

The Model Church

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[0:00] Good morning, God, we are here for you. And after joining in the angel's song and worshipping you, we now ask that you would speak through your word, from your heart straight into ours.

The first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 labour 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.

[1:22] 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Now, Paul starts these letters, and just bear in mind, as I read that to you, that probably would have been how it would be when you were sat in a church service back in those days, and maybe in the town of Thessalonica.

There wouldn't necessarily be lots of preaching, but there would be someone who would be reading out this letter from Paul. Do you remember Paul? Paul wrote us a letter. Let's listen to what he has to say. And so they would just read that letter out, and it would be our job to kind of go, Whoa.

Wow. He's reminding me of this. He's reminding me of that. And so he writes this letter, and he always starts, and I love how he always starts. Of course, he introduces himself. Hey, Paul here with Silvanus and Timothy, and we're writing to you guys, grace, peace, to you, peace.

And then he always says this, we give thanks to God, and I'm constantly remembering you in my prayers. And we've been talking about prayer, so we kind of know what he's trying to get at here. Man, he's just always remembering these people, remembering the people that he walked with.

[2:50] And actually, this letter is one of the oldest epistles that we have, but it's writing to one of the youngest churches that we have. So Paul, you see in Acts 17, he starts this church in Thessalonica, and you see in Acts 17, and they start it, but then very shortly after, they have to go, because they're getting in trouble.

They're getting in trouble, and they're starting to raid the church, and the leader of the church that they left there, Jason, he gets into a whole ton of trouble, has to pay his way out of the church. So at that point, actually, not out of the church, out of trouble. And so then what happens is Paul actually has to leave.

So he starts his church, and then he has to run, Zhao Lou. And then it's only two years later, he's eager to find out how this church is doing. And it's interesting, because our churches, depending on when you start counting, may be around the same kind of age.

So maybe around the same kind of young church, and Paul's writing to them, hey, I've been praying about you. I remember you. Don't forget that. I may not be with you in person, but I am always, always remembering you in my prayers.

And more importantly, remembering before our God and the Father, your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope. Before I get to that, just a little bit more context. So this is a young church.

[4:02] This is a two-year-old church that's going through a lot of trouble. It started, can you imagine just joining a new club, and suddenly you're getting raided by all the authorities, and people are just constantly being chased down.

You have to pay your way out of things. The moment people outside find out that you're associated with this church, then you start losing business opportunities. Then your friends stop inviting you to their parties. Then all kinds of things start happening to you.

And so to hear your pastor go, hey, I remember you. I remember you. And of course, Thessalonica was a significant city. It was on the central trade route.

So it was a city that actually a lot of people came in. It was a transient city. So people were kind of going in and out constantly. People would go there for travel. They would go there for culture. So it would be a very interesting kind of city, maybe much like the city that we have here.

And so that's the kind of context that he's writing this in. And then he says, I remember you. And then he gives them the ultimate CV. I love the CV. The work of faith, the labor of love, and the steadfastness of hope. Now, if you have grown up reading the Bible, then maybe you'll probably just glean over those words super quickly and just kind of, oh, yeah, I remember.

[5:08] It's just kind of the Christianese jargon. But man, a few weeks ago when I was reading this, I was like, you know what? I would love to be described and remembered like that.

That I have a work of faith. Work of faith. Before I continue, I want you to, we're going to have a little bit of interaction. Don't worry, introverts, not too much.

But what does that even mean? Work of faith to you. Just turn to the person next to you and go, hey, I'm going to have a guest now with you. What does work of faith mean to you? Go. Hey, that's all.

I promise you there won't be long things, so you don't have to do too much small talk. What is work of faith to you? We've heard this before. Z-Way started off great, which is what happens after you have faith?

So the moment you believe something and you have faith, something changes. There is a work that happens. And that's important. Because what he's saying here is that, hey, it's not good enough just to have faith.

[6:11] You can't just say you believe in Jesus and then you kind of go about your way and continue to do the same thing. That's not really faith. When faith leads to action is what the book of James talks about. So it's saying, actually, you're doing something with your faith.

