

“SILICON FAITH”

A SERMON BASED ON PAUL’S FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS (1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11) (TO THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA) AND PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON NOVEMBER 16, 2014

SINCE THE LATE 1970S, WE HAVE BEEN PUTTING OUR FAITH IN SILICON.

AS IN SILICON VALLEY.

ACCORDING TO *WIRED MAGAZINE* (MARCH 2014), AND YES THERE IS SUCH A PUBLICATION -----WE HAVE ACTUALLY *DREAMED* IN SILICON.

FROM "THE PERSONAL COMPUTER TO THE MP3, FROM THE INTERNET TO THE SMARTPHONE..... A SEEMINGLY UNENDING STREAM OF COMPUTER-BASED INNOVATIONS HAS KEPT SILICON VALLEY ALOFT ----- NOT JUST IN PROFITS BUT IN THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION."

WE LOVE THIS STUFF ... THE MUSIC ON OUR IPODS OR IPADS ... FACEBOOK SELFIES ... INSTAGRAM PHOTOS ON OUR SMARTPHONES.....INDEED --- FOR WHAT SEEMS A LONG TIME WE'VE BEEN ENAMORED WITH JUST ABOUT ANYTHING THAT COMES OUT OF THE SILICON VALLEY. WE LOVE ITS PRODUCTS, WE'RE BEDAZZLED WITH THE LATEST GADGETS AND WE SPEND HOURS OF EVERY DAY USING TECHNOLOGY THAT WAS BORN IN THIS SMALL, GEOGRAPHICAL AREA.

***IN SHORT, WE HAVE SILICON FAITH. WE PUT OUR TRUST
IN TECHNOLOGY, AND WE WORSHIP THE GODS OF THE
SILICON VALLEY.***

**OUR BIBLE LESSON FOR TODAY CHALLENGES US -- NOT
TO THROW OUR TECHNIE TOYS IN THE TRASH -- BUT TO
REEXAMINE WHETHER OUR FAITH IS PROPERLY
FOCUSED.**

**BUT NOW THE DREAM IS TURNING INTO A BIT OF A
NIGHTMARE.**

**FOR EXAMPLE: A YEAR AGO, PROTESTERS SMASHED A
WINDOW OF A GOOGLE COMMUTER BUS. WHY?**

THEY WERE ANGRY THAT THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY (NSA) HAD SNOOPED AROUND IN THE DATA CENTERS OF TECHNOLOGY GIANTS.

FOR EXAMPLE: MANY PEOPLE ARE ANGRY THAT A NEW INTERNET-BASED CAR SERVICE CALLED UBER IS CHARGING CUSTOMERS SEVEN OR EIGHT TIMES THE NORMAL RATE DURING PEAK HOURS.

WE'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT SILICON VALLEY WOULD HELP US, NOT HURT US..... WE HAVE TRUSTED GOOGLE'S MOTTO "DON'T BE EVIL."----- BUT NOW, WE WONDER AT TIMES IF TECHNOLOGY CAN -- IN FACT -- BE TRUSTED.

**PART OF THE PROBLEM MAY BE THAT COMPUTER
BIGWIGS ARE OUT OF TOUCH..... A FACEBOOK CO-
FOUNDER THREW HIMSELF A LAVISH "LORD OF THE
RINGS" WEDDING..... A VENTURE CAPITALIST
PRIVATIZED ONE OF CALIFORNIA'S HISTORICALLY
PUBLIC BEACHES..... AND HIGH-TECH SALARIES HAVE
PUSHED THE COST OF LIVING OFF THE CHARTS.**

**FOR YEARS, THERE WERE WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES
WHO LOVED THE BAY AREA.BUT NOW THEY ARE
BEING DISPLACED.**

**TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, WE HAVE TENDED TO PUT
OUR FAITH *IN WHATEVER SILICON VALLEY IS SELLING.***

