A picture containing text

Description automatically generated**The Gospel Came with Great Power and Suffering**

**I Thessalonians 2:1-20**

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 and philosophy.

Religiously, the city was committed to the Greco-Roman pantheon and the imperial cult; Egyptian cults were also prominent. Also, there were a reasonable number of Jews in Thessalonica.

The church in Thessalonica was established on thesecond missionary journey. Most scholars date 1 Thessalonians to A.D. 49–51, early in Paul’s 18-month stay in Corinth during the second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18).

Last week Paul had a great deal to say about the power of the gospel and what it does in the lives of people and how those people can turn the world upside down with their radical obedience to it.

**Chapter 2 – Main Idea: Suffering for the Glory of God and the Gospel**

***2:1 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. 3 For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed —  God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.***

**Vs 1 -** Paul says you, yourselves know that our coming to you was not in vain.

The Greek word know, here once again, is **οιδα** (oy’-da), it is to know something through observation, it is to know because you saw something. Paul is saying, brothers and sisters, you know (by observation) that our coming to you was not in vain:

There are three ways the word ***vain*** can be used:

1. **Empty handed** (as if we were beggars) in fact the opposite, we brought the gospel.
2. When something is vain, it is **without fruit**. Just the opposite here!
   1. *Blessed is the man… (Ps 1)*
3. **Fallacious or false**, I believe this is the primary use here. We saw and taught what we really are.

**Vs 2a –** **Coming not in vain**, but in fact Paul then speaks about what happened to them, he states that they suffered and were shamefully treated in Philippi:

***Suffered*** – The idea of this verb is pain. Pain from being beaten. This is real physical pain!

***Shamefully treated*** – The idea is to be treated shamefully or outrageously. It is to suffer reproach that is shameful!

Paul said as we came to you (not in vain), and we also came having suffered and been shamefully treated in Philippi, as you yourselves know. Once again the Greek word is **οιδα** (oy’-da). It means to know by observation, to know by seeing.

These people lived many miles away from Philippi, how could they **know** (through observation) that Paul and his companions suffered and were shamefully treated in Philippi?

**Let me show you, let’s go back to Philippi:**

*“16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. 19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.” (Ac 16:16-24 ESV)*

Notice five things:

1. Vs 22 – Having been dragged into the marketplace, allegations are made, and then Luke tells us the “crowd joined in attacking them.”
2. Vs 22 – The magistrates, tore their garments of them.
3. Vs 22 - The magistrates gave the orders to beat them with rods.
4. Vs 23 – The inflicted many blows with rods on them.
5. Vs 24 – Then they were thrown in jail and feet fastened in stocks

To be ***“beaten with rods”*** translates a Greek verb, **ῥαβδίζω** (*hrab-did’-zo)* found only twice in the Bible (as a verb). It means ***“to hit with long, stiff sticks.”***

The verb is written in the passive voice. A well-trained Roman soldier likely delivered the beating.

By the way, history indicates that many men died from these Roman beatings! **Now imagine what Paul and Silas looked like when they showed up in Thessalonica. They had been beaten with rods and locked in stocks.**

**Vs 2b –** Paul goes on to say: ***we had boldness in our God…*** This Greek word ***boldness,*** literally means to **speak freely** or to have **boldness to speak freely!**

**Why would it take boldness to declare the gospel?**

Notice what Paul and his companions declared (spoke) and what you and I have believed is not just the gospel **εὐαγγέλιον (***yoo-ang-ghel’-ee-on),* it is the gospel of**θεός** (theh’-os).

They declared the gospel in much conflict. The Greek word translated conflict *is* **ἀγών** (ag-one’). This word started out meaning the building where Greeks held their games, it came to mean the fighting match itself.

Paul said, we were beaten in Philippi, we came to you and we spoke clearly and boldly the gospel of God and guess what we received again?

**Vs 3 *-*** Our appeal, our call our summons, our exhortation (urging and beseeching) does not come from error (to lead you astray, not based on a lie), or impurity (moral uncleanness), or any attempt to deceive (trick you, beguile you).