Do you do something with your faith or do you just simply just believe that there is a God? So that's a different thing. Kyle was saying, actually, it's about everything that you do. Every piece of work that you do is filled with faith.

So that's a different angle, which also is good there, where actually when you go to work, when you wake up in the morning to go run your event and run your conference, you're like, man, God is here. And he wants me to do something in this.

As I start a new venture, God is here and I'm going to step out in faith because I believe in him. So he says, guys, young church, I remember you because you have a work in faith.

That means you believed and then you put it out into action. And the second is a labor of love. This is easy, so I won't get you to discuss this one. This is, hey, you guys do things. You guys labor and work.

[7:11] And it is hard work. But you do it out of love, which is different to doing it out of duty, doing it out of diligence, doing it because you have to, doing it because you feel completely, completely guilty if you don't do it.

And maybe just on this one, I just want to ask, hey, as we learn how to do life together, yes, on a Sunday morning, but also in the rest of our weeks, but maybe let's just even talk about the Sunday morning time or maybe during the lunchtime.

What does a labor of love look like? Labor of love looks like Trevor helping with the rubbish at 1, 2 p.m. when all the McDonald's and all the maizins and takeaways all stuffed in.

And you know, I've been there and I know that you have too. And I've seen some of you do it. You look at the bin that's filled in a nice pile and you have faith that you can squeeze your one in into the

corner.

And you leave just before it falls out. Can we be a community that actually goes, okay, you know what? This is part of where I call home and the bin is pretty full.

[8:24] Let me be the one that takes it out. Why? Because I want to love this community. I might not feel like loving this community. No one feels like doing the trash. But in that moment, I'm just going to do it because actually out of my love for God, out of my love for these people, I'm going to go change the bin bag.

When I see someone stacking the chairs, when I see Danny stacking the chairs after the service, you're like, I want to help Danny. I mean, I know he looks very strong and that's probably why he's so strong because he's doing all the chairs.

But maybe I should just help him. Maybe I should, Grace is like, nah, hell nah. Let Danny do it. Can we be a group of people that are out of love for God and out of love for each other, that the moments they're like, come on.

We're like, let's just tidy this place up together because no one else is doing it. But can we do it out of love? Not out of duty. Not because now Danny's right next to you piling chairs so you feel a little bit guilty so you're like, I guess I should help.

He's really struggling. He never struggles, but yeah. But can we be that kind of community? And then it says the steadfastness of hope. He says, I remember you guys because not only did you believe and then it changed the way you live, not only do you love people, not just because of duty, but you do it because of man.

[9:42] The word love there is agape, which means you love even when they don't deserve it. You take out the rubbish even when the other people don't deserve it. You just watch someone squeeze their McDonald's into the bin.

And you're like, but I will do it because I love. You do all these things because you have a steadfastness of hope. What is that? That is, the steadfastness of hope is basically saying, God, I know Jesus is coming back.

It's not wishful thinking. It's not, I just remained hopeful. It's not that. But hope is something that saves us that we cannot see but we know is going to happen. And so we do it. So he remembers them in such a way and I just love that actually that's the way it's described.

And then it says this, and we find out why they live with this, the work of faith, the labor of love and the steadfastness of hope. This is a good congregation. This is a good young church. Why do they do this?

And I think it's in verse four. If you have a Bible, I would love for you just to keep, I'm just going to be going through verse five first. So if you are wondering, when is this guy going to stop talking? You can actually see, I'm just going to go through the whole of chapter one so you'll be able to kind of track where I am.

[10:47] And of course, when I say Bible, I mean this. Who's got one of these? Just, can you be loud and proud of you? Oh my goodness. There's Juju, JP, Jocelyn, guess good. Judging the rest of you, this is the Bible.

The other is the iPhone. 15. And that doesn't count. Or whatever rubbish Android thing you have. So, the reason why this is the living word of God is because this demands your attention and demands your focus.

That little piece of technology that you have is trying to grab your attention and distract you in any and every way. So, actually, sounds a little bit snobby, but I don't read my Bible.

