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Adams Center Baptist Church

1 Thessalonians Part 2

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 — The Gospel in Thessalonica

I want to take a moment to thank the Miller's for being here last week. Joel and Keith did a great job leading worship and I am thankful that I got to watch Keith's message through Facebook. One of Keith's main challenges to us was to firm up our regular daily practices of prayer, Bible reading, and encouraging one another. When persecution comes, we commit ourselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. We'll talk more about this today. It was a great message, and it's a message we need to take to heart in the times we are in.

Today, we're going to continue to look at the book of 1 Thessalonians. Last time we were here we saw that the church at Thessalonica was a model of spiritual vitality—they fit Paul's profile of a healthy church. They had the right culture, the right attitudes, and the right priorities. What about us? What is Adams Center Baptist Church known for? What's our reputation in the community? Are we happy with the reputation we have?

The church at Thessalonica was the type of church we want to be, so we want to look further into what Paul says about them and to them. Let's read 1:4-10.

4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Three things I want you to see about the church at Thessalonica. The Church at Thessalonica was **Chosen, Changed, and Converted**. Another way to look at these three things is answering the questions: **How Did the Gospel Come? What Effect Did the Gospel Have? And What Difference Did the Gospel Make?**

Verse 4 begins with the phrase, "For we know . . ." So what does that point back to? It points back to verse 2, when Paul says, "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers." We said a couple weeks ago that Paul had deep affection for the Thessalonians. He was a spiritual dad to them. So, just like a parent and his sons and daughters, he thinks of them often, and when he thinks of them, he is thankful to God. Why? Because . . . Or "For we know . . ."

First, that God has chosen them. Paul is thankful to God because he is convinced that the faith of the Thessalonians is real! It's genuine, and he wants to encourage the Thessalonians to think about the fact that the people they once were, they are no more! All the things we talked about two weeks ago: their "work produced by faith," "their labor prompted by love," and their "endurance inspired by hope," were clear evidences that the Thessalonians Paul is writing to are what we would call "elect." They are loved by God and chosen by God.

Now, I think the fact that Paul thanks God and not the Thessalonians he is writing to, shows that these Thessalonian Christians did nothing to accomplish their own salvation. As Paul says to the Christians in Ephesus, they were "dead in their sins and trespasses." A cold, dead corpse can do nothing! They couldn't do anything to accomplish their salvation. But God! But God loved them, and called them. The cool thing in this is that Paul is pretty confident of this calling, and that should give confidence to the Thessalonians that they are in fact "called of God."

Paul explains here in verse 5, that he can see that they were Chosen by God, not just because of their faith, love and hope, but also because of the way that Gospel message came to them.

God's word was effective, because it came, not just in words, but it came (notice this triad — 3 points). It came with Power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. People of God, this is what we need! We need the power of the Holy Spirit producing deep conviction in the lives of the people we bring the gospel message to. Do you ever feel like your words fall on deaf ears? You finally have the opportunity to share the gospel message with someone you've been trying to reach for years, and as soon as you start talking, they seem to go blank. They seem to have no idea of what you're trying to say. Let me encourage you in a moment like that, to take a deep breath, and start praying. With your mind and in your heart, without audible words, start praying that God brings the gospel message with Power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. Pray that God gives you power, the Holy Spirit, and a deep conviction even as you are speaking.

I have often said that I think that when we are on the frontlines of sharing the Gospel message, we will see miraculous signs and divine healings. If we are not on the frontlines of sharing the Gospel message, I think our expectation of seeing miraculous signs and divine healings should be less. But, when we are on the frontlines, actively sharing our faith, praying and expressing our total dependence upon God, praying that God shows up with Power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction, we should expect miracles to take place.

One of the biggest miracles to take place is when a person who is "dead in their sins and trespasses" comes alive through the Gospel. I like what F.F. Bruce says about the "deep conviction" in this passage. He says that the deep conviction refers to "a deep inward persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, a token of the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts, more impressive and more lasting than the persuasion produced by spectacular or miraculous signs."

You might remember that there were many people that saw the signs, wonders and miracles of Jesus, but many of those same people did not follow Jesus. I've been thinking a lot lately about a portion of Scripture — John, chapter 6. It's the part of the Gospel of John that describes when Jesus feeds 5,000 people.

In John 6:14, the Scripture says, "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Then, in verse 15, we see Jesus' response. "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

Later on, in verse 26, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

The people ask him, "What must we do to do the work God requires?" And Jesus says, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

In chapter 6, verse 66, after Jesus gives the crowd a tough and probably difficult to understand message, we read, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." Jesus turns to his disciples and says, "do you want to leave too?" And Peter says, in verse 68, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Then Jesus replied, "Have I not CHOSEN you, the twelve."

When God chooses you, and the message of the Gospel comes with Power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction, it's like the AED just sent an electric charge through your dead body, and you come to new life! You hear and recognize that Jesus has the words of eternal life, and you see and know the truth of the Gospel message. God grant us this insight, and I pray that you would help those around us: our friends, our family members, our neighbors, our co-workers to come to that same insight. Amen.

