

I THESSALONIANS 1:5-6
GOSPEL POWER?

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study in this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. And as we have seen, Paul established the church here in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey and he spent maybe some 21 days sharing with them, teaching them, helping them grow in the Lord!

Also, Thessalonica was located in the Roman province of Macedonia or the northern part of modern Greece. So, Thessalonica, besides its population of some 250,000-people had, many other people from many different areas coming and going through its gates, you might say, because it had a thriving seaport as well as the famous Roman road that ran east and west, the Egnatian Way.

And as you can imagine, immorality, the worship of many false gods was the norm in Thessalonica. In fact, the city of Thessalonica was only fifty miles from Mt. Olympus, the home of the Greek gods such as Zeus. Not only that but they worshiped their emperors as gods!

But as we are going to see this morning and really for the next few weeks, lives were changed, they were transformed! Not by some Roman power but by the power of God. Let me show you what I mean with this true story. We are told,

It was 1945, World War II had drawn to a close, and a young man sat broken inside a POW camp. He had been a reluctant soldier in Hitler's army and here, inside a prison in Scotland, he had months to contemplate what had been and what was to come. The cities of his homeland had been reduced to rubble and the people impoverished. His sleep was filled with repeating nightmares in which the terrors of warfare were lived over and over.

And then came what was for me the worst of all. In September 1945, in camp 22 in Scotland, we were confronted with pictures of Belsen and Auschwitz. They were pinned up in one of the huts, without comment . . . Slowly and inexorably the truth filtered into our awareness, and we saw ourselves mirrored in the eyes of the Nazi victims. Was this what we had fought for? Had my generation, as the last, been driven to our deaths so that the concentration camp murderers could go on killing, and Hitler could live a few months longer? . . . The depression over the wartime destruction and a captivity without any apparent end was exacerbated by feelings of profound shame and having to share in this disgrace. That was undoubtedly the hardest thing, a stranglehold that choked us.

An unshakeable shame saturated his being and the only future he could see stretching out before him was one that filled him with despair. Yet it was in the midst of this shame and despair that God found him. A visiting chaplain gave the soldier a Bible and, with little else to do, he began reading it. In the lament Psalms he heard resonant voices, the agony of people who felt God had abandoned them. In the story of Christ crucified he encountered a God who knew what it was to experience suffering, abandonment, and shame. Feeling utterly forsaken himself, the German soldier found a friend in the One who cried “my God my God why have you forsaken me”.

In 1947 he was given permission to attend a Christian conference that brought together young people from across the world. The Dutch participants asked to meet with the German POWs who had fought in the Netherlands. The young soldier was one of them. He went to the meeting full of fear, guilt and shame, feelings that intensified as the Dutch Christians spoke of the pain Hitler and his allies had inflicted, of the dread the Gestapo bred in their hearts, of the family and friends they had lost, of the disruption and damage to their communities.

Yet the Dutch Christians didn't speak out of a spirit of vindictiveness, but came to offer forgiveness. It was completely unexpected. These Dutch Christians embodied the love the German soldier had read about in the story of Christ and it turned his life upside down. He discovered despite all that had passed "God looked on us with 'the shining eyes' of his eternal joy", that there was hope for the future.

That German soldier was Juergen Moltmann, who would go on to become one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century. Years later, with the message of the loving, crucified God still indelibly printed on his heart, he penned these beautiful words.

But the ultimate reason for our hope is not to be found at all in what we want, wish for and wait for; the ultimate reason is that we are wanted and wished for and waited for. What is it that awaits us? Does anything await us at all, or are we alone? Whenever we base our hope on trust in the divine mystery, we feel deep down in our hearts: there is someone who is waiting for you, who is hoping for you, who believes in you. We are waited for as the prodigal son in the parable is waited for by his father. We are accepted and received, as a mother takes her children into her arms and comforts them. God is our last hope because we are God's first love.

- Moltmann's writings. Quotes from The Source of Life. The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life

That is what we will be looking at this morning in a message I have called, "Gospel Power?" And the reason for the question mark is not if I am wondering if the Gospel has the power to change people's lives, I know it does! But there are many today who don't and thus, the outcome is, we don't see changed lives.

