

I THESSALONIANS 1:9
GODLY WITNESS!
THEIR PAST LIFE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study of Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. And as you look at this young church, Paul only spent three Sabbaths there teaching them, they were a strong church. Not perfect, because there is no such thing as a perfect church, but they were a witness to what God has done in their lives!

Remember what Paul said in I Thessalonians 1:3 about these young believers, **“remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”** They were a working church, not for their salvation but because of what God has done in their lives. It was truly a labor of love all that they did for the Lord!

We also saw that it was the power of the Gospel that brought them to saving faith. It was the Word of God opened up to them by the Spirit of God that brought them to saving faith and then they had the witness of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. These were men of God, and again, they were not perfect but they followed the Lord and the Thessalonian believers patterned their lives after these men. They were a witness of how to walk with the Lord!

And what I love here is, even though they were young in the faith, their witness of Christ in their lives was seen by many, both saved and unsaved. For the saved, what they were enduring for Christ was a witness to others in Macedonia and Achaia. For the unsaved, they saw the transformed lives of these believers, and what a witness that was.

And that is what we will be looking at this morning, *“Their Past Life!”* In saying that I think as we look at the world today we get discouraged because it is so wicked, it is so evil. We just have lost hope in seeing things change.

This was vividly manifested to me when Julie and I were on vacation in Fort Lauderdale, Florida a few months ago. The beach was just across the street from our hotel and it was beautiful. Now I think I forgot to tell you that spring break had two more days to go and guess where a lot of college kids go on spring break? You guessed it, Fort Lauderdale!

Now please understand, not every kid was doing bad things, but there was plenty of alcohol and drugs going around, even though, at spring break, they had signs saying that no alcohol was to be on the beach. These kids are smart, they put them in juice bottles, with juice and drink it!

When I went to the store to get some Splash drink, a fruit drink, they only had one bottle left. I was trying to figure out why they were out. Then the light went on. No alcohol on the beach but you can bring fruit drinks mixed with alcohol because you can't see the alcohol that is in it. But you can truly see the results and that is why the store shelves were empty, no fruit drinks to be found!

As I was watching all these things, what I saw truly saddened me. To see how far down we can go, and it is pretty far in regards to morality. Just add alcohol and drugs and you can guess what can happen! Anything and everything. But that was not the end of it.

In the evening I would go to the beach and sit down and just enjoy the ocean waves and the beautiful scenery. One night a man came up to me asking for money. He said that he was homeless and we talked for about an hour. He told me his whole life story, using very colorful language!

That was until I started sharing Christ with him. And then his words changed. He started talking about Jesus, which tells me that others had done this already because he had some of the lingo down you might say.

And as I was getting ready to go back to the hotel I told him about Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale, that he should contact them and they may be able to help him out. And we talked a little more and then I headed back. Watching what he did next just told me he was not interested in Christ, he just wanted money for alcohol. And thus, he was on his way trying to get in with someone else, trying to use the lingo that would open them up and get him some money! Very sad! My heart was broken over his condition and how he was in such bondage, seeing no way out. At least that is what he thought but it is Jesus who could set him free and only Jesus!

We aren't done yet. Spring break was now over and I thought things would calm down. Not so. As I sat on the small wall by the beach I was just watching people. And here were two guys and a girl by a picnic table. And one guy was on the ground and before I knew it this other guy was laying on top of him. "Lord, help me!" I was thinking.

Then, after a few minutes of this, the woman who was there with this other guy, starts smacking this guy who was laying on top of this other guy! Don't know why and I didn't ask. But both these guys were drunk as a skunk! I have never seen a drunk skunk before, but if they are anything like these guys, look out! So this one guy, who was getting beaten up, leaves, and as he does he try's hitting on this other guy, who kicks him away!

Not done yet. Again, I am sitting on the beach just watching people and there is this group that are at a picnic table maybe 100 feet away from me. There are adults and a few kids there and the women are drunk, very drunk.

The guys were too but they were not acting like the women. These women were loud, obnoxious, hitting on other men. And I am like, “Lord, don’t let them come over here, please!!!” Guess what? They did. Now music is playing and they are dancing, not very nice dancing and these were not women who weighed 100 pounds. They were well over 350 to 400 pounds, wearing bikini’s suits, if you can call them bathing suits, and then doing this dance in front of me. There are only so many places you can look to avoid this and I am still in therapy trying to get it out of my mind!