My brother, Jim, came up this weekend, and Debbie often talks about how much alike we look. You can definitely tell we're brothers. When we were a lot younger, I think we were just engaged or just newly married, Debbie came up behind Jim and wrapped her arms around his waist, and then all of a sudden, she startled and said, "Oh, I thought you were David." One of the sure signs that you're related to someone is that you have similar physical features. Many times you can see similar expressions, habits and character traits in family members.

The same is true of the family of God. If we're really a part of God's family, we start to look more and more like Jesus, who was the perfect model of faith. And, we start to look like other Christian brothers and sisters who reflect the same characteristics of Jesus. Paul says in verse 5-6, "You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us, and of the Lord."

Not only are the Thessalonians CHOSEN, but they are also CHANGED. What effect did the Gospel have? I want you to see another triad — three things in verses 6-8 that demonstrate what the Gospel did in the lives of these Thessalonians. They were changed! In verse 6, we see that they became **imitators** of the apostles and of the Lord. In verse 7, we see that they became a **model** to all the believers. And in verse 8, we see that they became **messengers**.

Before I dive into those three, let me draw your attention to this little phrase in verse 6 which is linked to all three of these effects of the Gospel. The phrase is “in spite of severe suffering.” I really appreciate Keith Miller addressing this issue last week. When severe trials come, even when not-so-severe trials come, many Christians lose heart. They wonder where God is as they experience suffering. Bad things, terrible things happen to Christians. Suffering is a part of this life. It’s even likely that Christians may be called to suffer when those around them don’t suffer, simply because they are Christians. The Thessalonians faced significant and severe suffering because of their Christian faith. But, Paul makes clear that it can be a powerful testimony, it can be an amazingly effective witness, when the church the called-out ones, gathered together, becomes an example of faithfulness in the midst of suffering by becoming imitators of Jesus and the apostles, by becoming a model to all believers, and by becoming messengers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, how did these Thessalonian Christians imitate Jesus and the apostles? Well, verse 6 tells us, “you welcomed the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Both Jesus and the apostles maintained joy in the midst of trials, even persecution. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus “endured the cross, scorning its shame” because of “the joy set before him.” Paul, right before he went to Thessalonica, while he was in Philippi, gets stripped and beaten and then sent to prison for casting a demon out of a girl who predicted the future. While in prison, Acts 16:25 tells us that “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.”

Jesus said, in Matthew 5:11-12, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”

In Acts 5:41, right after being flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus, “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they have been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” Oh, and by the way, “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”

This is what we need, saints! We need to receive God’s word with joy, not through our own efforts, but we receive God’s word with joy with the resources of heaven — notice in verse 6 that the joy was given by the Holy Spirit! Holy Spirit, please give us joy in the receiving of your word! Put our joy on display, even when we are suffering.

What happens when the Holy Spirit does this in us? Verse 7 says, “and so you became a model.” The Thessalonians saw the way Paul responded to suffering. They imitated him and

the Lord Jesus by persevering in suffering with joy by the Holy Spirit. And through that perseverance, they influenced others in the surrounding towns to believe in Christ! They became a model.

The word “model” here is the Greek word “typos.” We get our word “type” from this word. One commentator says the word is not merely “being an example which others are to follow but also a pattern which influences them. This word can sometimes be rendered “mold” (like a cookie or chocolate mold — which is a pattern of something that has the purpose of reproducing more identical patterns.

One of my favorite Bible teachers says this “Our lives have a purpose oriented beyond ourselves, beyond our own holiness and well-being. We are to become “molds” for others who are not Christians or who are younger Christians than we are. The essence of discipleship is imitation. As we become more conformed to the image of Christ, we are to live in such a way that others would be influenced by our lives and so become conformed also to Christ’s image.”

A Christlike reaction to trials, a reaction of joy in the midst of trials is a powerful way to influence others to be attracted to Jesus.

The Thessalonians were not only a powerful witness through the example of their lives, but they also shared the message of the Gospel verbally! Verse 8 says, “The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere.”

I think it’s significant that Paul mentions the example of their lives before talking about the testimony of their lips. Their lives, the way they responded to suffering, the way they conducted themselves — this is what opened the door for them to share the verbal message of the Gospel. And the Scripture says that all the saints in Thessalonica were a model, not that they had a few models amongst them. I’m challenged by this to wonder if as a church our message suffers because the example of our lives isn’t as solid as it should be. Are we allowing inconsistencies between our message and the way that we respond to people? Are we facing the suffering in our lives with joy? Are we being faithful to God’s ways even when it’s inconvenient, even when it isn’t as much fun?

If we don’t allow inconsistencies between our message and the way we respond to people, if we face suffering with joy, if we are faithful to God even when it’s not easy, it demonstrates the supernatural power of God at work in our lives! If that power is not there, we need to pray for it. Father God, in your gentleness and kindness toward us, would you reveal ways that we are falling short, so that we can repent, seek your face, and find restoration. We ask you to purify us, so that we can be an example to others, and so that you would open more opportunities for us to share verbally the great news that Jesus is Lord!