the body and you made him know that. As much as sometimes he struggled, he still had worth and was welcomed into your fellowship.

We're particularly grateful for Chris Thornton who showed such great love and care for Dave. Dave always said he had never met a truer Christian man than Chris. We hope that all of you know that your love and care was not in vain.

It's one of those rare things for which we can be eternally grateful. Friends, the mark of a true and authentic church. Friends, do you ever question your faith? Do you ever have doubts arise?

Does persecution, opposition, difficulty, disappointments make you have a question whether this whole Jesus thing is genuine? Authentic faith is not necessarily fancy. It may not be popular.

It may not be big. You don't need to save the world or plan a church. You don't need to have a certain type of personality. You don't need to be outgoing. Authentic faith is faith in the true and living God.

[34:21] It's the gospel being at work in you. It's the gospel being at work through you to bless and serve others. May that be true of you. May that be true of us. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we look at this passage 2,000 years old. This letter from a man to a church and simple church in Thessalonica. God, we want this to be true of us.

We want, Lord, for the gospel to come to us in power, in the Holy Spirit with much conviction. We want to be the kind of church where you, God, are at work in us but not just in us and work through us.

Lord, we want our faith to resound forth all across Asia. We pray. Help it to be so. May that be true of us. Pour out your spirit upon us. Lord, I pray for those of us that have doubts and questions, those of us who have faced disappointment and wonder whether our faith is genuine.

Oh, God, reach out to us. Pour out your spirit and pour out your love into our hearts. We pray in your wonderful and gracious name. Amen.