Like I have said, we will be looking at this power of the Gospel in transforming lives over the next few weeks. In our next study we will look at their Godly Witness in Their Present Life and then, we will look at their Godly Witness in Their Past Life, before they were Christians and how something changed drastically from their past, they were radically transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ because they actually got saved!

So, with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 1 starting in verse 5 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we look at the power of the Gospel!

I THESSALONIANS 1

VERSE 5

Have you noticed that people in this world, even you perhaps, are reaching for things, grabbing for things to make your life complete. You feel that if you can just attain this or that you will have made it, you will be satisfied. And then you reach it and you are not satisfied and there is something else that is dangling in front of you that you are grasping for and once, again, you feel if you can only attain that you will be satisfied, only to find out, it doesn't happen once again!

And the message that we are being bombarded with today is one of pursuing your own happiness and fulfillment in life! And the idea behind that is you will be content if you do and thus, many are going after this idea of pursuing their own happiness and fulfillment in life and are not finding it!

Let me give you this example and I am dating myself here but bear with me. I am sure most of you remember the great Chicago Bull's basketball player, Michael Jordan. He was an amazing athlete and probably the greatest or close to the greatest basketball player ever!

As I think about Michael Jordan I remember how he would just fly through the air and make these incredible shots and dunks! It was amazing, especially for me because the only dunk I could make with a basketball is if I used a ladder!

Now in saying that, I bet many of you remember the commercial that had this catchy phrase, “I wanna be like Mike!” In fact, the song goes like this,

Sometimes I dream
 That he is me
 You’ve got to see that’s how I dream to be
 I dream I move, I dream I groove
 Like Mike
 If I could Be Like Mike
 Like Mike
 Oh, if I could Be Like Mike
 Be Like Mike, Be Like Mike
 Again I try
 Just need to fly
 For just one day if I could
 Be that way
 I dream I move
 I dream I groove
 Like Mike
 If I could Be Like Mike
 I wanna be, I wanna be
 Like Mike
 Oh, if I could Be Like Mike

- <https://www.justsomyrics.com/722223/michael-jordan-song-i-wanna-be-like-mike-lyrics.html>

And we wanted to be like Mike! And you can put in that picture many different things and follow many different people. You know, if we just had the right job, more money, the right home, a better spouse, a fancy car or whatever, then everything would be okay! But, as I have said so many times already, you won’t because you are trying to fill a void in your heart that only God can fill. Thus, you keep searching and looking but until you look up and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, repenting of your sins, you will never find what you are looking for!

I know, some of you are thinking, “What a nut job! Man, if I just had those things I would be happy, I would be satisfied!” No you would not! Let me show you what I mean because it is never enough.

Many of you have heard of the New England Patriots quarterback, Tom Brady. He is an amazing quarterback, but I am just not a fan, sorry. As of this year Tom Brady and the New England Patriots have won five Super Bowls! That is amazing! And how many people would love to live in his world? And yet, listen to this,

In December 2007 Tom Brady was featured on a *CBS 60 Minutes* interview. At the time, Brady was the quarterback of the New England Patriots, a three-time Super Bowl champion, and he had a contract worth millions of dollars a year. By our cultural standards, he had everything. But in the interview he said,

Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what is." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think, "God, it's got to be more than this." I mean this isn't, this can't be what it's all cracked up to be.

Brady has reached his dream, a dream many of us share, whether we are talking about fame or fortune. "But he says, "God, it's got to be more than this." The idea that if men imitate the athletes or women imitate the models they will be happy and fulfilled is a lie that is being fed to us, and we know it. In our most honest moments, we would confess what Tom Brady confessed. As Christians we should be much more cautious about the message of our culture because it is at odds with the gospel. Only as we follow the message of the gospel and hope in Christ will we be content in our circumstances.