What was truly sad was these young girls, maybe 8 or 10 years old, daughters of these women, and as they were watching what these women were doing they had this disgusted look on their faces. My heart grieved for them.

One more and I wish there wasn’t! On the weekend they had an AIDS charity walk. Okay, I am a little slow on this one. Down to the beach I go, this time I am going for a run, I felt that would be safe.

But, being an AIDS charity walk, there were plenty of gay men and women and they wore team shirts and the sayings on the shirt, well, I will not repeat them. What in the world is going on here. It was crazy.

Why am I telling you this? Because as I was watching all this taking place the Lord really drove home the point that I am not of this world. I am a citizen of heaven and these things disgusted me. I was not comfortable with them.

The other thing I was thinking is that it is so bad, the immorality is so horrible, there is nothing that can be done. Now what is the problem with that statement? I factored God out of it! You see, the Lord showed me that like the people of Thessalonica, the people of Fort Lauderdale and the people of this nation, the people of this world can be saved.

Sin has not changed in 2,000 years, it is still sin and idolatry is still around. We worship all kinds of things just as the people of Thessalonica had done. And yet the Lord broke through that darkness with His light and many in Thessalonica got saved!

And here's the thing. The God who shined His light upon the people of Thessalonica is the same God who is working today. And just like He used Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to be witnesses of Him in that dark city, He uses us today to do the same! There is hope in the Lord but there is no hope apart from Him!

Let me share this with you to set the stage for what we will be looking at this morning regarding our Godly witness and the past life of these Thessalonian believers. We are told,

Mount Olympus is the highest mountain in Greece, and it was considered the home of the twelve Olympians who were the principal gods of the Greek world – Zeus, Hera, Athena, and Apollo to mention a few. That mountain was one of the most important religious sites, if not the most important religious site, in the Greek world, and it was just fifty miles outside of Thessalonica.

That kind of idolatry was prominent in Thessalonica. The city had a very religious atmosphere with temples and shrines everywhere, with temples to Greek gods, Egyptian gods, and a host of other foreign gods. You could worship any type of god you chose in that city, and the young Christians there had to face the temptation of idolatry at every turn. Some of them came out of that world into Christianity. They had to turn their backs on their community, their lives, their idols, and Paul was encouraged by their allegiance to Christ in the face of this temptation. He says toward the end of chapter 1 that others noticed “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (v. 9).

Sometimes we are tempted to feel far removed from our brothers and sisters at Thessalonica. They had to face the worship of idols, and sometimes even the worship of Caesar. They had to repent of that sin and follow Jesus, but we don't face those struggles, do we? We don't have to face the temptation to bow down to idols . . . or do we?

We shouldn't be quick to think of idols only in terms of inanimate objects. Idolatry is far-reaching and comes to us in many ways. What Calvin observed long ago is no less true today: the human heart, our image-bearing and image-fashioning nature, is an idol factor. We have made idols of money and jobs. We have made idols of sex and power. We have made idols of sports and recreation. Tim Keller says:

Sin isn't only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry.

All of these can take the place of Christ. We face idolatry just as much as our brothers and sisters in Thessalonica did. Not only do we, too, face idols, but we must respond to them in the say way – we must repent.

- James H. Grant, Jr. 1 & 2 Thessalonians, *The Hope of Salvation*, pp. 51-52

So with that as our background, let's read through the verse we are going to be looking at this morning, in I Thessalonians 1:9, and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word and we look at the godly witness of the Thessalonians and, ***“Their Past Life!”***

I THESSALONIANS 1

VERSE 9

As I read through this verse there are two main points that emerge and they do go hand-in-hand. You see, if you negate one you find the other is negated as well! Let me show you those two points and you will see what I mean.

First of all, Paul tells us that they “**... turned to God from idols ...**” And the second point is this, they turned to God, away from idols, “**... to serve the living and true God.**” Now think about this for a minute. Can you still serve idols and serve the living and true God? I guess you can but God will not accept it. You must come to Him first, repent of your sin and then you serve!