I actually deleted my Bible app to stop me from reading the Bible on my phone just because I'm like, I'm not actually reading it anyway because I'm such a popular guy. I have all these WhatsApps that come in, all these IG reels that people tag me in because I'm such a big deal.

So, it's just, every time I read the word, I just have to, have to go and check that and do the double click. And before I know it, I've forgotten where I was reading. Okay, so this is the Bible and I will keep saying that until the day I die.

[12:00] So, verse four, we find out why they are like this. And it says this, for we know, brothers, loved by God and 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.

When was the last time you listened to a sermon and you felt moved by the Holy Spirit that it was filled with power and that it was filled with, and you received it with conviction and you charged out

of church going, man, that is the word of God.

I've got to do something about it. Or did you listen to a sermon and it was intellectually curious that it was like, oh, that guy's pretty good.

That was an interesting point. I didn't know that about Thessalonica. Oh, that was a funny joke. He seemed quite entertaining. The only reason that there is life transformation when we receive the gospel is if we receive it with power and conviction.

That's the only way because if you're here going, hey, come James, just speak to me. Just like a TED talk. Just listen to me. It's a kind of interesting topic. Then your life's not going to be transformed and you're not going to be remembered in this way because you're not receiving it with conviction.

[13:25] You're just kind of like, oh, that was a funny joke. Oh, he's so funny. Oh, she was so interesting. What a moving story. And then you just leave. And then you wonder why your life isn't really changing.

And you wonder why you don't really have a work of faith. You don't really labor in love. And you don't have that kind of steadfast, unshaken hope because you're not receiving the word with power and with conviction, of course, with the Holy Spirit.

And that's why when I read the Bible, I'm like, God, this book sometimes just feels boring to me, but God, just show me. Show me there is power in this book.

Holy Spirit, can you shine a light on the things that you want me to hear and understand today?

That's how we read the word. So they received it and more importantly, they then lived it out. One prayer that I've always had is that especially for someone, let's say, those of us who are in ministry in different contexts, when you give talks and when you share the gospel, the prayer that I've always had is, may my preaching never outrun my living.

May I never become so good just holding a microphone, speaking, that it actually outruns my living. And when you see me preach, you think, oh, that's pretty good. But when you look at my life, you think, oh, that's not quite matching up. Because what Paul says is, hey, you saw how we were when we were with you.

[14:45] You saw how much power I had. You saw how much conviction I had. You saw the Holy Spirit working in me. Now I want you to have the same.

So here's the question that I have for you. Does your life match up with what you say you believe? Does your life match up with what you say you believe? Now what does this look like?

This looks like when something goes wrong at work, do you still have that kind of faith? Or does the moment a colleague say something bad about you, or a student say something bad about you, or a patient says something bad about you, or your boss shows that they don't like you, you are just crushed.

And then you can't sleep. When what you say you believe is that, man, I am made for more than just my job. That life is more than just what other people say about me.

And it's quickly exposed. It is quickly exposed whether actually our lives are contradicting or complementing to what we actually believe. What do you say you believe?

[15:49] And do you actually believe it? And do you actually live it out with conviction and with power? Because if you don't, if it doesn't quite match, then maybe that's where the problem is.

And then he says this, verse 5, again, they received all of this with much affliction.

They didn't need to receive this. You don't need to be here. They definitely didn't need to be here. And those people who live in countries that maybe have a little bit more pressure, they know, you know that when you turn up to a church service, there is a gamble, there is a risk that you are taking.

But they are there despite the affliction because there is a joy. Sadly, we've been deprived of that opportunity to exercise that muscle because we come and it's all fun and there's literally no threat to us at all.

There's no affliction coming up here apart from maybe the security guard downstairs asking you which floor you're going on. And then you tell them subsidize it out and then it's okay. Can you imagine walking into a church in a place where actually I've got to do a double take before I go up this lift, before I tell someone what floor I'm going up on just in case someone from the marketplace who recognizes me sees me, oh, they go there.