We must not be tempted by the message of our culture and buy into its path of happiness, but we must also beware of another temptation, a temptation from the Christian world. This temptation is similar because it, too, uses the idea of imitation. Christians get caught up in their own message of imitation that is not very Biblical. What is that message? “Imitate me. I am spiritual, and if you do this you will be spiritual too.” A Christian couple has a good marriage, so they decide to write a book about their experience. The book calls for you to copy and imitate their life because it is supposedly successful. If you imitate or follow their principles, you will have a successful marriage, it is claimed.

Or perhaps it is a successful ministry at a particular church. The leaders of that church write a book on their success or they have a seminar about how to grow a church. Hundreds of thousands of ministers read the books or attend the seminars, all trying to imitate that successful church. Then they bring those principles right back to their local churches. We seldom pause to consider that the principles might not apply to our particular locations.

You are probably more aware of this type of imitation. It is very seductive for Christians. The punch line might be, “Seven principles for making a marriage work.” When did we start thinking there are only seven principles that make a marriage work? Or “Six tips for successful child raising.” I don’t know about you, but that hasn’t worked for me. Or the claim might be, “Ten steps to financial success” or “Fifteen ways to grow your church.” In following this course, I am afraid that the church has fallen into the trap of the world. “You will find happiness if you just follow these ten helpful steps.” “You will have a great marriage because you will be like this model couple.” “Your church will grow and be like . . .”

- James H. Grant Jr, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, pp. 44-45

And we do that with the Gospel message, “Do it this way and you are going to have great success!” Hogwash! That is not what Paul did, Paul did not follow some formula. Then what did Paul do? He tells us, **“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”** I Thessalonians 1:5.

Paul lists five things that he did and this is not some formula, not at all. The first thing that Paul did is he presented to them the Word of God! Well, not exactly, let me back up a minute here. First they had this awesome lightshow, there was smoke and the worship team had this drum and guitar solo that was awesome! My ears still hurt! Okay, a little sarcasm there!

No, the Gospel was presented by presenting the Word of God and that is Scriptural folks. This is not something that Paul just came up with on his own. In fact, in Romans 1:16 we are told, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”**

I hope this makes sense to you. If you are not presenting the Gospel, then how are people going to get saved? They aren't! That is the problem many times because we don't want to talk about sin. But unless you come to the realization that you are a sinner separated from God, why do you need a Savior!

I think we are very clever today. You see, we are so much like the Jewish people in that, they were looking for someone to deliver them from their Roman bondage and we want a Savior who can save my marriage, get my kids off of drugs, solve my financial problems or whatever. We are not looking for a Savior to save us from our sins! And thus, we remain lost and there are many like that today!

Listen to what Peter said in I Peter 1:23-25, **“having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because ‘All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”**

So if you are not giving the people the Word of God then you are giving them corruptible seed that may take root in their lives! It will not bring them to saving faith like the Word of God will do, that is what Peter is saying! And tragically, we see many not giving the Word of God to people, either because they are ashamed of it, they don't know it, or even worse, they don't believe it themselves!

To kind of shed some light on this travesty, let me share with you this true story regarding the Book from Heaven. We are told,

In the Autumn of 1832, four Indian chiefs representing the Flathead and Nez Perce tribes arrived in St. Louis, Missouri. They had traveled more than 3,000 miles from their home in the Oregon country because a white man had witnessed to them about a “Book from Heaven” that told of the one true God. Their tribes had held a council fire and chose these men to go east to find the Book.

The Indians had come to see the Superintendent of Indian affairs, the famous explorer William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. He told them what he knew about the Bible and then took them on a tour of St. Louis, thinking this would impress them. But, the Indians only wanted the book and a preacher to explain it. Before long, two of the Indians died of an illness to which they had no natural immunity.

When the time came for the two remaining Indians to return home, General Clark honored them with an elaborate banquet. At that time, one of the Indians stood and said,

“My people sent me to get the white man’s “Book from Heaven.” You took me where you allow your women to dance, as we do not ours, but the Book was not there. You took me where you worship the Great Spirit with candles, but the Book was not there. You showed me images of good spirits and pictures of the good land beyond, but the Book was not among them.

I am going back the long sad trail to my people of the dark land. You make my feet heavy with burdens of gifts, and my moccasins will grow old in carrying them, but the Book is not among them. When I tell my poor blind people, after one more snow, in the big council, that I do not bring the Book, no words will be spoken by our old men or our young braves. One by one, they will rise up and go out in silence.