What about turning to God and away from those idols and not serve the living and true God? Again, I guess you can but how can you not serve God when He has saved you from your sins!

So we are going to take the remainder of our time this morning and look at these two points, they are important! The first one, they “**... turned to God from idols ...**” Think about this. What was all the buzz about? What was all the talk about?

It is very simple. It was the changed lives, the transformed lives of these believers in Thessalonica and it was so radical that their faith spread out past Macedonia and Achaia. It was not just empty words but changed lives that made the difference, it was Jesus! They turned away from idols and they turned to Jesus, 180-degree turn to the living God!

Now what word is there that describes this change of turning to God and away from idols? It is very simple, **REPENT!**

But today we have lost sight of what repentance is all about. In fact, talking about sin and repentance is almost looked down upon today. They may say things like this. “It is way too negative to talk about things like that. We talk about Jesus, that is all that people need” they tell us.

Let me show you what I mean with this article. And keep in mind that this is happening at alarming rates in churches across America. We don’t need that negative thought of sin and repentance! Then why do you need Jesus? Something to think about. The article tells us,

It is equally no coincidence that the Devil has done everything he can to downgrade the importance of repentance. He has managed to persuade multitudes of people that it does not really matter much and that preachers should not speak about it or emphasize it. He has had great success in the Western church in getting many Christian leaders to leave repentance out of their message altogether, or to just mention it briefly, with awkwardness and apology, rather than boldness and urgency.

One of the reasons why Christian ministers and teachers choose not to talk about repentance is that they are too embarrassed and afraid to do so. There is the fear that it will offend people and be controversial. They also fear that it will make them appear old-fashioned or even judgmental. Yet, our duty is to explain the gospel in the same way that Jesus explained it. We have no right, or need, to change it or to ‘improve’ it.

Note what apostle Paul says when he is on trial before King Agrippa. He is explaining what he has been preaching. See how Paul also emphasizes repentance right at the outset, as the very first thing he tackles when he preaches the gospel, just like John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter:

¹⁹So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.²⁰First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.
Acts 26:19-20 (NIV)

See also how apostle Paul says that we should prove our repentance by our deeds, i.e. by what we do. Mere speech is no proof that a person has really repented. There needs to be some visible and practical change. Something needs to stop, or begin, or change. When God sees that He can be satisfied that our repentance is real. . . .

Therefore when you repent take real steps to change your lifestyle. Get rid of any known sin that you are involved in. You can only begin with what you know about. From that point on God will bring to your mind, one by one, other sins that you need to repent of and actively put right. But He will not deal with it all in one go. He will take it in stages, provided that you genuinely begin by repenting to the best of your ability at that point. . . .

- http://www.realchristianity.com/become_christian/repent/repentance_modern_church.html

Think of it like this. Say I beat my wife, I don't but let's just say that I do. And after I beat her I say, "Honey, I am sorry, that will never happen again!" Then it happens, again, again, and again. Is that true repentance? No, I am doing the same thing I said that I wouldn't do. It is empty words because there is no change in my actions, my behavior. But as we look at these Thessalonians, there was true repentance as seen in their actions, the things they did and the things that they said!

Now as much as some may believe that repentance is not important, repentance is important. Not because I said so but we see it throughout the Old Testament and on into the New Testament.

In Matthew 3:2 we are told, **“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’”** So John the Baptist spoke about repentance!

In Matthew 4:17 we are told, **“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”** So Jesus also spoke of repentance.

In Acts 2:38 we are told, **“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized [as the evidence of your repentance] in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”** So Peter spoke about repentance!

In Peter’s second sermon, he once again spoke about repentance. He said in Acts 3:19, **“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”**

Also, in Acts 8:22-23, as Peter is rebuking Simon he said to him, **“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”** I think Peter wants Simon to do an about face, to turn to the Lord and away from sin! In other words, he wanted Simon to repent!

And we see Paul tells us in Acts 26:19-21, **“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.”**

Now for those who put down this need for repentance, I have one question. “Why are you doing that?” You see, John the Baptist spoke about repentance. Jesus spoke about repentance. Peter, Paul and I am sure even Mary spoke about repentance. Then what is the problem? It is not popular today because people don’t want to hear that they are sinners separated from God.

