

## **CHANGED BY JESUS: FOUR CHANGES JESUS MAKES (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10)**

Since I am a life-long Baptist, I can joke about Baptists. Do you know how many Baptists it takes to change a light-bulb? Change! What do you mean change?!

Most people are not receptive to change. We fear it. We resist it. We try to avoid it, but change is inevitable. How many have had the experience of looking in the mirror and wondering, “Who’s that old stranger? I don’t recognize him or remember her?” None of us look like we did 20, 30, 40 years ago. Time changes us, and it didn’t ask our permission.

The Bible teaches that Jesus changes us, and you may not have realized it at the time, but when you said “Yes” to His call to follow Him, you gave Him permission to change you. Every Jesus-follower has been and is being changed by Him.

If you haven’t been changed from the inside out, you must be following someone other or something other than Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 1 we get a picture of a group of people who had been changed by Jesus. We are going to be looking at vv. 6-10. In v. 6 we find the words, “You became.” Those words, “you became,” are repeated in v. 7. The words “you turned” show up in v. 9. This is change-language.

Based on the experience of those to whom Paul wrote, we are going to quickly examine four changes Jesus makes in our lives and the lives of those who trust Him.

### **Change #1: Because of Him, We Now Model Our Faith.**

Look back at vv. 6-7. The Bible teaches that we become like what give our attention to and what we worship. Listen to these words of warning in Psalm 115:4-8.

- <sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of human hands.
- <sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.
- <sup>6</sup> They have ears, but do not hear;  
noses, but do not smell.
- <sup>7</sup> They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk;  
and they do not make a sound in their throat.
- <sup>8</sup> Those who make them become like them;  
so do all who trust in them.

Those who worship false gods become like them, and thus they lose the ability to speak truth, see truth, hear truth, smell truth, feel truth, and follow truth.

Instead of trusting idols, the psalmist gave the alternative move to make in v. 9, “O Israel, trust in the LORD.” When we trust Jesus, we become increasingly more like Him. We begin to:

- think like Him,
- speak like Him,
- act like Him, and
- live like Him.

We love what He loves, and we value what He values.

The believers in Thessalonica patterned their lives after both Paul and Jesus. Like those two, they received the word of God with much affliction and the joy of the Holy Spirit. Does that sound odd, maybe even contradictory? How can you experience affliction and yet be joyful? It is not only possible, it is the inevitable and eventual experience of those who follow Jesus.

Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” He added, “Blessed are you **when** (not if but when) others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account.” He then tells us why we can respond in that way, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12). We are in good company when we are persecuted for having taken a stand for Christ.

When we stand up joyfully under mistreatment for the sake of Jesus and the gospel, we are following an example, and at the same time, we become an example to other believers. That was the case of the Thessalonian believers. Look back at v. 7.

Did you have a hero growing up? Was there someone you looked up to and wanted to emulate? I did. He wore #12 on his jersey, and I had a poster of him above my bed. He entered the NFL in 1969 as a 27-year-old rookie because after graduating from the Naval Academy, he spent four years in the Navy. Even though he got a late start, he set numerous records as he and his coach, Tom Landry, led the Dallas Cowboys to two Super Bowl wins.

He was everything that Christian moms in the 1970’s would want their son to become: clean-cut, respectful, a family man, and a committed Christian. There were many boys and young men in the 70’s who, like me, looked up to Roger Staubach.

Who do kids idolize today? Who are their heroes? Is it pop stars, entertainers? I really don’t know.

Last year, a Delta Force Lieutenant Colonel wrote a book entitled, *Where Have All the Heroes Gone?* His name is Jeff Tiegs, and the Amazon advertisement for his book reads:

What has kept him going, what guides him still, are stories — of David, the slingshot sniper who downed a giant, of a pregnant virgin bride, a rogue prophet, a betrayed liberator. To Tiegs, these ancient tales echo within every human story. He has followed them through holy lands and combat zones where he collected a few stories of his own.

In *Where Have All the Heroes Gone?*, Tiegs retells familiar Bible stories through the lens of a trained warrior. He weaves personal experiences and military exploits among the threads, inviting readers to take their own pilgrimage through the front lines of faith.

We all need heroes, and I don't think we ever outgrow that need. Find your heroes in the pages of the Bible. Make Jesus your ultimate hero. As you follow His example, you will become an example for others.

## **Change #2: Because of Him, We Now Evangelize Our World.**

Look at v. 8. Jesus had so made a difference in their lives that they couldn't keep silent about it. The words "sounded forth" invoke the image of a trumpet blaring. It is worth noting that these Christians did not toot their own horn. Instead, they trumpeted forth the good news of Jesus and the salvation that can be found in Him.

Telling others about the Lord, the gospel, and your faith are not things reserved for a special class of Christians. That is a task for all of us.

Jesus gave His first followers a command coupled with a promise. He said, "Follow Me." That is the command. He tied that command to a promise: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Fishing for men is evangelism.

If we claim to follow Jesus and yet we never fish for men, either Jesus is guilty of false advertising, or we are mistaken, and we aren't really following Him.

According to v. 8, the word sounded forth from the believers in Thessalonica to Macedonia and Achaia. On the map, Macedonia was north and east of Thessalonica, and Achaia was south. Their witness went far and wide. Using a bit of exaggerated language, Paul claims, "Your faith has gone everywhere."

