**The Power of the Gospel**

**I Thessalonians – Introduction and Chapter 1 (Lesson #1)**

**Author:** Clearly, Paul is the author of 1 Thessalonians. First the epistle is credited to him, it also mentions Silas (“Silvanus”) and Timothy as co-senders. Timothy was one of Paul’s protégés’ and Silas was his traveling companion on the second missionary journey.

**Date:** Most scholars date 1 Thessalonians to A.D. 49–51, early in Paul’s 18-month stay in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18).

**Theme:** The most prominent theme in 1 Thessalonians is the second coming of Jesus. It is mentioned in every chapter of the book ([1:10; 2:19–20; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:1–11, 23–24](https://www.esv.org/1%2BThessalonians%2B1%3A10%3B%2B1%2BThessalonians%2B2%3A19%E2%80%9320%3B%2B1%2BThessalonians%2B3%3A13%3B%2B1%2BThessalonians%2B4%3A13%E2%80%9318%3B%2B1%2BThessalonians%2B5%3A1%E2%80%9311%3B%2B1%2BThessalonians%2B5%3A23%E2%80%9324/)). But, there is another theme that is running alongside this theme and that is the power of the gospel to change lives. Earlier this week, I posted about this in YouVerse.

The theme of Christ’s return dominates First and Second Thessalonians. For those who are extremely interested in this topic, I recommend you start a log of everything you learn (from Paul) as we unpack the numerous verses about the Lord’s Return. What we learn here should serve as the foundation for your understanding of the topic.

**Background and Establishment of the Church:** Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and had a population of over 100,000. Its natural harbor and placement on the busy Egnatian Way meant that it was a flourishing center of trade, philosophy, and religion.

The Romans constructed over 250,000 miles of stone paved roads. One such famous road, that brought prosperity to the whole region was built in the second century BC and was called the “Via Egnatia.” It connected Rome with the Eastern provinces of Macedonia and Thrace. It physically started at the edge of the Adriatic Sea and ran all the way to Byzantine.

Thessalonica was a major city, a capital city, a port city, and a city on a major highway. It had all the good and bad, that these things brought to it.

Religiously, the city was committed to the Greco-Roman pantheon and the imperial cult; Egyptian cults were also prominent. Also, there was a reasonable population of Jews in Thessalonica. For example, as you will see, they had a synagogue which clearly had a number of people attending it.

**Establishment of the church in Thessalonica:** On the second missionary journey Paul and Silas had encounter great opposition in Philippi, although it is important to note that they had witnessed some amazing conversations as well. Leaving the city of Philippi (a city where Paul nearly lost his life), the resolve of this group to go into the world with the gospel, was severely tested. First in Philippi, Paul was resisted, because he cast out a demon from a girl, the masters of the slave girl grabbed Paul and Silas, drug them into the marketplace, then had the magistrates of the city publicly beat them, and then had the cast in prison.

Paul, Silas and Timothy leave Philipp and we read in **Acts 17:1 - 3** – *they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews.* *And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,* ***3*** *explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."*

Paul used the scriptures to explain and prove that:

1. It was necessary for the Messiah to suffer
2. it was necessary for the Messiah to rise from the dead.
3. With the conclusion: Jesus (the son of Joseph) is the promised Messiah!

**Vs 4** - And *some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.*

Imagine what this looked like!

The gospel is going forth in GREAT power in Thessalonica.

**Vs 5 -** *But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.*

They could not argue against what Paul was saying, so some of these Jews moved with envy that the Gentile converts were “getting in on Jesus.” Created a scene, took wicked men, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason.

**Vs 6 - 7** And *when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,* ***7*** *and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."*

Upon arriving at Jason’s house, they could not find Paul and Silas, so they drug Jason and some of the other brothers before the city authorities. You can hear them screaming and shouting. You can feel the chaos.

**The charge is sedition against Caesar!**

**Vs 8 - 9** And *the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.* ***9*** *And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.*

Money is given as security, in an attempt to ensure that there are not any additional disturbances. The city authorities let Jason and those with him go. Keep in mind this whole thing was fueled with lies.

**Vs 10** - *The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.*

Apparently worrying that additional resistance and hostility awaited Paul and Silas, some of these brand-new converts slipped Paul and Silas out by night, they then travelled to Berea.

That is the establishment of the church in Thessalonica. Only three weeks of preaching and Paul and Silas were ultimately ran out of town.

Although ran out of town, Paul was concerned about the new believers in Thessalonica and therefore a few months later Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1–2, 5). The we read what Paul said Timothy shared:

***“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you — ” (1Th 3:6 ESV)***

It appears that Timothy reported that generally, the church community was doing well. However, not everything at Thessalonica was perfect. Some members of the church had died (4:13), and because they were not fully informed about what would happen to deceased Christians at Christ’s return (3:10; 4:13), some apparently thought that those who had died (prior to Jesus’ return) would miss out on the second coming and this created a great deal of confusion and hopelessness (4:13).