I will let you in on a little secret. No one ever has wanted to hear that they are sinners and are separated from God. They don’t want to hear that they need to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives. But they need to.

Let me share a few things on what repentance is and why it is so important. First of all, David Horton defines repentance like this, “Reversing one’s direction in regard to sinful behaviors or attitudes; turning with appropriate sorrow from past acts displeasing to God.”

I think that is a good definition. This word in the Greek speaks of changing one’s mind and that truly is the idea in what David Horton said about this word. You are changing your mind about sin and you are turning from sin to the Savior, to Jesus!

Stanley M. Horton defined this word, “repentance” like this, “(Gk. *Metanoia*, ‘a change of mind.’) A change of the basic attitudes toward God and Christ, which involves a turning away from sin and a seeking of God’s rule and righteousness.”

Again, that should just make sense. Keep in mind that the Thessalonian believers were young in the faith and yet, when you look at what they turned from and who they turned to, it blows me away. They made a drastic change in their lives. They didn’t go half way or three-quarters of the way to Christ, they went all the way.

Again, I am not saying that they were perfect, they were not, none of us are. But when others looked at their lives they saw the change. They knew something was different about them and it was an open door to either share Christ with the unsaved or encourage other believers to continue on in the faith, to forge ahead in the faith!

Let me share this with you and as I do you will see how silly it is. And as you are listening and making that point in your mind, apply it to your faith and see if it fits. If it does –

REPENT!

We are told,

Professor Drummond once described a man going into one of our after meetings and saying he wanted to become a Christian.

“Well, my friend, what is the trouble?”

He doesn’t like to tell. He is greatly agitated. Finally he says, “The fact is, I have overdrawn my account” - a polite way of saying he has been stealing.

“Did you take your employer’s money?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“I don’t know. I have never kept account of it.”

“Well, you have an idea you stole \$1,500 last year?”

“I am afraid it is that much.”

“Now, look here, sir, I don’t believe in sudden work; don’t steal more than a thousand dollars this next year, and the next year not more than five hundred, and in the course of the next few years you will get so that you won’t steal any. If your employer catches you, tell him you are being converted; and you will get so that you won’t steal any by and by.”

My friends, the thing is a perfect farce! “Let him that stole, steal no more,” that is what the Bible says. It is right about face.

- Moody’s Anecdotes, pp. 99 – 100

I hope all of you can see how foolish that is. Now apply that to our Christianity and you will hear people say, “I am not perfect yet!” or “I am still a work in progress!” That is very true but by saying that they are making an excuse for their sin. No, don’t make an excuse, repent and get right with God. Don’t let your fellowship with God be hampered by your sin!

Sin is deceitful and destructive in our lives. Let me show you what I mean. We are told, Gary Richmond, a former zoo keeper, had this to say: Raccoons go through a glandular change at about 24 months. After that they often attack their owners. Since a 30-pound raccoon can be equal to a 100-pound dog in a scrap, I felt compelled to mention the change coming to a pet raccoon owned by a young friend of mine, Julie.

She listened politely as I explained the coming danger. I’ll never forget her answer. “It will be different for me. . .” And she smiled as she added, “Bandit wouldn’t hurt me. He just wouldn’t.”

Three months later Julie underwent plastic surgery for facial lacerations sustained when her adult raccoon attacked her for no apparent reason. Bandit was released into the wild. Sin, too, often comes dressed in an adorable guise, and as we play with it, how easy it is to say, “It will be different for me.” The results are predictable.

- Gary Richmond, View From The Zoo

May we be wise and not let sin control our lives, but let the Lord. We are new creations in Christ, may we live accordingly!

Turn to Ephesians chapter 4 and let's look at Ephesians 4:17-32, because we see in these verses this new life we have in Christ compared to the old life we had apart from Him. Paul tells us, **“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”**

Here's the thing, and please don't see this as being legalistic, it is not. You can't live in this world and live according to Christ, walking in the new life that He has given us. You can't serve two masters and thus, if this world is controlling your life, then the Lord is not. And the other is true. If you have surrendered your life to Christ, then the world, as much as it may try to pull at you and tug you, you will not be moved!

