1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 2We always give thanks to God for all of you as we make mention of you in our prayers, 3because we constantly remember before God our Father your work produced by faith, your labor produced by love, and your patient endurance produced by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is an epistle, literally it was a letter from the Apostle Paul to various Christians. In this case, the group of Christians he is addressing are those gathered in the city of Thessalonica. Paul had managed during his second missionary journey to spend some time at Thessalonica. By our reckonings he spent anywhere from 2 to 3 weeks because we know he only managed to visit the Jewish Synagogue three times before the Jewish leadership rebelled at this message of Jesus and had Paul and companions chased from town.

I think of that, 2 or 3 weeks was all Paul could spend there. Yet what we learn is that a vibrant, faithful and yes, Christ centered church was growing there. It is all attributed to the power and wonder of God’s Word. Yes, the message of Jesus as the Savior had an impact. That tells us it wasn’t Paul that was the factor. For that matter, Paul himself claims that he was not a polished speaker. There is even a record that during one of Paul’s sermons a young man fell asleep and actually fell out of a window! Yes I know, your pastor drones on too. Yet, it is clear. God’s Word has had a deep impact on the people of Thessalonica.

Please note that this letter may be the first Epistle that Paul wrote. The other contender is Galatians. Think of that. We have here one of the first letters inspired by the Lord, letters that will be gathered together by the early Christians and accepted as the Word of the Lord. That’s right, by the time of John’s Revelation, written in 68 A.D. the gospels, and the epistles had already been collected by the early church as the authoritative Word of God! We think this may have been the first Epistle with the Gospels already written and well established.

Let’s look at what is said here to this relatively new congregation founded in a wide open important Roman town. Our theme will be: **A GLIMPSE OF TRUE FAITH!**

As we look at the first verses we simply see the standard format for any letter of the day. In today’s world, we put our name and personal greetings at the end of the letter but in those days it was customary to put that greeting and name at the beginning of the letter. That is exactly what we find. What a beautiful greeting: **“Paul, Silas, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

It is already the next words that begin to teach us more and more about the people here who have declared faith in the Lord. It is clear that Paul is impressed by what the Lord has done. He states: **“We always give thanks to God for all of you as we make mention of you in our prayers.”** Yes, all thanks is given to the Lord God. Although we are not told specifically what is prayed about the Thessalonians one thing I think we can say. These were souls under the care of Paul. These were souls precious to the Lord. I have no doubt that on a regular basis, Paul included these souls in his prayers asking the Lord to watch over them and to help them in the struggles they were going to have because of the faith. That truth is brought out all the more as we look at the next verse.

Verse 3, is to me an important and most revealing verse. It says this: **“Because we constantly remember before God our Father your work produced by faith, your labor produced by love, and your patient endurance produced by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** I say these words are important because in truth, they reveal the nature of what our Christian faith is about. Let’s look more closely.

What becomes clear is that Paul is expressing thanks to God for what has taken place in this congregation of believers. Here is this group, served by a Pastor for just a short time, and yet here is this group that simply and evidently clings to the wonder of Jesus. Paul knows all of this because he had sent Timothy to check up on them. When Timothy returns, he speaks of an active body, a church that is willing to share the message they have and to do so fearlessly. For that matter, I am going to tell you that I highly suspect that the three phrases used here to describe the Thessalonian believers may have been how Timothy reported it. Paul is saying that they are giving thanks for this faith, remembering these believers before God. And if you want to ask why they were remembering these people the next phrases sum up everything. The first phrase is: **“Remembering…your work produced by faith.”**

Doesn’t seem like it says much, but that would be shortsighted. The first thing that comes to Paul’s heart as he thinks of these believers is their work, not just any work, but their work produced by faith. It is important that we dig into these words and what they say.

To begin, the word for work here is important. Here is what Reineker/ Rogers says in his book: Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament. “The word refers to active work. The word could also involve the results of activity, i.e. ‘achievement’. The word comprehends the whole Christian life work, as it is ruled and energized by faith.” That is a mouthful. Here is a phrase that literally serves to summarize what is produced by faith.

I am not sure exactly where to start if I want to summarize the very impact and product of this faith. Perhaps I can just start by using words Paul has already stated in his opening: These people understood God’s grace. They knew the love of Jesus who gave his life on the cross. They didn’t use this grace as a reason to sin, as an excuse for godlessness, rather they used this grace as the motive for works of service: every work of service they could give to the Lord. Not because they had to, but rather because of the grace of God that filled their lives.

Next I would speak of the peace of God that was theirs. They knew they were forgiven in Jesus. They lived that forgiveness. They had in their lives that “peace” that can only come from God. Peace because you know He loves you. Peace because you know this life is but the valley of death you must walk through keeping in sight the joy and wonder of the eternal life promised and fulfilled in Jesus. This is the peace of God that even in the midst of the greatest trauma, the most difficult of hardships, yes, even with the deadliest of diseases, you know God is with you and whatever happens is to the glory of his name.

These are people who grasp what Jesus is about. Who thrive on the name and wonder of Jesus! People like many of the faithful Christians I know. People filled with **“works produced by faith.”**

But that is not all that is said. The next phrase rings out too. It says, **“Remembering…your labor produced by love.”** Already here, if you are going to be a student of the Scripture you are going to have to realize that the word used here is not the same as “work.” Here again is what Reineker/Rogers says of this word: “The word denotes arduous, wearying toil involving sweat and fatigue. The word emphasizes the weariness which follows on this straining of all of one’s powers to the utmost.” Again what an absolute mouthful. Not simple deeds here, not just some sort of doing, but rather labor, hard, heavy, difficult, and strenuous labor. Here is, no doubt, the reference to the very conditions surrounding their faith in Jesus.

Thessalonica is a harbor town, a main harbor town for the Roman Empire. A vast majority of whatever was shipped out of Rome and what was shipped to Rome went through Thessalonica. Add to that fact that the *Via Egnatius,* one of the major highways of the Empire passed through. It was an important city. It was a city of some 200,000 people. Note, that whatever you wanted could probably be found in Thessalonica. So note that here is a group of Christians who stood opposed to, spoke against the wild life and false god’s found before them. They found no favor among the Romans. The Jewish population that hated this message of Jesus, when it could, persecuted these Christians. I think you can now begin realizing why this word is used.

It is used and note that this word is connected to the word for love. Yes, this labor, this hard work, this sweat and stress was the product of the love of God, the love poured upon them in Jesus. That love in turn overflowed in their lives. In their enthusiasm for Jesus they worked at spreading the message of Jesus. Here is what is said in 1Thes. 1:7-9 about these faithful believers. **“So that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Indeed, the word of the Lord has resounded from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith in God has become known. As a result, we do not need to say anything, because they themselves inform us about what kind of reception we received from you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”**

Those are truly words of compliment. In other words, though being faithful and true was difficult, they did it because the love of God filled them and they in turn loved back. Maybe in some cases, that is our problem. We don’t have to fight and labor to be believers. We look around and see churches, churches everywhere and maybe we just determine that it’s all good and well. But be careful. Your faith is under attack. Many of you have maybe noticed how your children or grandchildren want nothing to do with the Lord and faith? We tend to think nothing of gross sins, immoral lives and patent crudeness. And sadly, in many cases, those things are among us! Do you think the issue of lawlessness going around is new? In truth, lawlessness started among the liberal Christian churches who 40 years ago began to proclaim that the law of God was nothing anymore. We are now a feel good, do what you want society that says my truth is my truth and your truth is your truth and there isn’t really any absolute truth to be had. Welcome to the world and its ways. I fear that one day we too will learn all the more what this “labor produced by love” is all about.

Then our final phrase. **“Remembering…your patient endurance produced by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Again let’s turn to Reineker/Rogers for a deeper grasp. ”It is the spirit which bears things, not simply with resignation, but with blazing hope. It is the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory.” Again, it is a phrase that packs a punch.

I wonder in a way, if we haven’t as a people lost this wonder and power of “patient endurance.” We used to be a people who taught things like: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!” or “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” I am sure you can come up with a few such phrases like that that you used to hear and be guided by. Now its: “Oh no, Johnny fell. Do you need a counselor? How about some meds!” Now don’t get me wrong. I am not against medicine and counseling. Those should be in our arsenal of helps. But they should not be the first line defense. You don’t get a whole new motor when all you need is new plugs or maybe you just need an oil change! We have forgotten to teach toughness to our kids as a part of life. It is important because in truth, each of us knows just how tough life can be. Well, let’s let the Thessalonians be our example of faith.

They were complimented for “patient endurance.” They were able to stick it out, not with dull resignation but with the hope of Jesus Christ as their guide. In other words, they knew they could never fail, never be defeated, never be beaten down all because of the sure and certain confidence we find in the salvation of Jesus. Seriously, what can’t we endure with Jesus on our side? People in the world die because they carry the name of Jesus and they die with happiness and joy in their heart. That’s what is being said here. There is strength, endurance and wonder to be found and had in Jesus! Do you know about it? Do you get it? Its source is that grace and peace we spoke of earlier. Grace and peace because Jesus has delivered us from sin and death and heaven is our home! That shades everything we are.

Quite a lesson isn’t it? Honestly, I didn’t even get to touch on the phrases found in the last few verses of this section, phrases that express even more joy and wonder. I knew as I was working and saw the depth of the words before us that such is all we would get to. But what wonder these words are. May you too, have it said of you: We remember your work produced by faith, your labor produced by love and your patient endurance produced by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ! To God be the glory. Amen.