My people will die in darkness, and they will go on the long path to the other hunting grounds. No white man will go with them, and no white man’s Book to make the way plain. I have no more words.”

- Wes Bently, Far Reaching Ministries, April 2006

What a tragic story and yet, we, the people who have the Book from Heaven, the Word of God are doing the same thing, giving people everything but the Word of God. We would rather entertain people, go back to the icons, speak of all the blessings that God has given to us in this great country and yet we negate what people need, the Word of God spoken from the mouth of God, the Bible!

Also, Paul tells us in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** Our faith begins with the Word of God. Our faith grows with the Word of God. And ultimately, we are taken up into heaven! So if you are not giving out the Word of God, can faith begin or grow? It does not sound like it!

Now let me also say this, for some people, the Bible is nothing more than just a bunch of words, it is a book. And like a book, you may read it once but why go any further! Think about it. Many read the Bible and they come to all kinds of bizarre conclusions about what it says and yet, when we read it we understand what God is saying. How can that be?

Notice what Paul says next in I Thessalonians 1:5, it was not just the Word of God spoken to them but it was done in **“power.”** And this power comes from the **“Holy Spirit”** and thus, our second and third points here in how the Gospel was presented to them!

The Amplified Bible puts this verse, I Thessalonians 1:5, like this, **“For our [preaching of the] glad tidings (the Gospel) came to you not only in word, but also in [its own inherent] power and in the Holy Spirit and with great conviction and absolute certainty [on our part]. You know what kind of men we proved [ourselves] to be among you for your good.”**

You see, the natural man cannot understand the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. Thus, it is the Word of God opened up to us by the Spirit of God, and that power is able to not only bring us to saving faith but also to grow in our relationship with the Lord!

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 4:12-13, **“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”**

As you can see, Paul tells us that God's Word is living and it can change people's lives. And it is not only living but it is also powerful! Books don't have the power to change people's lives as God's Word does. Yes, books can affect our lives but God's Word changes us from the inside out!

And Paul is telling us that he has seen the evidence, that as God's Word goes forth in power and in the Holy Spirit, it changes people. And we too have seen this evidence, not only in our own lives but in the lives of others who have come to saving faith! You see, it is the Word of God empowered by the Spirit of God and we can have that full assurance that God's Word will do what it says!

As one writer put it, "The word of God actively works in believers to teach them doctrine, diagnose sin, discipline them, and provide direction for them when they hear and heed it." (David M. Levy, Hebrews A Commentary, p. 45)

So, God's Word is not just living, it is not just powerful, but it is also sharper than any two-edged sword. It is like a surgical instrument and Paul tells us that this surgical instrument, or **"... the word of God is . . . piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow . . ."**

No doubt about it, I believe it is God's Word opened up to us by the Spirit of God that brings us to saving faith. But God's Word is even more than that because once we are saved God's Word is like a surgical instrument cutting away the garbage in our lives. This is called the sanctification process and like I have said this is God purging the garbage from our lives to make us more like Him.

So as God uses His Word in our lives like a surgeon's scalpel He is cutting away those things in our lives that need to be removed. It pierces our "**soul and spirit**" or the PSUCHE, (psoo-kahy') and the PNEUMA, (pnyoo'-mah) in the Greek and it speaks of our consciousness, (soul) and that part of us that is in communion with God, (spirit). Why does God pierce those areas? I think He does so to draw them together so that our conscious and our spirit are one, focused on God!

Also, it pierces between the "**joints and the marrow.**" Joints are the point of contact between the bones and what surrounds those areas. In other words, it speaks of how we move. It speaks of the things we are doing, how we are walking. The Word of God shows us how to walk, it tells us what is right, what is wrong, how to get right when we have gone astray and how to stay right.

Also, Paul speaks of the "**marrow**" or the place where red blood cells are produced. The Bible tells us that the life is in the blood and the blood permeates our body, it goes throughout our body and I think the point is this. That what is on the inside of our lives, what is flowing through our blood will overflow in what we do, how we live, the nature of Jesus will come forth from us!

