

# Building A Church Of Thessalonica For The 21st Century | Part 4 | True Ministry | Dr. Madana Kumar Series

**Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar, Phd on Feb 27, 2024**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:1

**Denomination:** Evangelical/Non-Denominational

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**Summary: In the fourth part of the series Dr. Madana Kumar examines some aspects of the Ministry Thessalonian Church that made it a Model church. What is True Ministry?**

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This is Part 4 of the Series of studies on 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Visit <https://youtu.be/umaQ68xYVSg> for a video/audio version of the sermon

Good morning. We will continue our study of the epistles to Thessalonians today.

In this series so far, we have seen that the church at Thessalonica was built based on the Macedonian call. The formation of the church was the culmination of a series of God orchestrated events in Paul's second missionary journey. This church became a model church, and we are looking into some of the factors that contributed to that status of the Thessalonian Church. We saw that the foundation of building a model church is the fact that they had hope in the second coming of Jesus Christ, and they were in high level of anticipation about that event. Thus these epistles become a guideline for all believers who need to be prepared for Jesus' second coming. Or in other words, how to be a true church. We saw that there were four pillars of true church.

1. True Transformation
2. True Ministry
3. True Fellowship
4. True Evangelism

In the last part of the series, part 3, we looked into the aspect of True Transformation. We saw that True transformation is a cycle of Hearing and accepting the word, imitating Christ, becoming an example and then sharing the gospel with others.

In this part 4 of the series, we will look into the second pillar of the true church namely true ministry.

At the core of the teachings of Christianity are Faith, Hope and Love. Paul starts the letter by commending them on an excellent display of these three core elements in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 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,. Later on Paul asks them to use these three core elements to

shield us from darkness. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. True ministry is built around these three. True ministry is one that strengthens the faith, continues to give hope and teaches us to live one another. Paul sees all the three of them in the church at Thessalonica.

In part 2 of this series we examined the hope that the Thessalonian church had. We established that one of the main reasons for their success is their hope in the salvation and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In the next part of the series, part 5, we will examine the core element of love in more detail.

So in this part 4, let us focus on faith. Paul is very concerned about the faith of the Thessalonian church. As we have seen in Part 1 of the series, Paul had an opportunity to teach them personally only for about three weeks. Once he reaches Athens, his concerns for Thessalonian church grows and he sends Timothy to see if their faith has reduced, and to exhort them in their faith. He wanted to know how the church is doing, and he asks his trusted apprentice to go and check on the church.

It is interesting to see how we assess how a church is doing vs how Paul assessed how the church is doing. Yesterday, I was in another city speaking to the professional group of a mega church. A Christian brother invited me for speaking at the session, and after he asked about my availability and willingness, he sensed that I was still reluctant because I knew I had a commitment here, and traveling back from another city in the evening and speaking at this church in the morning was not a very comfortable thought to me. I realise that I am getting older. That is when this dear brother used his final pitch to close the deal. He said " Brother, this is a mega church with more than 10000 members" . I was on speakerphone and Leslie was listening to the conversation. She shook her head, and once the phone call was over, she asked "what has the number of people in the church got to do with your preaching?". I am not assigning any motive to this dear brother who provided an opportunity to me to minister. I am thankful to him for inviting me. But I am bringing this up to highlight how we assess the health of a church. When you meet someone new in any Christian gathering, at some point or the other, the conversation will turn to "which church do you attend, or where do you worship". If your answer is that you worship in one of the mega churches, or one of the well known traditional churches, the conversation will veer away to something else. But if your answer is that you worship in a small congregation that not many have heard about, the very next question is "how big is the church? How many families worship", or something to that effect. If you meet someone who was part of our congregation in the past, the most likely question is "hey how is BBF doing, has the congregation grown, do you have a pastor now? Etc.". You see, by our worldly standards, when we want to know how a congregation is doing, the size becomes an important factor. The popularity of the Pastor becomes an important factor. The size of the building becomes an important factor. But not for Paul. His concern is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

Paul's concern was not about the numbers. His concern was not whether the congregation has grown or

not, his concern was not whether new families have joined the congregation, his concern was not whether the church had a big building, his concern was not even whether the congregation had a great pastor. His concern was about their faith. He sent Timothy to strengthen their faith. He sent Timothy because he was worried that they might have become weak in their faith. That is true ministry, when the leaders are concerned primarily about the faith of the congregation.

And Paul is delighted when he receives confirmation through Timothy that not only his apprehensions were misplaced, but in reality they have grown in their faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. In this passage Paul is delighted with the good news, and he is comforted about their faith. Verse 8 is beautiful. Paul says, now we live because you stand fast in the Lord. The news that the Thessalonian church is strong in their faith, gives Paul a new life and vigour. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul says We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. We are bound to give thanks to the Lord because your faith has not only sustained but has grown exceedingly.