We have means of communication that those followers of Jesus did not have. With that device you carry in your back pocket, on your hip, or in your purse, you can contact people almost anywhere in the world.

Can you imagine what Paul could have done and would have done with today's technology. He would have sent emails, texts, tweets, created podcasts, and streamed his sermons.

Paul did what could with what he had. What are you doing with what you have?

The Christian life isn't just about you and Jesus. Your Christian life isn't just a personal, private affair. We are to take our faith public, and together, we will take the gospel globally.

There is a third change.

## **Change #3: Because of Him, We Now Repent of Our Past.**

Look at v. 9. According to Paul, he was getting reports from people who had not yet embraced the faith that the believers in Thessalonica had turned from idols to serve the living God. This was huge news. To understand how big this was, we need to know that idol worship was everywhere in the ancient world, especially the Roman Empire. The people there in that day were very religious. Temples and shrines were always in view.

NT Wright, in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians wrote:

The gods of Greek and Roman paganism were everywhere. If you were going to plant a tree, you would pray to the relevant god. If you were going on a business trip, a quick visit to the appropriate shrine was in order. If you or your son or

daughter was getting married, serious and costly worship of the relevant deity was expected. At every turn in the road, the gods were there . . . you could never do too much in the way of placating them, making sure you'd get them on your side.

According to Professor Wright, to not worship the gods was unheard of in the Greek and Roman culture. He said that would be like people today being asked to quit using motor cars, computers, and telephones. Ask a teenager or young adult to give up his or her cellphone. See how far you get.

When the Thessalonian believers trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, they quit praying to false gods, and they quit making offerings at pagan altars. They turned. I looked up the Greek word Paul used which is translated as *turned*. It means, "An immediate and decisive change, consequent upon a deliberate choice; [it] is a voluntary act in response to the presentation of truth."

In 2019, several men and I went to Russia. We flew into Moscow. That night we had dinner with several of our IMB personnel. The next day we went back to the airport, got on a plane, and flew 600 miles south to the city of Volgograd. We met with a group of students who are part of a missionary training school. They each shared their salvation testimony. Here in America, we often talk about the day we believed, the day we trusted Jesus. They didn't do that. Each of them talked about the day they repented.

We have something to learn from our young, Russian brothers and sisters. It is possible to believe without repenting. James wrote about the inadequacy of believing without repenting. In James 2:19, he wrote, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" The demons believe without repenting. I am afraid there are many people who call themselves Christians, but they have believed without repenting, without turning from their sin. While it is possible to believe without repenting, it is not possible to repent without believing.

You might think to yourself, "Well those believers in Thessalonica turned from idols to serve God. I don't believe in any of their gods; so, I don't need to turn like they did." Don't kid yourself.

Not quite 500 years ago, John Calvin wrote that the human heart is "an idol factory." We are making and end up worshiping idols routinely. Money is an idol for many, as is one's job or vocation. Our culture worships sex, power, and status. We have made idols out of sports and recreation.

Tim Keller wrote, "Sin isn't only doing bad things, it is fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than God."

If God helps you to identify something in your life that has become an idol, turn from it; repent and serve God's purposes and what He has for you to do.

#### **Change #4: Because of Him, We Now Wait for Our Savior.**

We close with v. 10. These believers were waiting for the return of Jesus, the one who was raised from the dead, the one who rescued them from God's coming wrath against sin.

According to the NT, waiting is not a passive thing. We do not sit down, twiddle our thumbs, gaze at our navel, or watch the grass grow and wait for Jesus to come back.

If you put the end of v. 9 and the beginning of v. 10 together, you see that they were serving God while they waited. We are called to wait actively. In Matthew 24-25, Jesus tells several stories to hammer home the truth that we need to be ready for His return. Just remember, if we stay ready, we don't have to get ready. One way to stay ready is to keep serving Him. If He finds us serving Him when He returns, He will reward us well.

I wonder, for what are you waiting?

In the last book that he wrote, *O the Places You'll Go*, Theodore Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, issued a word of warning:

Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find, for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind. You can get so confused that you'll start in to race down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace and grind on for miles cross weird-ish wild space, headed, I fear, toward a most useless place. The Waiting Place . . . for people just waiting. Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go, or the mail to come, or the rain to go, or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow, or the waiting around for a Yes or No, or waiting for their hair to grow. Everyone is just waiting. Waiting for the fish to bite, or waiting for the wind to fly a kite, or waiting around for Friday night, or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake, or a pot to boil, or a Better Break, or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants, or a wig with curls, or Another Chance. Everyone is just waiting.

That is not the kind of waiting to which God has called us. We are to keep serving, keep loving, keep using the gifts God has given us in the place to which He has called us as we look for the return of Jesus. Jesus didn't say when, but He did promise He would. So, we wait actively. We want Jesus to find us about the Father's business when He returns.

I have heard it said that when a man gets married, he thinks his beautiful bride will never change. When a woman gets married, she thinks her head-strong husband will change. And they both are wrong.

If you are a Jesus-follower, you are part of the Church, the Bride of Christ. Jesus is the Groom, and He knows His Bride will change because His Spirit is at work doing the changing. Let's work with God instead of against Him. Let Him change you to look more and more like Jesus.