The fourth point here is that Paul speaks of this assurance that he had. What is he talking about when he says, "**and in much assurance**"? I think the idea here is that Paul spoke forth the Word of God with full assurance that God was at work, that the Word of God was living and powerful and able to transform lives! Folks, this should just make sense. If you are presenting something you better be assured that what you are bringing forth is right, it is true. Remember, you are not the news media with their "fake news." You are a Christian bringing forth the truths of God from the Word of God!

For the life of me I can't understand a preacher, a teacher who does not believe what he is sharing! That makes no sense and yet you listen to some and they deny the Word of God, they make excuses for the Word of God. Look, if you don't have that assurance, then stay out of the pulpit!

Of this Leon Morris gives us this insight to what Paul is speaking of here. He wrote, . . . the gospel came "in much assurance." There is no repetition of the "in" in the Greek. The effect is to link these words very closely with the foregoing. Assurance [plerophoria] is not some human device whereby men persuade themselves. Rather it is the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit working within believers. Some have felt that the assurance meant here is that which came to the converts as they put their trust in Christ, and this may not be out of the Apostle's mind. But his primary meaning is the assurance that the Spirit gave to the preachers, for Paul is dealing with the way he and his companions came to know the election of the Thessalonians. They had the assurance in their own hearts that, as they were preaching, the power of God was at work. The Spirit was working a work of grace.

- Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 57-58

Paul saw the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people of Thessalonica and he had the assurance that they were saved, God was working. We see this played out for us as Paul tells us in I Thessalonians 1:7-10, **“so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”**

Their lives were transformed by the Word of God opened up to them by the Spirit of God! But for many, they think the power is in their words, what they do, and it is not as this story illustrates for us. We are told,

King Canute was once ruler of England. The members of his court were continually full of flattery. “You are the greatest man that ever lived . . . You are the most powerful king of all . . . Your highness, there is nothing you cannot do, nothing in this world dares disobey you.”

The king was a wise man and he grew tired of such foolish speeches. One day as he was walking by the seashore Canute decided to teach them a lesson.

“So you say I am the greatest man in the world?” he asked them.

“O king,” they cried, “there never has been anyone as mighty as you, and there can never be anyone so great, ever again!”

“And you say all things obey me?” Canute asked.

“Yes sire” they said. “The world bows before you, and gives you honour.”

“I see,” the king answered. “In that case, bring me my chair, and place it down by the water.”

The servants scrambled to carry Canute’s royal chair over the sands. At his direction they placed it right at the water’s edge.

The King sat down and looked out at the ocean. “I notice the tide is coming in. Do you think it will stop if I give the command?”

“Give the order, O great king, and it will obey,” cried his entourage

“Sea,” cried Canute, “I command you to come no further! Do not dare touch my feet!”

He waited a moment, and a wave rushed up the sand and lapped at his feet.

“How dare you!” Canute shouted. “Ocean, turn back now! I have ordered you to retreat before me, and now you must obey! Go back!”

In came another wave lapping at the king’s feet. Canute remained on his throne throughout the day, screaming at the waves to stop. Yet in they came anyway, until the seat of the throne was covered with water.

Finally Canute turned to his entourage and said, “It seems I do not have quite so much power as you would have me believe. Perhaps now you will remember there is only one King who is all-powerful, and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. I suggest you reserve your praises for him.”

- Source Unknown

How true that is. We don't have any power but if we truly rest in the Lord and let Him not only work in us but through us, God can do amazing things! It is His power, His might and not ours. And yet, when you look at the programs on how to grow churches, how to do this and how to do that, there is one thing missing – ***GOD!*** Paul did not have any fancy words, he just spoke forth the Word of God! May we do the same.

And let me show you what I mean about Paul and how he saw himself. Paul wrote these words in I Corinthians 2:1-5, **“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”**

May we bring forth the Word of God in the power of God's Spirit and see the wonderful things the Lord can do!

Now make no mistake about it. All of these are important and one is not more important than the other. We need to speak forth the Word of God. We need to do so in power and in the Holy Spirit. We need to have that assurance as we speak these things. But the fifth point many miss and that is truly sad.