In addition, Timothy apparently related to Paul a Thessalonian question about the timing of the day of the Lord (5:1–2). We will unpack what Paul taught when we arrive at those verses, and when he picks it back up in II Thessalonians, so keep this in the back of your mind. Although there were other items, we will pick those up as we encounter them.

This generally positive report caused Paul to be filled with joyful relief and he appears eager to encourage the embattled and discouraged Christians and provide answers to their questions. It appears that in a very short timeframe, Paul began composing I Thessalonians.

We will see how Paul answers their questions and concerns around the Lord’s return and how he encourages them to holy living.

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**Thessalonians Chapter 1 – Main Idea:** The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God and can transform people which in turn can impact the people around them!

***1:1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 ¶ We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.***

**Vs 1a -** So when Paul identifies Silvanus and Timothy, the believers in Thessalonica were familiar with both of them, they had met them, and they had enjoyed fellowship with them.

**Vs 1b -** Notice this letter is written to the “church.” The Greek word is **ἐκκλησία** (ek-klay-see’-ah). It is not a building but the people. It could be translated the called-out ones, the assembled ones, the gathering of believers, the company of Christians, the tribe of believers.

The church is the people who have placed faith in God’s Son. You and I are the **ἐκκλησία.**

**Vs 1c -** Notice the church is ***in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.***

We gloss over this, but to be in God and in the Lord Jesus is a place of power and security.

**Vs 1d -** This statement in God the Father and in the **Lord** Jesus Christ also highlights Jesus’s divinity in **two ways**:

1. **First, the use of the word Lord.** The Greek word is **κύριος** (koo’-ree-os). It means lord or master. But there is more to the story. When the Old Testament (Hebrew) was translated into Greek (the language of the New Testament). The word they used for God’s name was… Yes,**κύριος!**
2. **Look at the sentence structure.** If Jesus is not God, then this would have been a blasphemous statement. Imagine if Paul had written: “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Paul.” **NEVER!**

**Vs 1e -** ***Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Grace – God’s unmerited favor, which brings peace with God.

Now as believers, we have been shown grace, but surely, we want and indeed need fresh grace from the Father every morning!

**Vs 2 -** Do you sense Paul’s love for the believers in Thessalonica? Notice once again the pronoun we. We give thanks, we are thankful and prayerful.

He is thankful to God, for what God is doing in the hearts and lives of these Thessalonian believers. H

e and his companions were also prayerful.

**Vs 3** - ***remembering without ceasing***…Paul now tells the believers in Thessalonica and you and I what he is thankful for about them, what he is remembering, and what he has been praying about in reference to them.

He is remembering these three virtues **(faith, love, and hope).** Faith looks back to the cross, love is funneled to us in the present from God and thus we can funnel it to others, and finally hope looks forward to the one who will finish the work that he started in us.

1. **Work of faith**

The word translated **work**, is the standard Greek word for work or labor, the word is **ἔργον.** It is normal word for work. Paul is remembering their **work that flows out of your faith**, it is the **work done in faith**.

1. **Labor of love**

The word translated **labor**, is a different word and brings with it a different meaning. The word is **κόπος** and brings with it the idea of **strenuous effort**, of **intense labor**, of **efforts that are taxing**, **efforts that are exhausting and require endurance.**

The Greek word translated love, you might guess, is **ἀγάπη.** It is that love that God loves us with, selfless love.

1. **Patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ**

This is steadfastness, endurance, continuance, because I have hooked my wagon to God, he has never failed. Thus, in him my hope is anchored.

**Vs 3b –** Notice all this ***in the sight of our God and Father***, or before the face of our God and Father.

The picture is their **work of faith**, their **labor of love**, their **patience of hope** in Jesus is all done in front of, or in the face of God!

**Let’s bring this home. Your work done in faith, your labor done in love, your patient and enduring hope in Jesus, is done in front of the throne of God!**

**Vs 4 -** ***Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.***

**Uhhh ohhhhh! Here we go again, your election of God.**

**So let me say a few things here:**

1. The Greek word is **ἐκλογή** (*ek-log-ay’).* It brings with it the idea of picking or choosing. The word describes God’s choosing us to bless us.

This is a divine mystery, but let’s work through everything Paul has to say.

*Other places where this word is used: (Acts 9:15, Rom 9:11, Rom 11:5, Rom 11:7, Rom 11:28, II Pet 1:10)*

*“10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."” (Ac 9:10-16 ESV)*

1. Did you notice what Paul said before that, he called the believers “beloved brethren”

**ἀγαπάω** (ag-ap-ah’-o) selfless love (**perfect tense, passive voice**)

**ἀδελφός** (ad-el-fos’) brother or sister

The church in Thessalonica, and you and I by extension are **“beloved of God”** we are **“loved by God.”** God loves you. God loves you intensely, God loves you with a scandalous love, God has held nothing back from you.