**WE TRUSTED THAT THE TECH GIANTS WERE RIGHT
WHEN THEY SAID THAT WE NEEDED A COMPUTER IN
OUR HOME, THE INTERNET IN OUR POCKET AND A
SMARTPHONE ON OUR WRIST.**

**BUT MAYBE WE DON'T REALLY NEED ALL THIS.
PERHAPS OUR FAITH IS A BIT MISPLACED.**

**THE APOSTLE PAUL IS WRITING TO THE
THESSALONIANS ABOUT HOW THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO
LIVE IN PERILOUS TIMES..... IN WHAT AND IN WHOM
SHOULD WE PLACE OUR FAITH?**

HE DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT SILICON, BUT HE DOES LIFT UP THE DANGER OF PUTTING TOO MUCH TRUST IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.

PAUL SPEAKS OF "THE DAY OF THE LORD," WHICH HE UNDERSTANDS TO BE THE COMING DAY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT (V. 2). -----HE PREDICTS THAT PEOPLE WILL SAY, "THERE IS PEACE AND SECURITY," AND THEN WHAM!.....BAM! -- SUDDEN DESTRUCTION WILL COME UPON THEM (V. 3). PAUL IS WARNING US ABOUT THE DANGER OF MISPLACED FAITH.

JESUS IS TRACKING THE SAME WAY WHEN HE SAYS, "FOR WHAT WILL IT PROFIT [PEOPLE] IF THEY GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD BUT FORFEIT THEIR LIFE?" (MATTHEW 16:26).

**HE'S CALLING US TO FOLLOW HIM INSTEAD OF
FOCUSING EXCLUSIVELY ON WORLDLY POWER AND
SUCCESS.**

**WE NEED TO HEAR THESE WARNINGS TODAY, BECAUSE
WE DON'T KNOW WHEN THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL
COME FOR US..... IT COULD BE UNIVERSAL, OR IT
COULD BE VERY PERSONAL..... IN ANY CASE, WE ARE
GOING TO BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHOICES
WE HAVE MADE.**

**THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS: IS OUR FAITH MERELY A
SILICON FAITH? OR, DO WE HAVE REAL, AUTHENTIC,
GENUINE FAITH IN A SAVIOR?**

AS WE EXPLORE THIS QUESTION, LET'S EXPAND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SILICON FAITH JUST A BIT.

IT IS NOT MY INTENTION TO RANT OR TO RAIL AGAINST TECHNOLOGY..... THE CALL TO ACTION IS NOT TO TRASH OUR IPADS, OR TOSS OUR LAPTOPS. IT'S RATHER A WAY TO SHOW US THAT, JUST AS WE PUT SO MUCH FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN TECHNOLOGICAL MACHINES AND GADGETS, SO -- EVEN MORE SO -- SHOULD WE PLACE OUR FAITH IN THE GOD OF THIS INCREDIBLE UNIVERSE.

THEREFORE, WE'RE NOT DEMONIZING SILICON VALLEY, BECAUSE TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS HAVE CERTAINLY DONE A GREAT DEAL TO IMPROVE OUR LIVES OVER THE DECADES.

**FROM ADVANCED MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVED
GLOBAL COMMUNICATION, SILICON HAS HELPED US AS
INDIVIDUALS AND AS A GLOBAL COMMUNITY. ON A
PERSONAL LEVELAS I SURVEY MY OWN LIFE AND
CONSIDER TRIPLE BYPASS SURGERY AND CATERACT
SURGERY ON BOTH EYES ---I KNOW THAT MY RECOVERY
AND MY GREATLY INCREASED QUALITY OF LIFE ARE
DUE ---- IN LARGE PART ---- TO THE GREAT ADVANCES IN
MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY THAT WE ENJOY IN THESE
TIMES -----**

BUT SILICON IS EARTHLY, NOT HEAVENLY. IN FACT, SILICON IS THE SECOND MOST ABUNDANT ELEMENT IN THE EARTH'S CRUST, RIGHT BEHIND OXYGEN. SILICON IS EVERYWHERE, IN DUSTS AND SANDS THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE..... WE USE IT IN CERAMIC BRICKS, CONCRETE AND PORCELAIN, AS WELL AS IN SILICONE IMPLANTS..... SILICON IS USED IN STEEL REFINING AND CHEMICAL PRODUCTION, AS WELL AS IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE INTEGRATED CIRCUITS THAT ARE AT THE HEART OF MODERN COMPUTERS.

