

**Essential Marks of the Christian Life**  
*1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; February 12, 2023*

**Introduction:**

- Who's excited about the Super Bowl tonight?
- Who could care less?
- Even if you don't love football, I bet many of you will watch tonight because of the commercials. I love a good commercial.
- You could probably scroll through the rolodex in your mind and come up with your top 5 commercials of all time.
- In 2020, there was a Hyundai [commercial](#) that drew attention to some of the most recognizable things about Boston (both good and bad). It had a number of local celebrities in it: Chris Evans, John Krasinski, Rachel Dratch and Big Papi (David Ortiz). Two of those things are the challenges of parking in Boston and then a very recognizable thick, local accent (one that I don't have).
- Do you remember it? The "smaht pahk" commercial:
  - It starts showing a car trying to park in a tight space and there are a couple of locals commenting on this entire scene:
    - "Ah, look at this guy."
    - "He's not getting that cah in theyah."
    - "No suh."
  - When that car fails, another car pulls up, a Hyundai Sonata, driven by Johnny.
    - "Wicked cah. Is that new?"
    - "Hold on. Let me pahk it."
    - "Oh, you're not fittin ya cah in theyah."
    - He hops out of the car, clicks a button and says,
      - "Look who's got smaht pahk."
      - "Just hit the clickah; cah pahks itself."
      - "It's smaht. It's wicked smaht."
    - "I can pahk it anywhere: Dorchester ("pahked it"), Foxborough ("pahked it"), the Gahden ("pahked it"), Saugus ("pahked it"), Swampscott, Revere, the "hahbah. ("pahked it and unpahked it")"
    - "Kid, gamechangah."
  - And then it shows Big Pappi leaning out of an apartment saying, "You can't pahk theyah."
    - "He's got smaht pahk."
  - And when they realize it's Big Pappi they apologize and say, "Sorry about that, ya' bigness."
- The point:
  - "We thought it was a fun, charming and memorable way to tell people about this incredible new technology using **one of America's most-recognized and beloved regional accents**" (from Hyundai).

Transition:

- What should be the most recognizable (not accents) traits or marks of a genuine follower of Jesus?
- In our passage today, Paul gives thanks to God for three essential marks that point to the genuineness of their faith.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3.

#### “We give thanks...”

- To fully understand Paul’s thankfulness, I need to remind us of the context of this letter and of Paul’s relationship with the Thessalonians.
  - Acts 17 tells us that on Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey, he, Silas and Timothy went to Thessalonica and preached the gospel. And guess what? People responded and began to follow Jesus.
    - Jews
    - Many of the devout Greeks
    - Many of the leading women
  - But what happened?
    - Persecution began to arise in the city and so they had to leave the city.
  - Imagine how Paul felt. He viewed these new followers as family: spiritual children, brothers and sisters in Christ.
    - Read 1 Thess. 2:17-18
      - While Paul had left physically, mentally and emotionally they were on his mind.
    - Read 1 Thess. 3:1-3, 5
      - So Paul sent Timothy to check on them.
      - He was concerned that his labor had been in vain.
    - Read 1 Thess. 3:6-10
      - This letter is what Paul writes after hearing news of them from Timothy.
      - One of the key reasons he wrote this letter was to celebrate their early progress in the faith.
  - Imagine how the Thessalonians **felt** as they read this letter. They must have been so encouraged.
    - Sidebar: The power of giving thanks!
      - My suspicion is that you probably hear criticism in many areas of your life:
        - Live
          - From a spouse
          - From a parent
          - From a sibling
        - Learn

- From a teacher
    - From a principal
    - From a student
    - From a classmate
    - From a parent of a student
  - Work
    - From a boss
    - From a co-worker
    - From a client
  - Play
    - From a coach
    - From a teammate
  - How do you typically respond to criticism?
    - It can ruin your morning, day, evening, week.
    - It can make you not even want to be in those spaces and places.
  - How do you respond to gratitude and thankfulness?
    - Doesn't it feel good!
    - Hearing someone say, "Thank you." Reading a note from someone saying, "Thank you." Receiving a gift from someone saying, "Thank you."
  - Who in your life do you need to go and say, "Thank you" in a very meaningful way?
- **What characterizes Paul's prayer?**
  - "Always...constantly mentioning...remembering before our God and Father"
    - Paul's statement isn't mean to be taken literally. Rather, it reflects his habitual activity and attitude.
    - One commentator describes it this way: "Paul is a spiritual parent to the Thessalonians (2:7-8, 11), and just as little children are never far from the thoughts of their parents, so Paul is continually mindful of his children, the Thessalonians" (G. K. Beale).
  - Here's a challenge this week: pray for and work for better memories.
    - How can you better remember people's faces, names and needs?
    - How can you grow in this with the people in your Community Group?
    - Our giving thanks is tied to our remembrance of people and needs.
- **Who does Paul give thanks to?**
  - Why does Paul give thanks to God?
    - If you see my wife doing something wicked awesome and you came to me and said, "Thank you for..." That wouldn't make any sense. I didn't do anything for you. You should be thanking Leigh. So why does Paul thank God? Because...
    - Paul gives thanks to God because God is the cause of the fruit in their

lives.

- Yes, Paul, Timothy and Silas preached the gospel.
  - Yes, the Thessalonians turned from idols and believed.
  - But God was at work in all of that. Grace, Grace, Grace.
  - Our salvation is a work of God's grace from beginning to end. He starts it and he will bring it to completion.
- **What does Paul give thanks for?**
    - Their Sunday morning attendance is not listed.
    - Their Community Group numbers are not listed.
    - How much money they've given is not listed.
    - One commentator draws attention to this and says, "Too often churches today tend to give thanks only for **visible** and **quantifiable** realities such as a new building, an increase in membership and an increase in giving. Paul gives thanks for more **unquantifiable** realities such as faith, love and hope, which are needed to inspire good works on the **visible** level" (G. K. Beale).

**Paul specifically gives thanks for three things, what I'm calling three essential marks of the Christian life.**

- The three:
  - Work of faith.
  - Labor of love.
  - Steadfastness of hope.
- What you probably hear ringing out are these three words: faith, love and hope. This is a common Pauline triad (cf. 1 Thess. 5:8; Rom. 5:2-5; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5).

*"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."* (1 Corinthians 13:13, ESV)

- Some have called these three "a brief definition of true Christianity" (Calvin) or the "whole of Christianity" (Bengel).
- I want to highlight a few things common to all three of these marks and then we're going to look at each one individually:
  - These are subjective genitives:
    - Faith, hope and love are that which motivates and produces Christian actions.
      - Work motivated and produced by faith.
        - Work that proceeds from their faith.
      - Labor motivated and produced by love.
        - Labor that proceeds from their love.
      - Endurance motivated and produced by hope.
        - Endurance that proceeds from their hope.
  - What's stressed by Paul actually not the faith, hope and love but rather the actions themselves: the work, the labor and endurance.

- As one commentator notes, “Visible Christian deeds and perseverance in spite of difficulty give witness to a genuine and enduring faith. Thus Paul gave thanks for a faith that was shown to be real by the evidence visible in the lives of the believers” (D. Michael Martin).
- These are not just passive or hidden or abstract values. They fleshed themselves out in their conduct; how they lived! They have concrete and practical results.
- These aren’t essential marks for the so-called “spiritual” Christian. These are the marks of anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus. What’s being described is a complete reorientation of our lives:
  - Vertically in faith toward God.
  - Outward in love toward others.
  - Future in the hope of Jesus’ return.

### **Mark #1: Work produced by faith.**

#### **What kind of work is Paul praising and how does faith produce this work?**

- What is the relationship between faith and works?
  - No one can be saved by works (cf. Eph. 2:4-9).
    - Faith is a response to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - But genuine faith produces works (cf. Eph. 2:10; James 2:14-17).
- Paul doesn’t define what works he is talking about. But his readers probably would’ve understood him referring to the totality of their Christian life that separated them from the pagan culture around them.
- In light of this, most take this to refer to “good works” which we are to give ourselves to. We’ll see Paul unpack these more as we continue through the letter.
- How can I think about good works?
  - Beyond the Horizon Vision: “This vision will come alive through bold prayer and action.”
  - 2023 Vision: “The blessing (BLESS) we bring will help people see: you are real, you are alive, you are unignorable.”
- Faith gives rise to love.

*“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:5–6, ESV)*

### **Mark #2: Labor prompted by love.**

#### **What kind of labor is Paul praising and how does love produce this labor?**

- “Work” and “labor” are synonyms but the word used for “labor” here is a slightly more intense word indicating strenuous work. This points to either the fatiguing nature of the work or the magnitude of exertion required (Stott).

*“For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:9, ESV; cf. 3:5)*

- Jesus is the perfect example of sacrificial love (John 13:34):
  - Love is hard, strenuous and exhausting
  - Love is patient.
  - Love is kind.
  - Love forgives even when it's wicked hard.
  - Love advocates.
  - Love is compassionate and caring.
  - Love respects and listens.
  - Love gives of self for others.
  - Love is not just an emotion. It's not just being sentimental. It's a LABOR!
- I would encourage you to think about love in both a vertical and horizontal sense:
  - Love God
  - Love your Neighbor
    - Pursuit #5: Serve with intentional love in the home, church and city.
    - Home
    - Church
      - Leaders (1 Thess. 5:13)
      - Members (1 Thess. 3:6, 12; 4:9)
      - Community Group
    - City
- 2023 Vision Prayer:
  - Move us out with urgent love, so that your Spirit's presence and power flood livings rooms, classrooms, and conference rooms.

### **Mark #3: Endurance inspired by hope.**

- Why does Paul address hope last instead of love?
  - I believe it's because Paul's letter is really concerned to address the end times (cf. 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:12, 19–20; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:1–11, 23–24).
- What is hope?
  - It's not the same as “I hope the Chiefs win the Super Bowl.”
  - Our hope is sure and guaranteed.
  - In some ways, hope is the same as faith but in the future tense.
  - Scripture:
    - Hope of Salvation (1 Thess. 5:8)
    - Hope of Glory (Col. 1:27)
    - Blessed Hope (Tit. 2:13)
    - Living Hope (1 Pet. 1:3; 15).

- Hope is found in our Lord Jesus Christ!
- Why does he draw attention to their endurance or steadfastness?
  - Hope and endurance are often connected (cf. Rom 8:20-25; 15:4, 13; 2 Thess. 1:4; Heb. 12:1; James 1:3;

*“Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.” (2 Thessalonians 1:4, ESV)*

- Life is hard. Life as a follower of Christ in a world that opposes God and the gospel is hard. Ministry is hard. Marriage is hard. Parenting is hard. Work is hard. Our culture in many ways doesn’t value endurance in relationship/jobs/ministry!
  - How do you keep going in obedience to Jesus when things are hard?
  - How can I ensure that I don’t just run hard for a few years but for a lifetime of following Jesus?
  - To cultivate endurance is to swim against the tide of our times.
- Endurance comes from hope.
  - Jesus purchased your endurance on the cross. It’s a gift.
  - Jesus empowers your endurance.
  - God gives the grace to endure.
  - Jesus is returning! Firmly fix your hope on Jesus and may he strengthen your resolve to endure and persevere even in the midst of adversity and persecution.
  - Endurance isn’t passive. It’s the “fortitude of the stout-hearted soldier” (Morris). It’s a strong confidence in the expectation of Christ’s return.
  - He will make all things new!
  - Father, your kingdom come; your will be done!

## **Conclusion**

- A Boston accent is one of America’s most recognizable!
- What marks and traits will be most recognizable and true for the people and church known as RHC?
- May it be...
  - Works produced by faith.
  - Labor prompted by love.
  - Endurance inspired by hope.

Our Prayer: God, may these marks increase and abound even more so in our lives.