

Rappahannock Christian Church – 10/16/11

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

From the very time of Jesus Christ, people have tried and tried to find words to describe and explain God's plan of salvation in Christ. Sometimes they have used the words of the marketplace. You are *bought* with a price, Paul says. We often call Jesus our Redeemer, and *redeem* actually means *to buy back*.

Salvation has, alternately, been described in the language of the courtroom. God is the *Judge*, and a guilty *verdict* has been reached. The death *sentence* has been meted out, BUT the death penalty doesn't have to be paid by us because, as it says in Hebrews, Jesus has taken our place and by faith in Him we can escape.

This is what we celebrate as we come to this Table, that Jesus is our Substitute, and through Him we have release from the death penalty. Let me read you the words of the Apostle Paul, which are recorded in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Supermodel

This morning our Scripture is not *taken* from the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians; it IS the first chapter! Again, this is the Common Lectionary Scripture for the week, and it's far more than can be covered in the time we have today, so I'm going to concentrate on just one verse.

In this verse Paul says some important things and he says them in a very crisp and terse way. I want to examine what he is saying; so, based on the rest of what Paul says in his letter, I have paraphrased and expanded the text to say what (I believe) the Apostle wants to convey.

Okay, so let's read the whole chapter first to get the context.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 – Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace be to you.

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by 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 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. 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.

Sometimes greatest inspiration comes, not from merely reading or hearing words of exhortation and encouragement, but in seeing the strength and sacrifices of other people.

We may not think about Christians experiencing persecution today, and thankfully we aren't persecuted here, but Christians are suffering for their faith in many countries all over the world. In fact, in November our Sunday School classes will be having a special program where we'll learn more about our brethren in the persecuted church.

The Thessalonians are a "model to all the believers in Macedonia." *They're Supermodels!*

In verse 3, Paul lists three characteristics that mark them:

- their *work* produced by faith,
- their *labor* prompted by love and
- their *endurance* inspired by hope in Lord Jesus Christ

Here's what I think Paul is saying...

“You are becoming known for your WORK produced by FAITH. You heard the message of grace, and you responded.”

“At one time you were enslaved to idols and to their priests who made demands of you with little hope that any of it was going to be of lasting benefit to you. Now you have been saved by the grace of our Heavenly Father, and your lives have been changed forever. You have experienced the lifting of your burdens. No longer do you feel the weight of guilt and anxiety over lives that seem so futile and meaningless! You have the gift of God's Holy Spirit who speaks to your heart, convincing you that you have been saved from your sins.”

“You are one of God's own. A transformation has begun. You have been made alive, and are no longer dead in your sins. And so your faith has begun to produce results. You see -- maybe even to your own surprise -- that you *want* to offer God something back for all that you have received. You are expressing your thanks to God in the very work that you do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

"Secondly, your labor has been prompted by love. God has chosen you. You know God loves you. Faith has germinated in you! This would not be possible were it not for the miracle of salvation! God has done a great work in your heart; faith has blossomed! And this is producing labor. You are thinking NOT of yourselves and what you can get from God, because you realize that in Christ you already have everything! So you can 'afford' to spend yourselves; you can labor for the advancement of God's Kingdom with joy and boundless energy."

"Lastly, you have a great attitude. You have endured much, and this ENDURANCE is inspired by the HOPE that is ours in Jesus Christ. You know full well -- from MY OWN life and testimony before you -- that coming to Christ and surrendering to Him does NOT give you a ticket to health and wealth! There can be no question of this."

"I look at you and I see that CLEARLY you are deeply committed. You are genuine! Who could point a finger at you and claim that your suffering is the punishment of God for sin?! It is obvious to all that this CANNOT be true! Everyone can see that you are offering yourselves to God in faith and gratitude. And yet, although your faith and your good deeds are becoming known and admired by other Christians as your story spreads, you are doing it all IN SPITE OF PERSECUTION!!!! The world around you is harassing you and hurting you and making life difficult for you, precisely *because* of your faith! My dear brothers and sisters! I commend you! Christians everywhere admire your faith and are inspired by it!"

"You have every reason to be discouraged. 'What has faith gotten me?' you might well say. 'A black eye! Imprisonment, beatings, scorn, hatred!' I know! I hear you! But you also know (and your lives are the evidence of it!) that these hardships are nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus!"

"We endure, we hang on, because of the HOPE that now lives and grows within us. We have confidence that salvation in Christ is REAL and that one day God will take us to our real home, that place waiting for us, which Jesus went ahead to prepare."

"What do we care about the trials we face here? Do they think we are going to throw away the eternal life which is ours in Christ -- the life which we have already begun to feel and experience right here and now -- do they think we are going to throw that away to avoid a few brief moments of pain and persecution? *Not on your life!*"

"Super-models you are indeed! Praise God!"

Benediction

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. – 1 Timothy 1:17