**Vs 4 -** Just as we have been approved of God. The Greek word is **δοκιμάζω** (dok-im-ad’-zo.) It means to test, to try, to examine.

Paul is saying we are examined by God, and having passed that examination, He has entrusted us with the gospel. So we speak, not to please men, but to please the God who…

Here it is again,**δοκιμάζω** (*dok-im-ad’-zo),* tests, tries, examines our hearts. By the way, this is a present tense verb. It could be translated, so we speak, and speak, and speak, not to please men, but to please God, who is continually examining and testing our hearts!

**Vs 5 -** We never came with words of flattery… AS YOU KNOW! What do you think the Greek word is here? Sure… **οιδα** (oy’-da). You KNOW by observation that we never did that!

Nor with a pretext for greed. We did not come under the cover of what we could get from you.

**Vs 6 -** So Paul is clear, we were not seeking glory from people, the Greek word is **δόξα** (dox’-ah). It means praise, honor, glory.

We are not seeking glory from people (you or anyone else) and even though we could have made demands, (as apostles) **we did not,** even do that.

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***7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. Vs 8 - So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 9 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. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. 11 For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.***

**Vs 7 -** So, we could have made demands… Instead, we were gentle among you.

Notice how Paul describes how they treated the believers in Thessalonica. Like a mother nursing her child. Let that paint a picture in your mind of how Paul, Silas, and Timothy loved the believers, cared for the believers, and placed the needs of the believers in front of their own.

**Vs 8 -** Longing for you, longing to love you, we not only shared the gospel, **εὐαγγέλιον** *(yoo-ang-ghel’-ee-on)* with you, but we even shared our own selves.

Because you were dear to us!

**Vs 9 -** You remember, brothers our:

**Labor** - **κόπος** (kop’-os) labor that is mingled with trouble.

**Toil** - hard and difficult labor.

We worked night and day, so that we did not burden you.

**Vs 10 -** Here Paul introduces a new point. Namely, that you are witnesses of another point, and again it may be that there were those who charged something different against Paul and his companions, but notice what Paul says.

You are witnesses and God is a witness (both of you in the dock to give testimony) of how holy, righteous, and blameless our conduct was towards you.

**Paul reminds them of their love for them, how they cared for them, and their conduct among them. And, he calls them and God to witness to the truthfulness of what he is saying!**

**Vs 11 12** For you know, again the Greek word is **οιδα** (*oy’-da*). For you know how we were like a father with is children!

Now a different picture. Like a father with his children, we:

**Exhorted –** beseeched you or comforted you.

**Encouraged –** this is to speak in such as way as to incentive, calm, and console.

**Charged –** bear witness or testify.

Verse 12b tells us what they charged them to do: ***to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.***

The One who calls you (present tense, calls and keeps calling you) into His Kingdom and glory

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***13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved —  so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!***

**Vs 13 –** We thank God, we could translate it “without ceasing”. For the reality that when you “received” the word, notice which they heard, with various truth claims, when you received the message, which you heard from us, you accepted it.

The Greek word for accepted is **δέχομαι** (dekh’-om-ahee) to take by the hand, to receive as you would receive a friend or guest, it brings with it the idea of receiving and granting access.

You received it not as the word of men… But rather, what it really is ***“the word of God.”***

The word translated work, is the word **ἐνεργέω (**en-erg-eh’-o). It is where we get the English word energy. **The word of God is what energizes us*!***

**Vs 14a** - ***For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.*** Notice that again, brothers…

Notice imitators, The Greek word is **μιμητής** (mim-ay-tace’). Again, it is where we get the word mimic.

Paul told them in chapter 1: *“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord…” (1Th 1:6a ESV)* The believers were mimicking Paul and Jesus in their conduct, in their behavior, and in their character.

Here Paul says you have also become imitators of the Churches of God in Christ in Judea. These are the churches in Israel, these are the churches that are comprised of Jews who have converted to Christianity.

These are national Jews who have become saved, and Paul says you have also become imitators of them.

**In what way Paul? How Paul?**

**Vs 14b - *For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,***

**Did you hear that?** You are being persecuted and suffering from your fellow Thessalonians, just like the churches in Judea are being persecuted and suffering at the hands of the **Jews**.