Yes, you walked that way once, but since you have **REPENTED** and come to Christ, you no longer do those things that you once did! If we have learned Christ, then we need to walk accordingly! We need to put on the new man and be renewed in our minds by the Word of God opened up to us by the Spirit of God.

The world's filth, since we do live in this world but are not of this world, comes upon our lives and we need those refreshing waters of the Word of God to wash us daily from this filth.

And keep in mind that we do have options in this life. We can put away the things of the world or we can embrace them, but both have consequences. If we put these things away, the things of the world, then we will be blessed. Our life will be a witness to others. I am not saying that people won't hate us for that, but God will honor our faith, our walk.

Or we can embrace the things of the world and when the world looks at us they see no difference in us. That we are just like them except we call ourselves Christians and they call themselves whatever!

In Joshua 24:14-15, at the end of his life, Joshua is trying to encourage the children of Israel to walk in the Lord and he tells them, **“Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

Did you hear what Joshua asked them? Please understand that Joshua did not say, *“Choose this day if you will serve . . .”* No, he said, *“Chose this day whom you will serve.”* Why did he say that? Because Joshua knew that you are going to serve somebody and it may be the Lord or it may be the Devil, but you will serve somebody. Those are the only two choices you have!

And I love the way Joshua ended this. He said, **“But for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”** Did you see that. He is saying that you can choose for yourselves whom you will serve, but I am serving the Lord and that is going to be the practice in my house, with my family. It doesn't matter what you do, what this person does, I am going to serve the Lord!

May that be our hearts desire and the practice of our life, that we will serve the Lord! Now we have talked about this first point of Paul, that they **“... turned to God from idols ...”** And we talked a little about the second point, that they turned to God, away from idols, **“... to serve the living and true God.”** We are going to finish up looking at this last point now.

What we have seen is that true repentance leads to transformed lives, we serve the Lord, the living and true God! Let me show you what I mean with this article that will give you some shocking statistics between saved and unsaved people. We are told,

One somewhat depressing set of statistics for today's Christian is that a number of sociological studies reveal that there is little to choose between the morals of those claiming the title of Christian and those who have no Christian affiliation. In spite of all the sermons about how belief makes a difference in life, the numbers show that those claiming to be Christians are not better off than unbelievers. At least one born-again sociologist is honest enough to admit it.

We start our discussion with one survey compendium typical of such studies. This collection of statistics by George Barna addressed the apparent situation of those in the United States.

In particular, he addressed one wider question which was:

Are Christians more moral or successful than non-Christians?

His blunt conclusion in his book, *The Second Coming Of The Church* by George Barna (Word Publishing, 1998), was that that they are not. The author, a self-identified born-again Christian sociologist, is founder and president of Barna Research Group (CA), which releases many of its own survey results in the context of other national surveys.

Although most of Barna's book is addressed to Christian ministers with the intention of suggesting how the church might regain something of its lost status, it presents statistics which indicate how the present church has "failed" in its mission. The numbers are only partially based on Barna's own studies, and are supplemented with a number of other national surveys.

Barna compares the behaviors and attitudes of Christians with Non-Christians . . . and concludes: "We think and behave no differently from anyone else."

Examples of the Similarity of Behavior Between Christians and Non-Christians

(from *The Second Coming Of The Church*, p 6, partial list)

Have been divorced (among those who have been married) Born Again Christians: 27%; Non-Christians: 23%

Gave money to a homeless person or poor person, in past year Born Again Christians: 24%; Non-Christians: 34%

Took drugs or medication prescribed for depression, in past year Born Again Christians: 7%; Non-Christians: 8%

Watched an X-rated movie in the past 3 months Born Again Christians: 9%; Non-Christians: 16%

Donated any money to a nonprofit organization, in past month Born Again Christians: 47%; Non-Christians: 48%

Bought a lottery ticket, in the past week Born Again Christians: 23%; Non-Christians: 27%

Attended a community meeting on local issue, in past year Born Again Christians: 37%; Non-Christians: 42%

- <https://billpeddie.wordpress.com/articles/science-and-religion/does-christianity-make-a-difference/>

What I see is that we are holding back from allowing God to truly transform our lives because we are holding onto the things of this world instead of holding onto Christ. Some Christians today have one foot in Christ and the other foot in the world and they are being pulled in opposite directions. And that won't work. As I have said, you can't serve God and this world, you can't serve two masters. There is one that will control your life and for many Christians, they are allowing the things of this world to control them!