[17:14] Oh, they're that kind of person. We should retract that invite. We should stop this. We should stop that. And he says, you saw us, then you copied us and now other people are hearing

about it.

And this really comes to the heart of really discipleship. And that is, and this is the main topic of what I wanted to ask you today is this, imitation.

Discipleship is essentially imitation. If you think about the word disciple, it means student, it means learner, it means follower, it means actually you're just simply imitating that person. I was sharing in a dinner on Friday night that actually Joe and I, we imitated our parents, imitated our dad without even really knowing.

We grow up in these settings where we'd organize sports and we'd have young adults come over to our house when we were just little kids, not really being aware or recognizing that actually he was discipling.

And then suddenly, fast forward many few years, we're doing the same thing. And you realize that age old statement that that discipleship, discipling is often caught, not taught.

[18:24] You can't teach someone, hey, this is how you disciple. No, you say, hey, this is how I do it. And actually, you just let that go.

Watch what I do. It is not do as I say. It is watch what I do and then do as I do. The question is, who do you imitate? Who have you imitated?

In fact, culture is one of imitation. Culture is one of imitation. And actually, those of us who move to a big city, one that is a bit of a cultural melting pot like Hong Kong, like Thessalonica, it is all about copying.

Think about fashion trends. How do fashion trends even happen? It's because you look at someone and you think, that looks cool. I'm going to imitate that and I'm going to buy it.

Think about how you subconsciously imitate people. We were at a dinner the other night and I had a chat with Ellen and my dear childhood friend, Ken, is here.

[19:25] Ken and Jess, they've just moved their family to Hong Kong from England and I was asking, hey, does my accent sound just like Ken's? And Ellen was like, no, yours is kind of like, and Ken actually said, yours is compromised now.

Oh, that was a dagger. Because when you come into a place, you inadvertently start changing, subconsciously start changing.

In my defense of all the Australians and Americans that I have to hang out with, they just don't understand real English so I've had to kind of just bend to get to the point where they truly understand.

And it's only afterwards when I speak to Ken and I'm like, man, how far have I fallen? How far have I fallen from the glory of Great Britain? So I seek to make amends and I seek to kind of go return back to the former glory.

And of course, we grew up in an era where, and I know Ken, well, Ken's known me for so long, I had a lot of hair when I first met Ken. A lot of that. And we grew up in the late 1900s.

[20:30] 1900s. So the late 1900s were... Grace has just... Grace, you're from the same decade. Well, Grace and Ken and those of us will remember that in the late 1900s there was this boy band called the Backstreet Boys.

Where did that come from? Where was that? Nick Carter. Is it Nick Carter? Yeah, it's Nick Carter. And those curtains. Like, I tried the curtain thing.

Ken tried the curtain thing. We all tried the curtain thing. Culture demands that you try the curtain thing. Culture imitates.

You hadn't met him then, yeah. But you imitate. We imitate. The question that we have is actually who are we imitating?

Just evaluate your life right now. If I ask you in the most respectful, polite, loving way, what is your life? You would probably be able to tell me a collection of influences that you've been imitating to get to where you're at now.

[21:47] Good ones. really good ones. Really holy ones. And then really bad ones. Right? The question is who are you imitating?

This young church in Thessalonica were imitating Paul and Timothy, those who started the church. And you see, once they imitated, then the word started to spread.

It started to spread. Now other people were hearing about this church and they were like, this church is fire. This church is filled with the people there are just, and that's what Paul is saying.

Hey, I started this thing two years ago, but now I'm starting to hear about you guys and it's cool and it's good because you have a work of faith, you have a labor of love and you have a steadfastness of hope. People are hearing about you.

Here's something else that I find actually for us as a church is actually if we're doing what God is asking us to do, if we're trying to imitate him, then naturally people will start hearing about it.

[22:47] But we only want people to hear about this for the right reasons. Wouldn't it be incredible if you wanted to find out about the church in Thessalonica, you look at this church and you're like, this was a good church.