Paul spent time with them and that is so important because it shows he cared about them. We just don't go out and share our faith and when someone gets saved we put another notch in our belt! Not at all. That is not what we are to do! Paul said, **“. . . as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”** I Thessalonians 1:5.

In other words, Paul lived a life that shinned forth the Gospel message. It showed that he believed and not only believed but he lived what he said he believed. Make no mistake about it, the Thessalonians had not only heard the Gospel preached, they had seen it lived out in the life of Paul, Silas and Timothy. Their lives were a rich example of the power of the Gospel they preached.

Listen to what Paul said to the church in Corinth in II Corinthians 1:12, **“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.”**

That truly was Paul! Someone said, *“There is nothing so powerful as a holy instrument in the hands of a holy God.”* How true that is!

Thank about that for a minute. Imagine a surgical instrument, maybe not the top of the line, it may not be the best there is. And that surgical instrument is worthless sitting around. It can't do anything on its own. It has to rely on the surgeon, his expertise, his skills, and he can take that instrument and do great things with it but apart from the master you might say, it is worthless!

That was true of Paul and it is true for all of us. Apart from God we can do nothing that He will accept and if we try to do it on our own, we will not succeed the way that God wants us to. You see, if we, as the instrument, are willing to submit our lives to the Master, to God, He can do great things through us, not because we are so great, but because He is!

What was this evidence that showed not only how much Paul loved the Lord, but how much he loved the people of Thessalonica? Remember what took place in Acts chapter 17 as Paul was in Thessalonica. We are told in Acts 17:1-10, **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.”**

As Paul shared the Gospel, as he brought these people to Jesus, there were some who were upset with what Paul was doing. He was messing with their lifestyle and they did not like it. They had their ways of doing things and it was nothing like Paul was saying. So some of the Jews who didn't appreciate this got some wicked people to make some accusations against them and things got so bad that they sent Paul away for his safety.

In I Thessalonians 2:2-12 Paul tells us, **“But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness - God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”**

That was Paul. He was with them for those three Sabbaths and they saw his love for God and for them and it affected their lives. This was not just some guy out to build up his cause but this was a man of God who came to share the love of God with them and they received it into their lives. It is as one writer put it in regards to the man that Paul was. He wrote,

He was a man of the gospel. Paul saw the gospel as the center of his life. He was a man who focused on a kingdom other than the Roman Empire. He was a man who followed another king, not Caesar. He was a man who was not of this world. He preached a message of hope that didn't depend upon Caesar or the approval of various people in that community. Paul's hope was his approval by Christ. Paul lived in such a way that he reflected the reality of another world. Can you see this in Acts 17? Paul could not go into Thessalonica and be mistreated and live through that with joy unless he believed that the city would not last, unless he believed in a more abiding city. He glorified God by witnessing to the reality of the Kingdom of God in the face of tribulations and trials.

Paul lived in such a way that he reflected the reality of another world. That is what kind of man Paul proved to be among them. Paul glorified God by witnessing to the reality of the kingdom of God in the face of the power of the Roman Empire. That is what Paul did in their presence. And guess what happened?

- James H. Grant Jr, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, pp. 48-49

We are going to see what happened but I will give you a sneak preview you might say. They became imitators of Paul! Let's read on and see how this plays out for us!

VERSE 6

“Wait a minute. I thought you said we are not to follow people? Remember, ‘I want to be like Mike! And that was not a good thing. So what is up with what Paul is saying here, ‘And you became followers of us . . .?’”

I think Paul gives to us the reason they should follow Paul, Silas and Timothy, it is as they were following the Lord! Paul put it like this in I Corinthians 11:1, “**Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.**” That truly is the key.

When I first got saved I watched my pastor like a hawk. I watched what he did, how he responded in situations, the things he said and I learned from him because he was following the Lord.