But for these Thessalonian believers, their faith was radical as they turned from these idols they once worshiped and turned to the living God. It was a complete break from the past life. Many hold onto the things of this world, but not for these believers, they cut themselves off from the old life to serve the living God and what a witness that was to others.

How is this done? Again, it is the Word of God illuminated by the Spirit of God that reveals to us what we need to do in our lives, how we are to live! Listen to this powerful example of what God's Word can do in people's lives. You have heard of this story before but to me, it is a witness of the transforming power of God in the life of a believer. And not only in the life of a believer but how that faith is passed on and the transforming power that is seen. And I think it is important to understand that the God we read of in the Bible is living and powerful and able to transform lives. May we not forget that. Listen to this story and see the amazing things that God can do in us and through us if we allow Him to. We are told,

One of the most dramatic examples of the Bible's divine ability to transform men and women involved the famous mutiny on the "Bounty." Following their rebellion against the notorious Captain Bligh, nine mutineers, along with the Tahitian men and women who accompanied them, found their way to Pitcairn Island, a tiny dot in the South Pacific only two miles long and a mile wide. Ten years later, drinking and fighting had left only one man alive – John Adams. Eleven women and 23 children made up the rest of the Island's population.

So far this is the familiar story made famous in the book and motion picture. But the rest of the story is even more remarkable. About this time, Adams came across the “Bounty’s” Bible in the bottom of an old chest. He began to read it, and the divine power of God’s Word reached into the heart of that hardened murderer on a tiny volcanic speck in the vast Pacific Ocean – and changed his life forever. The peace and love that Adams found in the Bible entirely replaced the old life of quarreling, brawling, and liquor. He began to teach the children from the Bible until every person on the island had experienced the same amazing change that he had found. Today, with a population of slightly less than 100, nearly every person on Pitcairn Island is a Christian.

- From Signs of the Times, August, 1988, p. 5

Do you see the transforming power of God’s Word as the Holy Spirit opens the things of God up to us! What is taking your attention away from serving the Lord fully? What have you turned to that has you so busy that God is a second thought? You see, those things have become idols in your life because you are worshiping them instead of the Lord, the true and living God. Make that break and turn back to the Lord as these believers did!

I want to share with you about another letter that Paul wrote, to a church that was in the middle of immorality. It was a wicked area, Corinth. And yet, the light of God shined down upon these people and many repented of their sins and served the living and true God. They turned from their idols and served the Lord alone!

In I Corinthians 6:9-11 we are told, **“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”**

What is Paul saying here, that we can lose our salvation? Absolutely not! But if you stand before Christ in your own righteousness, you will not inherit the kingdom of God, ***PERIOD!*** You see, your righteousness is like filthy rags before a holy God!

And Paul makes a list of those who will not enter into the kingdom of God, and it is not an all-inclusive list but he does hit the ones that the Holy Spirit wanted us to hear about because all of us have been involved with at least one of these I am sure.

And today, we see the church embrace homosexuality as a normal lifestyle but to do that you would have to ignore or remove passages like this from the Scriptures that condemn this lifestyle. We have the pride, the audacity to change God’s Word to accept sin and if we do that for homosexuality, why don’t we do it for other sins? Make no mistake about it, this is happening!

Now please understand that when Paul speaks of **“homosexuals”** or MALKOS, (mal-ak-os’) in the Greek, he is speaking of male prostitutes in a homosexual relationship and **“sodomites”** or ARSENOKOITES, (ar-sen-ok-oy’-tace), which is a generic term for homosexual practices!

And please don't think Paul was a homophobe, for homosexuality was a common practice in Rome and in that culture. Keep in mind that 14 of the first 15 Roman Emperors were homosexuals.

Also, Nero, who was the Emperor at that time, was a homosexual and he was about to marry the boy Sporus, having him castrated so he could be his wife!