I would like to go to this church. What time is their service and which MTR stop is it? I would love to go and visit this church. Wouldn't it be great that if you wanted to get a taste of the church of Thessalonica, you just have to come to the gathering?

Wouldn't that be fun? Wouldn't it be nice for people to hear about this church going, these guys, these guys are built different. They love different. See, this interesting thing about maybe contemporary church culture, one that we're very much part of, is that churches have started just basically self-promoting.

We have an Instagram account, we have a Facebook account, and say, hey, look what we did here. Worship night, selfie, hashtag fire, all these things, and it's just branding and it's trying to advertise and go, hey, look, look what we're doing here.

Look how good it is, look how cool, look how cool the gathering is. But that's not my heart, that's not my prayer. Leonard Ravenhill, a famous British evangelist, said this, no one needs to advertise a fire.

[23:59] No one needs to advertise a fire. If there's a fire, people will know about it. Our job isn't to advertise and say, hey, look what we're doing here, this is so great, this is so fun. Come, if you want to sit in a church service and if you're late, you have to stand for the whole time, come.

Wouldn't it be great if people are like, I just want to know what real Christianity is. I just want to meet real followers of Jesus that are not hypocrites, that are very real about their flaws, that are really trying their best to live a life devoted to and following Jesus.

I would love to come and meet these people. Wouldn't that be a church that we really want to be a part of? No? You don't want to be a part of it? Sorry, who was this?

That's the hope. Here's another question. So the first one was like, who are you imitating? The second question I have for you is this, if someone imitated your life, would they look more like Jesus? If someone looked at your life and like, you know what, Uday just seems like such a good guy, just so capable of growing such great facial hair and just those muscles, I'm going to imitate Uday.

How do I do this? Which gym do I sign up to and what do I do? Now, if we all imitated Uday, would we start looking more like Jesus? That's the question Uday needs to ask himself.

[25:29] If someone looked at the way you read the Bible, if someone looked at the way you prayed, if someone looked at the way you love people on the fringe who people don't usually love, would they become more like Jesus?

Or would they not? That's the question I have to ask. When people look at our lives and they seek to copy and imitate our lives, would it lead them to looking more like Jesus?

Because if that's not the case, then something's wrong. We were made in the image of God. We have all fallen short. But we're supposed to be heading into that direction to look like him so that if someone is following you, they will start looking like him.

1 Corinthians 11, that's what Paul says, imitate me as I imitate Christ. So as we seek to follow Christ and we have other people follow, our hope is that we would just not create mini Jameses and mini Mihis, but we would create mini Jesuses, Christians, Christians.

But isn't that the problem with the church? It's funny because at this dinner that I was speaking at on Friday, it was a dinner designed to share the gospel with people and actually it was refreshing.

[26:47] It was talking to a whole group of people who don't know the gospel, just non-believers who haven't been in a church in Hong Kong. And just to speak to them and go, hey, so how come, have you been to church?

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. But I went to DBS. Have you been to church? Oh, no, but I went to St. Mary Noel. Oh, so what? The people I saw in school, the Christians that I saw were not really that inspiring.

In fact, they did the opposite thing. They turned me off the faith. Put your hand up if you've heard someone say something like that. Oh, that should ache you.

That should break your heart. That's one of the questions I was asked. So I did this, I did this talk and there was like 15 minutes of Q&A; afterwards, which terrified me because I was like, can I just speak over time so that we don't have time for Q&A;?

But that was one of the questions. What do we do with people who, when they say, oh, well, I'm kind of interested in God, but people just put me off. Those Christians really put me off.

[27:55] It's called hypocrisy. When they say one thing and they do another. Do you think this young church in Thessalonica would have survived if Paul and Timothy lived a different gospel to the one that they preached?

No. It wouldn't have happened then and it won't happen now. The question for us is do we live with the same power and conviction? The word really here is integrity.

If you ask me what that word, and I think Keller described it in such a way, integrity is basically are you the same person in any and every circumstance regardless of who's around you? Now, you've got to temper that with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9 which is, I become all things to all people in order that I may save some.

To the Jews, I'm a Jew. To the Greek, I'm a Greek. It's not quite that because that's actually just getting to the place where you can relate to people so you can share the gospel with them. You and I know it's not about that.

That's not the problem we have. The problem that we have is that when we're in different groups, we start acting different altogether. We have different values altogether. Our language changes because of the people that we're around.

[29:02] Much like my accent, when I'm around people, Americans, and they don't understand certain words I'm saying, I'll have to say it in the way that they understand it. The wrong way, but I have to say it in that way together.

Or if you meet Singaporean and Malaysian people, they do the same. Because some Singaporean and Malaysian people that I meet, I'm like, oh, actually, I don't quite hear the accent, but they're like, oh, trust me, the moment I'm with my fellow Singaporeans, things turn up.

Walau! And it comes out. Do you have integrity? If someone imitated you, would they look more like Jesus?

Because that is what the church desperately, desperately, desperately needs. As part of my role with Young Life, I always get asked, why are so many, so many young people leaving the church? And I'm like, I just, I just think it's because they don't see enough real people, real Christians.

They have this perception that has been passed on as to what Christian living should be like. Their mom or their dad tells them this is how it should be, and then they go home and they see a very different version of it.

[30:17] And then we wonder why they're leaving. This next generation is hungry for, desperate for, people who are authentic and vulnerable. Now, there is a nuance there, and Gabs and I were talking about this this morning, the goal isn't for us to kind of go to people and go, hey, I'm just like you.

I'm a sinner, just like you. I do the same stuff as you. We can go to LKF tonight and we'll do the same stuff. It's okay. I'm real. I'm not fake. It isn't that.

It's being honest with who you are and saying, I have this temptation and I have messed up in my life, but I call myself higher because I'm trying to look more like Jesus. So I am not where I used to be, but I am also not where I should be and I am heading in that direction.

People to be honest with that is what we really need. To have people who are genuine about their faith because modern culture is so disillusioned. So disillusioned with the church.

You see all these scandals that are happening everywhere. You see all this abuse that is happening everywhere. People who are not imitating Jesus. If someone imitated you, would they look more like Jesus?

[31:35] So people are hearing about this church. They're hearing about it and it's spreading everywhere. For they themselves report concerning us, verse 9. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turn to God from idols to serve the true living and true God.

They're hearing about this group of people that have turned away from idols. Now Thessalonica was a place that had tons of idols, all kinds of statues, things that you would worship. And now this group, this small group, this young group were now getting famous or they were hearing about this group that they were turning away from those things.

The question is, as we evaluate each of our lives, have we genuinely turned from the idols that we have?

The same idols that the world has. I was reading different newspapers these last few weeks and I was like, you know what? And of course, the more time you spend reading just articles about the world, your heart just sinks further and further.

And I was looking at the SEMP, I was looking at the BBC and I was like, you know what? All of these articles, all of these events can be summed up by what Richard Foster calls the three idols, just money, sex and power.

[32:48] If you remove the problems that come from money, sex and power, there would be no news this year. You could categorize every one of these bad events into one of these three things.

Now these things technically are neutral things. Money is a neutral thing. It's just a number, it's just a piece of paper. But we've turned it into something, an idol, and then we've let it consume us, we've let it corrupt us.

Sex isn't just a neutral thing, sex is a beautiful thing. We cannot live, we cannot survive as a species without sex. But we've been corrupted by it, we've been consumed by it, it's been distorted, it's been twisted, turned into an idol, put in a place where it shouldn't really belong.

Power. We were given power in the very beginning. Genesis 1, what does God say to Adam and Eve? He says, I've given you authority and dominion over creation.

Power is essentially good. If we use it for the right thing. We serve and trust and follow a benevolent king with all the authority.

[34:02] But often, the moment we have power, we use it for our own good. It's funny, when you start off in a profession that's really hard, medics maybe is a good example of this, it's super, super hard, super, super busy, you get completely just destroyed by your bosses and your supervisors, and so just the whole vibe within the profession is just sad and no one smiles.

And I'm like, oh, that my boss is mistreating me. But it's funny, isn't it? It's funny that it happens to so many of us when we get mistreated when we're at the bottom of the ladder, but the moment we reach the top of the ladder, suddenly it's our turn and it's kind of like, well, this is the only way, this is what happened to me.

And so this is how I will dish it out. But as Christ followers, we believe in a king who surrendered all of that power and spent time with the least of these.

That's what we should be imitating. And then it says this, and this is the final verse, so this is the good news to those of you who are falling asleep. And to wait for his son from heaven.

This group of people who have turned from those idols are now waiting for the son. I think there's people here in this room who kind of understand the gospel and say, yeah, I do, Jesus, I do believe you.

[35:27] And I also believe that you're coming back again. And I also want you to come back again. But can you come back after I get qualified as an accountant? Actually, Jesus, I really welcome you back, but can it only be after I get my own apartment?

Or actually, Jesus, I really, really want you back. I am so desperate for you to come back, but only after I find a girlfriend and I can get married and I can have kids. I think for some people, if the good news was to step into this room right now, it wouldn't be good news because you would have your own ambitions.

You're like, oh, Jesus, yeah, it is cool that you're here, but could you just wait in that room just for a little bit longer because I've got a couple other things to do. This group, this young church, of course, it's easy to understand because they have this affliction, they have to double down to be here, which is something, as I'll say again, that we don't have.

So we have to constantly remind ourselves of this more because of the comfort, because of the complacency that comes with the comfort. These guys were here because they were desperately, eagerly waiting for the son.

Are you waiting for the son? Are you truly waiting for him to come back? Or are you kind of like, yeah, I guess I want him to come back, but only after I do all the things that I want to do.

[36:54] The kind of community, the kind of believer that I'm praying that I become, that I hope that we will become is people who are just so set on the return of Jesus that they will have this kind of hope that isn't a wishful thinking kind of hope.

But it is a hope that he is coming back. So in the meantime, I will take out the trash. But out of just joy and love and conviction.

That's the type of people I want us to be. And to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. And maybe that's the reason why we aren't that desperate for him to come back.

Because we don't truly understand the wrath. And the church doesn't really like to talk about the wrath because it's not one of those lovey-dovey verses that you can put on a fridge magnet. But until you truly understand that you and I are destined for wrath, so therefore no earthly affliction and persecution can really weigh up to what it is, that you have truly been saved from the wrath, maybe you won't be that desperate for Jesus to come back.

Maybe you think you're actually a good enough person that you will be spared. That's the key here. The heart of the gospel is knowing that we are in deep need of a saviour.

[38:10] And if we were to meet our creator tomorrow, we wouldn't be able to get past him without the son. Because I think some of us, we may not say this out loud, but we're kind of like, oh, I don't know, I fancy my chances.

I've been a decent person. Look at my tax receipts. It's like, I've donated to a lot of charities. And so you think you'll meet your creator and he'll be like, oh, you've actually been okay.

You can get through. No, because if you have that mindset, then maybe you don't need the son.

And that's why you're not that eager. Because you think all the other things will get you there. But this group of people, this group of people were waiting for the son.

They have turned from their idols to the living God Jesus who has saved them from the wrath. And you wonder, well, how did he do that? How does he rescue us from the wrath?

Because he took on the wrath himself. Because he went to the cross himself and he spared us from that. So we should be filled with the joy. We should be filled with conviction. We should be filled with power.

[39:18] And so until we truly understand that bit, maybe we don't truly get it. Maybe we choose to imitate the things of this world more. So my heart is this.

And I'll finish here. And I'll summarize the questions. Who are you imitating? Who are you a product of? As you sit, just think about the way you talk, the way you act, think about the values that you have.

Julie and I were talking the other day and we're just joking that he's poking in front of me because one of my idols is the issue of cheap parking. I am willing to walk very far, I assure you, to get cheap parking.

Every time, if I end up having to pay a specific place and have no parking redemption, oh, I am, my heart is in despair. And I'm willing to spend quite a lot extra to get the free parking.

And he jokes that that's one of my idols. And of course, where did I get that from? It's because I imitate my dad. I caught it, he didn't teach me. It just happened.

[40:21] Because I watched him walk 20 minutes in the rain to save £1.50. Who are you imitating?

Have a think about your life. Who have you been imitating? And now there's good ones and there's great ones, but I know there are also bad ones. And can you, first of all, just be aware of them? Be able to articulate, oh man, that's, yeah, I caught that.

I need to get, I need to give that up. Who are you, who have you been imitating? In your office, who have you been imitating? Have you been imitating your boss so that they can like you a little bit more?

That was my first question. My second question is, if someone was to imitate you, would they look more like Jesus? And are you truly eager for and waiting for the son to come back?

If he stepped into this room on the 14th floor right now, would that be good news to you? Would that be good news to you?

[41:30] For this group, it was. And my prayer that as we go on our way, as we look through this book, as we are the same kind of age as this church here, that we would commit to following the way of Jesus, just like this group did.

And that we wouldn't have to advertise the fire that's here because people will see, people will hear that there is a group of people that live differently, that they love differently, that they work differently, that they hope differently because of Jesus.

Can I invite you now just to spend a moment of reflection to ponder those questions, to surrender anything that actually you know shouldn't be there, that you've been imitating the wrong person, or if you've just realized that if someone was to imitate you right now, it would be a horrible fate for them.

Without being too hard on yourself, would you then repent of that? Would you confess? And then would you turn around?

Turn around and go back to following Jesus. Let's just spend a moment to pray now. Jesus, we choose you.

[42 : 58] We try our very best not to say that lightly or casually. that Jesus, we really do choose you to follow you.

Forgive us when we don't. Forgive us when it's too hard and we give up. Forgive us when we are distracted. We just want to look more like you.

And show us now, Lord, what that looks like in our lives. So that when others see us, they see you. Thank you, Lord.

in your name we pray. Amen. Please take a seat. Just have a final thought.

Our society, our culture has cheapened the word follow. I don't know if you agree with this because we've used that word and put it mostly on social media and we follow people on social media.

[44 : 24] But the word follow that we kind of interpret it as, we really just mean we watch and we stalk. I feel with all the love in my heart, I feel as though there are many of us here who are guilty of simply following Jesus on Instagram.

And what I mean by that is that we follow him from a distance we watch and we've seen and we read and we just follow. But that's not the follow that we're after here.

When Jesus tells the fishermen to follow me, it wasn't to, hey, check out my account and so you can watch what I'm doing. That's not the following he was telling them to do.

He was saying, leave it all behind, leave all those other things behind and follow me. and walk in my footsteps. So that's number one. And I challenge you and I encourage you, if you have simply been following him, then truly follow him.

Why? And it comes to my second point here is this. The challenge for you, what that whole passage, wherever it is now in my Bible, is really summarizing and saying is, don't just pursue the good life.

[45 : 36] That group of people basically said, we're not going to just pursue the good life. But we're going to pursue a life that is good. And there is a difference. The good life is one that follows all the idols and follows all the acclaim and follows all the reputation and the money and follows all these things so we can accumulate all these things so we can have a good life that's filled with all the things that we want, our ambitions, our dreams.

But what that group of people were doing is not pursuing a good life. They were pursuing a life that is good, which is different. A life that is good means one that is with purpose, with meaning, with true joy, true conviction, and true contentment.

And only followers of Jesus can have that. And that's why the Christian message is offensive. So I've led you to believe that it's easy, it's not.

And it's insulting because some of you think, well, that's important. Those things are important. And this is what Julian prayed at the beginning, that there are no other gods before him. There is no one even around him, followed just him and nothing else.

I hope the message ministers to you in some way. And I pray that this time next week we'll come back and we'll look a little bit more like Jesus than we did today. So that if someone was to imitate next week's you, they would look a little bit more like Jesus than if they were to imitate you today.

[47 : 05] Bless you and I'll see you next week. Bye.