SILICON VALLEY GETS ITS NAME FROM THIS PARTICULAR USE OF VERY HIGHLY PURIFIED SILICON.

PUT ALL OF THESE USES TOGETHER, AND WE BEGIN TO SEE THAT SILICON FAITH IS A KIND OF FAITH THAT PUTS ITS TRUST IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD. YES, IT INCLUDES THE SUPER-WEALTHY COMPUTER BIGWIGS WHO ARE OUT OF TOUCH WITH COMMON PEOPLE.....

BUT IT ALSO INCLUDES ALL OF US WHO LOOK FOR HAPPINESS IN THE NEXT HIGH-TECH INNOVATION, AND WHO EXPECT TO BE SATISFIED BY A VARIETY OF MATERIAL THINGS RANGING FROM STEEL LUXURY CARS TO SILICONE IMPLANTS.

SO..... GO AHEAD AND PUT YOUR SMARTPHONE IN YOUR POCKET..... BUT DON'T FORGET TO ALSO "PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF FAITH AND LOVE" (V. 8). THIS PIECE OF ARMOR PROTECTS US FROM THOSE WHO WOULD SAY THAT WE'RE NOT SMART ENOUGH.... RICH ENOUGH OR SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH..... WHEN WE HAVE FAITH IN OUR SAVIOR JESUS, WE DON'T HAVE TO BE WEALTHY HIGH-TECH GENIUSES..... WHEN WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, WE ACHIEVE SUCCESS AS CHILDREN OF GOD..... THESE QUALITIES PROTECT US FROM ANYTHING THE WORLD THROWS AT US, BECAUSE THEY ASSURE US THAT WE HAVE ETERNAL VALUE IN THE EYES OF GOD.

**THIS BREASTPLATE ENABLES US TO DO GOOD IN THE
WORLD, WITH COURAGE..... MAYA ANGELOU, WHO
DIED LAST SPRING AT AGE 86..... WAS DEEPLY
INVOLVED IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND HAD
CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
AND NELSON MANDELA.....SHE WAS THE
COORDINATOR FOR THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE AND FOUGHT AGAINST
SOUTH AFRICAN APARTHEID.**

**SHE SAID THAT THIS WORK WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY
ONE THING -- HER FAITH IN GOD. *"I FOUND THAT I KNEW
NOT ONLY THAT THERE WAS GOD -----BUT THAT I WAS A
CHILD OF GOD,....."***

WHEN I UNDERSTOOD THAT, WHEN I COMPREHENDED THAT, MORE THAN THAT, WHEN I INTERNALIZED THAT, INGESTED THAT, I BECAME COURAGEOUS."

ONCE SHE PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF FAITH AND LOVE, SHE BECAME COURAGEOUS. "I DARED TO DO ANYTHING THAT WAS A GOOD THING," SHE SAID. AND WHY NOT? "IF GOD LOVES ME.....IF GOD MADE EVERYTHING FROM LEAVES TO SEALS AND OAK TREES, THEN WHAT IS IT I CAN'T DO?"

THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION..... IF GOD LOVES US, IF GOD MADE EVERYTHING AROUND US -- FROM THE OXYGEN OF THE SKY TO THE SILICON OF THE EARTH'S CRUST -- THEN WHAT IS IT WE CANNOT DO? WE SHOULD DARE TO DO ANYTHING THAT IS GOOD, WITH COURAGE.