Even in the Old Testament God condemned this practice, in Leviticus 18:22 we are told, **“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman.”**

Now what if we blow it, what if we sin, are we cast out of the kingdom of God? Please understand that Paul is not speaking of a Christian who stumbles; one who falls into sin but rather a person whose life is characterized by these sins; they are not saved.

And for those who say they were born that way, as a homosexual or whatever, I guess it is true because we have all been born into sin. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God. And we can't be good enough to get into the kingdom of God because we are already bad and God demands perfection from us.

That is where Christ comes in. Listen again what Paul said here, **“And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”** I Corinthians 6:11.

This is so wonderful. Paul is saying that yes, they once were like that but the blood of Jesus has washed their sins away. They once were like that but the Master, set them apart for His use, He has sanctified them. They once were like that but they have been justified, declared innocent before God through Jesus Christ.

In other words, you don't have to live that way any longer, or as Paul said, **“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** Galatians 2:20.

Thus, like the believers in Corinth, we once were like that but the blood of Jesus has washed our sins away. We were once like that but the Master, set us apart for His use, He has sanctified us. We once were like that but we have been justified, declared innocent before God through Jesus Christ.

Thus, if that is where we once were and this is where others are today, we should show them the love of God, the forgiveness of God that is found in Jesus Christ so they too can be washed, sanctified, justified before God and that happens as they repent of their sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of their lives!

As I said when I opened up our study this morning, when I saw the wickedness that was going on in Fort Lauderdale it grieved my heart. And that was and is a good thing. We should grieve over sin.

But then I went a step too far and felt that all was lost, it was hopeless, this nation is going to hell in a handbasket, whatever that means! And that is when the Lord knocked upon my heart, or I guess my hard head, and showed me what was going on here in Thessalonica and how lives can be changed, not by programs, not by powerful speakers, not by great worship bands, not by light shows, not by this or that but by the power of the Gospel message spoken to people and opened up by the Spirit of God! And the same can happen anywhere in America, even here in Manitowoc!

I love what Spurgeon had to say regarding what was going on in Thessalonica, what was going on in their lives. He tells us,

Everybody asked, “Why, what happened to these Thessalonians? These people have broken their idols: they worship the one God; they trust in Jesus. They are no longer drunken, dishonest, impure, contentious.” Everybody talked of what had taken place among these converted people. Oh, for conversions, plentiful, clear, singular, and manifest; that so the word of God may sound out! Our converts are our best advertisements and arguments.

- Spurgeon

They were a powerful witness of the Lord Jesus Christ because their lives reflected their love for the Lord and His transforming power! Paul put it like this, “**For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.**” I Thessalonians 1:9.

I don't know where some of you are at this morning with the Lord. Maybe you have never come to the Savior, repenting of your sins and asking Him to be Lord and Savior of your life. And you may feel beaten, broken, like there is really nothing left in this life for you.

I am here to tell you that you are wrong. There is a God, the living and true God who loves you more than you will ever know.

Maybe some of you have been trying to live with one foot in the world and the other foot in Christ and you are being torn apart. You need to remember that there is a God, the living and true God who loves you more than you will ever know.

Let me share this poem with you called the Touch of the Master's Hand by Myra Brooks, Welch. This is how the poem goes,

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
 Thought it scarcely worth his while
 To waste much time on the old violin,
 But held it up with a smile.
 "What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
 "Who'll start the bidding for me?"
 "A dollar, a dollar. Then two! Only two?
 Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
 Going for three . . ." But no,
 From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
 Came forward and picked up the bow;
 Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
 And tightening the loosened strings,
 He played a melody pure and sweet,
 As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
 With a voice that was quiet and low,
 Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
 And he held it up with the bow.
 "A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
 Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
 Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice,
 And going and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
 "We do not quite understand.
 What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
 "The touch of the Master's hand."
 And many a man with life out of tune,
 And battered and scarred with sin,
 Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
 Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
 A game - and he travels on.
 He is "going" once, and "going" twice,
 He's "going" and almost "gone."
 But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
 Never can quite understand
 The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
 By the touch of the Master's hand.

Has He touched your life? If not won't you let Him in? He loves you that much. And if He has touched your life, don't keep Him at a distance, He died for you so that you can live with Him! Truly, the touch of the Master's hand transforms our lives and that transformed life is a witness to others. Never forget that!