This is true ministry. When you are able to strengthen the faith of the congregation. When the congregation grows in faith. But this does not happen by accident. It requires the leaders to do at a minimum the following.

1. True ministry calls for bold preaching and teaching. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 says as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. There are three things Paul highlights about his teaching. Exhortation, Comforting and Charging. All of us go through difficulties and trials through the week, and we are normally delighted when we come to church, because we feel comforted. Hence many preachers set their teachings only to the aspect of comforting. It is true that we need comforting, but the hard fact is that if all we seek is comfort from the teachings from the pulpit, we are mistaken. If we are looking for numerical growth, focus on comfort alone will work. Focus only on the promises of God will work. That is how prosperity gospel flourishes. Bold preaching requires us to convey the good news and the bad news. Paul does commend the congregation for their faith, and at the same time, he highlights the perils of not accepting the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Paul comforts them with the hope that comes from the correct understanding of the second coming of Christ, but exhorts them to be prepared for it by being holy, shunning sin, and lead righteous lives (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). He affirms the fact that the Lord is faithful and will guard them, but warns them against falling prey to false teachings and rumours (2 Thessalonians 2:2). He makes his views clear on the issue of work and idleness, and exhorts them to stay away from people who are idle (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). He is gentle with them like a nursing mother (1 Thessalonians 2:7), but charges them like a father (1 Thessalonians 2:11). True ministry of the word has to balance between exhortation, comfort and charging. That is what makes faith strong. That might not get you numbers to become a mega church, but that will make your congregation a faith based congregation, just as the church at Thessalonica was.

2. True ministry demands leaders to set personal example for the congregation. True ministry happens

when leaders exhibit authenticity and transparency through example. In Part 3 we saw that setting an example precedes sharing the gospel with others. Paul gave a twist to the traditional walk-the-talk and practice-what-you-preach to make it talk-your-walk and -preach-what-you-practice. Paul sets an example for bold preaching in 1 Thessalonians 2:2 and 2:4 . In Part 1 of this series we saw that Paul reached Thessalonica after his stay at Philippi. And we know that his stay at Philippi was not a walk in the park or a vacation. He was arrested and put in jail. He was persecuted. But what does he do when he is out of prison, he reaches Thessalonica to do the same thing. Preach the gospel despite persecution and threats and suffering. That is a great example of bold preaching, despite resistance. I believe it is by design that the world is designed to resist the gospel. Those of you who are familiar with exercise jargon know about resistance bands. Those are elastic bands used during exercise and they are available at different strengths. Leslie and I use them occasionally when we workout. What is the role of the resistance bands? They make your muscles and core stronger. When you are in a boat, and you are rowing, it is the resistance that the water provides which makes the boat move forward. I love riding motor bikes and one of the wishes in my bucket list is to ride a Harley Davidson bike to Palakkad and back. Unfortunately Leslie had said that there is no way she is going to be part of that journey. A Harley Davidson bike is around 300 KG heavy. The weight provides high resistance to the rider, and that resistance is what provides the bike with its comfort and power and agility. It is that resistance which gives it momentum to move forward, and stay steady under rough road and weather conditions. So you see resistance is good. When there is resistance to the gospel, Gospel will get stronger. Hence let us not worry about the current developments in our nation regarding the sharing of gospel. It will ultimately emerge stronger for all the resistance it is facing, not just in our country, but all across the world.

So Paul sets an example for bold and fearless preaching. We saw how Paul exhorted the Thessalonians against idleness. Paul sets an example for hard work and diligence before he exhorts others not to be idle. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 he explains how they took all measures to ensure that they were not a burden to anyone, and they earned their living by hard work while they were doing the ministry. This is an excellent example to follow.

3. True Ministry is founded on Prayer and Thanksgiving. Paul has been fervently praying for the Thessalonian church. He starts the letter by thanking the Lord for the Thessalonian church and praying for them (1 Thessalonians 1:2). He continues to pray for them in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. He prays and sets an example before he asks them to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And finally he asks for their prayer for himself and his ministry team in 2 Thessalonians 3:1. Pastor Augustine has preached several sermons here at this very pulpit about the importance of prayer in Christian life. Let us take the example of the Thessalonian church and become a praying church.

So let us summarise today's learnings.

1. True Ministry is the second pillar of a True Church.
2. True ministry happens when Faith, Hope and Love are strengthened in the congregation.
3. Faith is the true measure of a true church. Not numbers or anything else.
4. Strengthening of faith requires Bold and fearless preaching and teaching, setting personal examples and Prayer and thanksgiving.

Let us pray.