Where we get into trouble is when we follow those who are not following the Lord and that is dangerous! We see the children of Israel speak to Joshua regarding this very thing. In Joshua 1:16-17 we are told, “**So they answered Joshua, saying, ‘All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moses.’**”

In other words, they were going to follow Joshua as long as Joshua was following the Lord. That is important for us as well. Think of the things and the people you followed before you were saved and now look at who you are following since you have become a Christian, people who love the Lord, things that will build you up, not tear you down, at least that is what you should be doing!

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 4:8-9, “**Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**”

May we do that as the Thessalonian believers were doing.

And we see Paul admonish the Philippians as well in regards to following those who are following the Lord. We are told in Philippians 3:17-21, **“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”**

Paul is saying that we are to follow those who follow the Lord and then he puts forth this contrast. He speaks of those who are not walking according to Christ and we are not to follow them. We are not to pattern our lives after them. If they are not walking according to the Word, then don't follow them. It is that simple and yet, it is that hard.

Why is it so hard? Paul tells us what the Thessalonian believers had to endure, **“much affliction.”** And they handled that affliction with joy and not just any joy, **“joy in the Holy Spirit.”**

Listen to what Morris tells us regarding this word, “affliction.” He wrote, “The word for ‘affliction’ outside the Bible usually denotes literal pressure, and that of a severe kind. The corresponding verb, for example, was used of pressing the grapes in wine-making till they burst asunder, and so metaphorically came to mean very great trouble.”

Keep in mind that these were new believers, they were young in the Lord and yet this persecution came upon them as they received the Word of God. In II Thessalonians 1:4-10 Paul speaks of this tribulation they faced as he wrote, **“so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”**

I guess you can say that in this world they faced tribulation for their faith and so do we! But also, notice that Paul reminds them that the Lord is coming back and that this tribulation is limited. It will not go on forever. God will deal with those who come against His people because when they come against believers they are coming against Him!

Now I realize that many Christians feel that once you get saved life is easy, there is no more trouble, no persecution, no tribulation, it is a walk down easy street. Just name it and claim it or blab it and grab it and it is yours. Don't worry, be happy! That is the most ridiculous thing I have heard. Well, maybe not the most ridiculous thing, but it is up there!

Let me show you what I mean by letting the words of Jesus speak to us because He does know what He is talking about. These others, not too much! In John 15:18-25 Jesus tells us, **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’”**

I have heard people say that this is not what Jesus meant, that the world will hate us and persecute us for our faith. Again, you don’t have to be a theologian to figure this out. If the world hates Jesus, who was perfect, then why do we think they will love us? And here is the answer to that question. They will love us when we compromise what we believe, then the persecution, the trouble will stop.

But for these Thessalonian believers, they endured much affliction, they did not compromise what they believed, their faith was real! And notice also how they responded to these afflictions. When the Thessalonian Christians faced this affliction from receiving the Word, they didn’t just face it with a resigned fatalism. They faced it with joy of the Holy Spirit.

What does that mean? One writer sums it up like this for us. He wrote,

Paul is talking about true joy, not the kind that is offered through television programs and movies or by politicians and athletes and models. Paul is offering joy unspeakable, a joy found in the gospel, in the work of the Holy Spirit. This joy comes from peace with God because our sins are forgiven. This is a joy that knows God will make all things right one day. This is a joy that knows God's kingdom will never end. This is a joy that could not be taken away from Paul or his companions when they were thrown in jail. This is a joy that cannot be taken away from us because we lost our jobs. This is a joy that is not dependent upon the ups and downs of an economy.

This is a joy that will see us through trials and tribulations, and even through death. There is no message in this world for the sting of death, and that is where the rubber meets the road for Christians. That is where our faith will be tested because the message of the gospel is a message that will bring hope in the face of death, and these Christians in Thessalonica could face death for the gospel.

- James H. Grant Jr, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, pp. 49-50

Folks, mere human joy will die under intense pressure, but the joy of the Holy Spirit will see it grow. May we be able to say as Paul said as he was in jail for his faith, "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**" Philippians 4:4. The only way you will be able to do that is by keeping your eyes on the Lord and trusting in His Word, His promises to you! ***THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL!***

What happened as these Thessalonian believers lived out their faith, as people saw that it was real? We will see that next time as we look at their Godly witness!