PAUL ALSO CHALLENGES US TO PUT ON..... "FOR A HELMET----- THE HOPE OF SALVATION" (V. 8). ----- WITH THIS HELMET IN PLACE, WE KNOW THAT WE'RE FORGIVEN BY JESUS, THE GREAT REDEEMER..... WE KNOW THAT WE'RE HEALED IN BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT BY JESUS, THE GREAT PHYSICIAN..... WE KNOW THAT WE'RE OFFERED ETERNAL LIFE BY JESUS, THE SAVIOR.

THE HOPE OF SALVATION IS NOT ANYTHING WE EARN OR DESERVE..... BUT IS SIMPLY SOMETHING THAT WE PUT ON AND WEAR THROUGHOUT OUR LIFE, TRUSTING JESUS TO PROTECT US AND PRESERVE US.

FAITH, LOVE AND HOPE..... PAUL RECOMMENDS THIS TRIO IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS, AND IN HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS AS WELL, WHEN HE SAYS THAT "FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE ABIDE, THESE THREE; AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE" (13:13).

SUCH QUALITIES ARE HEAVENLY, NOT EARTHLY -- THEY'RE PART OF GOD'S PLAN FOR US TO OBTAIN "SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST" (V. 9). THEY CAN BE ACTIVATED IN BOTH HIGH-TECH AND LOW-TECH AREAS OF THE WORLD, FROM SILICON VALLEY TO THE HILLS OF KENTUCKY.

BEST OF ALL, THEY CAN HELP US THROUGH THE TOUGHEST OF LIFE'S CHALLENGES.

WHEN ANDREW AND SHARRIA WESTPHAL GOT MARRIED IN JULY OF 2013, THEIR WEDDING DAY WAS HECTIC. IT WAS CRAZY AND CHAOTIC, SAID SHARRIA. BUT NOT NEARLY AS CHALLENGING AS WHAT LAY AHEAD.

THAT SEPTEMBER, ANDREW WAS DIAGNOSED WITH A MALIGNANT BRAIN TUMOR, AND HE WAS ADVISED TO TRAVEL FROM KENTUCKY TO CALIFORNIA FOR CONSULTATION AND TESTS..... ANDREW'S OLDER BROTHERS AND THEIR WIVES LAUNCHED A FUNDRAISER TO HELP PAY FOR THE TRIP, WHICH QUICKLY RAISED MORE THAN \$35,000. -----FAMILY, FRIENDS AND STRANGERS ALL CHIPPED IN, FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL TO "ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD UP EACH OTHER" (V. 11).

"WE GOT OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FROM PEOPLE WE HAVEN'T EVEN MET," ANDREW SAID ----- "THE WORDS AND PRAYERS EVERYBODY HAS BEEN OFFERING, IT'S LIKE YOU'RE WRAPPED UP IN IT. WE WERE VIRTUALLY SURROUNDED BY A HUGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T WANT US TO HANG OUR HEADS DOWN AND DIDN'T WANT US TO BE ALONE."

ALTHOUGH THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY ARE FACING THIS CRISIS, THE COUPLE AGREES THAT THEIR FAITH IS SUSTAINING THEM, GIVING THEM A SENSE OF PEACE.

**SAID SHARRIA, -----"WE HAVE A STRONG FAITH IN
GOD, AND THAT HAS HELPED US GET THROUGH IT."**

**THE WESTPHALS ARE CERTAINLY HOPING THAT
ADVANCED MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY WILL HELP THEM-----
-- BUT STILL THEY ARE PLACING THEIR TRUST IN THEIR
SAVIOR.**

**WE CAN DO THE SAME, AS WE PREPARE FOR THE DAY
OF THE LORD BY PUTTING ON FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE.**

**SILICON VALLEY CAN HELP US, BUT ONLY JESUS CAN
SAVE US. SO LET'S PUT OUR FAITH WHERE IT BELONGS.**

**PRAISE GOD.....AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN**