

BE KNOWN FOR RIGHT THINGS!

Today's Text: 1 Thess.1: 2-10

Extracts:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father... For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 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, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come [1 Thess. 1: 2-3, 8-10]

Alfred Nobel (1833-1896) was a Swedish chemist and engineer who invented dynamite, a powerful explosive used for blasting.¹ In the year 1888, his brother, Ludvig, died while visiting France. A French newspaper erroneously published Alfred's obituary, saying, "The merchant of death is dead." It added, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday." Alfred was shocked by what he read and how he would be remembered. So, on 27 November 1895, a year before he died, he signed his last will and testament, setting aside the bulk of his estate to establish the Nobel Prizes, including one for peace. Today, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite for war and destruction is better known for Nobel prizes for peace and outstanding achievements in science, medicine, economics and literature.

But for that wrong obituary, how would Nobel have known that he was better known for wrong, not right things? You and I may not have such a privilege. So, what are you doing with your God-given opportunities to touch other people's lives? Are you going to be known for right things? In today's study, Paul commends believers in Thessalonica for their well-known good conduct. We have a great deal to learn from the story to guide us for the rest of our own sojourn here on earth. Let us read on.

¹ Story is based on the following source: "Alfred Nobel," *Wikipedia*, The free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Nobel

1. Background: Paul outlines the right things for which the Thessalonians were well known

There was a certain disciple at Joppa called Tabitha, which is translated as Dorcas. She was said to be a woman “full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” [Acts 9: 36]. She fell ill and died. She was washed up and laid in the upper room, preparatory to her burial. Then word came to the disciples around her that Peter was ministering nearby at Lydda. So, they sent two disciples to him, imploring him not to delay to come to Joppa [vv. 37-38]. Peter came with the messengers and went straight to the upper room where the body of Dorcas lay. We are told, “And all the widows stood by him weeping, *showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them*” [v. 39]. You can then imagine the joy of those widows when God raised Dorcas from the dead through Peter.

Of interest to us in that story is what dead Dorcas was known for among the widows. The word of God says, “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” [Prov. 27: 2]. What the widows remembered about Dorcas was not her age or beauty or education (or the lack of it) but her works of charity that they were going to miss. Dorcas was known for the right thing.

But we also know that every praise is not wholesome. Some people call evil good and good evil, put darkness for light or bitter for sweet, and vice versa [Is. 5: 20]. No matter the tricks we try to play, even our praise singers soon get tired! The best place to hide is in the open. Who can ever smell his/her bad breath? Therefore, it is in our long-term interest to be known for right things.

Today, God has put you in a privileged position as a spouse, parent or dependant. You may be a boss in a big office or a top political leader. You may be pastoring a large congregation or a fledging splinter group. You may be running a charitable organisation or a social cause. You may even be a lowly housekeeper in a big person’s house. *What are you known for? Are you living in a bubble of self-delusion, boasting, like the Pharisee, about your hypocrisy [Lk 18: 9-14]? Or, can God boast of you as He did to Satan concerning Job [Job 1: 6-8]? What right things are you known for? What are you doing about those wrong things in your life that the Lord hates [Prov. 6: 16-19]? How much time do you think you have left before the return of the Christ to judge the world? Those and more are the questions that we shall attempt to answer in today’s study.*

Paul’s First Epistle to the Thessalonians becomes very helpful to us. Paul wrote it presumably after departing from Thessalonica to return to Corinth [Acts 17: 1-10; 18: 1]. In the first chapter of this letter, which we are focusing on today, Paul reminisces about the right things that the Thessalonians were doing that endeared them to him. Paul wrote, “For *from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward*

God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything [1 Thess. 1: 8]. Paul focused on their ***“work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father”*** [v. 3]. What they did was not to impress people but God Himself. Let us examine those right things in some little detail as follows:

a) *Work of faith*

Paul remembered “without ceasing” the work of faith of the Thessalonians [v. 3]. ***Work of faith can be defined as anything we do in total obedience to the word of God*** for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” [Rom. 10: 17]. In the “Faith Hall of Fame” [Heb. 11: 4-40], we can have a glimpse of the work of faith by believers through history. All of them through faith [33-35]:

Subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong... women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

The Thessalonians gave up idol worship and turned “to serve the living and true God” [1 Thes. 1: 9]. You can imagine the jeers and indignation they had had to bear among the Gentiles. Yet, they never gave up. In no time, their work of faith became well known.

True believers are to walk by faith and not by sight [2 Cor. 5: 7]. That means ***you should not walk according to your five senses but in accordance with what God tells you to do. It may not make sense to logic or commonsense but “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”*** [1 Cor. 1: 25]. For example, Jehoshaphat went to war against multiple nations by putting praise singers in front and he won a decisive battle without throwing a single weapon because he believed and followed the word of God that said that the battle was the Lord’s, not his [2 Chron. 20: 1-25].

b) *Labour of love*

Paul also commended the believers in the Thessalonian church for their labour of love [1 Thess. 1: 3]. To love is indeed hard work! Speaking to His disciples on the subject, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you... By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” [Jn 13: 34-35]. ***To love Christ is to keep His word. Then His Father will love you and you will become indwelt by the Father and the Son*** [Jn 14: 15-23].

You cannot obtain or sustain that kind of love by will power or own effort without the presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit for “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” [1 Cor. 12: 3]. *That means that you give, not because you can but because you care.*² *That means that you forgive, not because the offender has apologised but because Christ has said that you have to do so, no matter how many times in a day the same person has offended you* [Matt. 18: 21-22]. That is hard labour! That was what the Thessalonians did.

c) *Patience of hope*

Paul also commended their “patience of hope” [1 Thess. 1: 3]. *When you know for sure what to expect and when and how it will come, nobody needs to preach patience to you. The challenge comes when you have an idea of what to expect but not of when and how it will come.*

For example, God told David that he was going to recover all that he and his men had lost at Ziklag that had been raided and destroyed by enemy forces. But David was not told when and how he would recover them. So, when he set out with his troops to “recover all,” he did not know which way to go or how. Out of exhaustion, two hundred out of his six hundred men dropped out by a brook. He came across a dying Egyptian whom he took time and pains to revive with food and water. Patience and time were running out! As it turned out, however, it was that revived Egyptian, an abandoned servant of an Amalekite, that gave useful leads that helped David to recover all [1 Sam. 30: 8-19].

Perhaps, we all need patience so as to allow our wings to grow and mature before we can aim to soar to higher heights of success and victory. Patience implies not only waiting for the Lord but also waiting on Him, i.e., serving the Lord while waiting for Him [Ps. 37: 7,9].

Paul examined what the Thessalonians were known for within the context of the Second Coming of Jesus to judge the world. We know for sure that He will come but we do not know when. We are told He will come unexpectedly, as a thief in the night [1 Cor. 5:2]. So, unless our work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope are endearing and enduring, we stand the risk of not reaching, not to talk of crossing the finishing line. So, what lessons do we take out of that strong message?

2. Lessons for us

The following need to be noted, among others:

² “Give because you care not because you can!” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 15 No. 2: 2 Feb. 2014; <http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume-15/GivebecauseyoucarenotbecauseyoucanVol15No22Feb2014.pdf>

a) *Everybody is not doing wrong things!*

One very popular slogan that one hears around is, “If you can’t beat them, join them!” That suggests that we should join others to do evil because it no longer pays to be virtuous in an increasingly wicked world. It could be for political reasons (so as to win more popular votes) or peer pressure (so as to belong to the Joneses). The truth is that everybody is not doing it!³

Jeremiah was in pain over the same matter, and he took it to God. “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?” he asked God. “Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?” God answered him back with the following question: “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?” [Jer. 12: 1-5]. In other words, look up to God’s standards instead of downgrading yourself to the ways of the world. Why walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the path of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful? Why are you not among the blessed that delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night? That way, you will stand out like a tree planted by the rivers of water, with evergreen leaves, that brings forth fruits in due season; and whatever you do will prosper [Ps. 1: 1-3]. Everybody is not doing it.

b) *Somebody has to stand up for right things!*

Perhaps it is easier said than done. We may succumb to pressures from family, friends and peers to go with the crowd to do evil. Unfortunately, as the popular saying goes, “Success has a hundred fathers but failure is an orphan!” The moment we run into trouble arising from unrighteous choices, our huge crowd of “admirers” will disappear and the soul that sins shall die [Ezek. 18: 20]! Therefore, ***somebody has to stand up for the right things and why are you not that person?***

For example, when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made an image of gold to be worshipped by all, the law was quite clear that whoever refused to do so would be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. All the Jews in captivity in Babylon at the time were also affected but only three young Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, defied the order. Even when the king threatened them, they defiantly told him, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery fire ... but if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” You know the rest of the story. God rescued the young men unharmed. The king acknowledged that “there is no other God who can deliver like this.” Then

³ “Everybody is not doing it.” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 2 No. 20: 29 July 2001; http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_2/PDFs/Everybodyisnotdoingit.pdf

he promoted the three young men [**Dan. 3: 1-30**]! Somebody has to stand up for right things. Why are you not that somebody?

Jesus taught His disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*” [**Matt. 5: 14-16**]. *The light of believers in the Thessalonian church shone to Paul and the Gentile world through their work of faith, labour of love and patience of hope. Therefore, they were on the right course among those waiting for the return of Jesus. Are you prepared to be among that elite group of true believers? That is Paul’s message to us all in today’s Bible verses.*

3. Conclusion: Focus on Christ’s imminent return!

Of the Thessalonians, Paul noted how they had 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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come [**1 Thess. 1: 9-10**]. Therefore, *the end of the matter is the return of the Lord on the last day.*

He is on the way! The signs are all over the place [**Matt. 24: 3-28; Lk 21: 25-28**]. On the need for our patience of hope, Jesus said [**vv. 34-36**]:

But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Be known for those things (the work of faith, the labour of love and the patience of hope) that can make you look forward with joyful assurance to that day that you will face Jesus. How will you feel when He will say to you, “Come you blessed of My Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” [**Matt. 25: 34**]?

So, be known *only* for right things.