1. But there is another point we should not miss. Paul the apostle, Paul the Hebrew of Hebrews, Paul the Pharisee, as he writes to the Gentile believers he calls them (BROTHERS)!

This is the power of the gospel! The gospel breaks down every barrier.

1. Notice what Paul said… Knowing (beloved brothers and sisters) you election of God.

**How does Paul know this?**

In the Greek there are a few different words for know or knowing. Here the word is **οιδα** (oy’-da). **Oida** is to **know something through perception**, through **observation**, through **what you see**.

**Hear me. Paul knew they were the elect of God, because of what he saw in and about them!**

So, let’s insert the idea: Paul said I know (through observations that I see) **that you are beloved of God and that you are the elect of God**.

Let’s read verses 5-7 to complete Paul’s thought: ***5 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. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.***

1. Our gospel came to you in power
2. You believed and became followers of us and of the Lord

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OK, let’s pick back up and follow Paul’s second thread that he is developing alongside the first thread.

**Vs 5 –** ***Our gospel did not come in “word only”***

First, the gospel is a message, it is truth claims, it is knowledge that is conveyed through language, that is principally about Jesus (the promised Messiah), living a perfect life, dying a sacrificial death, and rising from the grave!

It is the story that you that we were lost, we could not save ourselves, and God made the way for us to be in relationship with Him. It is a message of various truth claims, that are shared via words, but Paul said when it came to Thessalonica, **it came not in word only, but in POWER.**

The Greek word for power is **δύναμις** (doo’-nam-is). It is where we get the English word **dynamite**. It means power, might or strength. It came not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit, and it also came with much assurance.

**What does it look like when the gospel comes in power?**

**Vs 6 – Point #1 of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power. –** They received the word. Literally, in the Greek, the idea is you **took hold of the word** that Paul and his companions proclaimed. They laid hold of the words that Paul and his companions declared.

In the marketplace of a million theories and ideas, the Thessalonians heard the message about a Jewish man, who declared himself to be God (through many evidences and proofs), he lived, he died, and he rose from the grave. They did not simply accept the truth but embraced the message with the assurance of its truth given by the Holy Spirit!

**Point #2 of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power. –** ***Having received the word, you started following us.*** The Greek word is **μιμητής** (mim-ay-tace’). It is where we get the English word **mimic**. It is the idea of following, mimicking, or imitating.

**Point #3 of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power. –** Not just following us, not just mimicking us, but you started following (mimicking) the Lord Himself!

**Point #4 of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power. –** You did this is spite of a great deal of affliction that was going on. The idea is a great deal of tribulation.

**Point #5 of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power. –** You heard, you turned, you started mimicking us, and you started mimicking Jesus, in spite of some pretty rough opposition, and you did it all with great joy over what Jesus had done for you!

**Now watch what Paul says next! Do not miss this:**

**Vs 7 -** ***so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.***

**Point #6 of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power. –** They took hold of the word personally (they believed), they became followers of Paul and Silas, not just that, they started following (mimicking Jesus), they did so while suffering great persecution, and they did so with JOY, and here we go.

**And you became examples to all around.**

You became a **τύπος.** This is an **interesting word,** and it is a figure or mark that is left behind, that is formed, by a strike or a blow. The stamped image of something.

**You became the example of the thing you started imitating.**

**The gospel changed everything about them and created a reproduction of the thing it mimicked, in this case Jesus Himself. HEY, this is the power of the gospel.**

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***8 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. 9 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, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.***

**Vs 8 –** Then Paul says, from you the ***“word of the Lord”*** has sounded out, has trumpeted out, or has thundered out to those in Macedonia, Achaia, and in fact all over the place.

**Vs 8b –** People are talking about what God is doing in Thessalonica, so much so, that we (Paul and his companions) do not need to say a word.

**Vs 9 –** Paul is saying, the surrounding peoples are declaring and keep declaring (present tense) a few things about what happened in Thessalonica! We heard:

1. ***What manner of entry we had to you*** (three weeks and ran out of town).
2. ***How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.***
3. ***And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.***

First, we see further explanation of what it looks like when the gospel comes in power!

Second, here is our first reference to the return of Jesus.

If you are keeping a log of what Paul has to say about the return of the Lord.

1. We are ***waiting*** on Him (Jesus) to come from heaven.
	1. Jesus who ***rescues us*** from the coming wrath
	2. Jesus delivers us from the building wrath **ὀργή** (or-gay’) of God!

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