Grace, it seems, the persecution may have been more than Jews and Jewish converts, because Paul could have said that and instead chose to say your own countrymen.

**Why would Paul even say this?**

1. **True** – Truth matters, and it is simply true!
2. **Prepares them for what is coming.** Being a believer in a fallen world, will be difficult.
3. **This persecution (suffering and trials) is not the exception**, it is the **NORM!**
4. **Persecution began in Judea;** it is the boiling point of persecution. If the enemy could not stop the church in Judea, it will not stop you either!
5. **You are part of something much bigger,** this is not a little sect. This is the gospel of God. **YOU are part of the great plan of redemption!**

*“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” (2Ti 3:12 ESV)*

**Vs 15 –16 -**  Speaking of the Jews: ***who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved —  so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!***

Paul now lays **six charges against the Jews** and draws **two conclusions**: **First the six charges:**

1. They killed the Lord
2. They killed the prophets
3. They drove us out. The Greek word is **ἐκδιώκω** (ek-dee-o’-ko), it means to drive out by persecution.
4. They do not (even try) to please God, their behavior is the opposite of even **an attempt** to please God.
5. They oppose or they are against, all mankind.
6. They hinder **(the word is prevent, deny, or refuse)** us from sharing the gospel with the Gentiles that they might be saved (this is what Paul and the missionary teams have been experiencing in every city).

**The worst feature of unbelief is the desire to drag others down with themselves!**

Now these charges may seem harsh, but these charges are found all over the Bible, but I will stick to just the New Testament and **just two references:**

**Jesus -** *“"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Mt 23:37 ESV)*

**Stephen** *- 51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,” (Ac 7:51-52 ESV)*

**These are horrible, and they are true!**

**Now the two conclusions:**

**Vs 16b -** ***so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!***

1. It is the idea that God allows a certain space or repentance, a measure of iniquity before he acts. **Picture a cup of sins filling up and then God responding.**

With the nation of Israel, Paul is saying they keep filling up the measure of their sins!

1. ***Wrath has come upon them at last!***

This is a very interesting statement, a few things you should know:

1. Terry, this is the exact same Greek word used in I Thes 1:10: *“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”*

The Greek word is **ὀργή** (or-gay’)- **it is the boiling anger of God.**

1. The tense of **“has come”** is Aorist tense which means it has to do with something we do not have in English, what Greek scholars call **“punctiliar action.”**

So in its context like ITh 1:10, it may be a statement about the future that is absolutely certain.

The way Jesus used it: *“Whoever believes* (present tense) *in the Son has* (present tense) *eternal life; whoever does not obey* (present tense) *the Son shall not see* (future tense) *life, but the wrath of God remains* (present tense) *on him.” (Joh 3:36 ESV)*

It seems he is speaking of future wrath, that is certain, so certain, that it is hanging (present tense) over those who currently do not believe.

**This final phrase is handled in two ways:**

1. God’s wrath has finally (at last) come upon them

Or

1. God’s wrath has come upon them until the uttermost (end)

Based on all that Paul is saying, he is speaking of a wrath, that is as good as fallen on Israel (if they remain in unbelief!).

Now what Paul has said about the Jewish nation is only part of the story. **Let’s be honest, since the fall of Jerusalem, it has been the Gentile nations who have taken over the job of persecuting the church!**

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***17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you —  I, Paul, again and again —  but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy.”***

**Vs 17 –** remember back in Acts when Paul, Silas and Timothy had to flee the city? *“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.” (Ac 17:10 ESV)*

Look how Paul describes it: We were ***“torn away.”*** The Greek word is **ἀπορφανίζω** (ap-or-fan-id’-zo)

This is a compound word to separate and to orphan. Paul is painting a picture, of a child and parent being stripped apart, leaving the child orphaned. We were town away from you… BROTHERS!

**Once again, do you see Paul’s love for the people he shared the gospel with?**

This **tearing away** was only for a **short time**, although in person, it was not in heart (our hearts were always with you), and we have been working hard because we have a great desire to “see your face.”

**Vs 17b** -­ We had a great desire, a craving, to see you face to face.

**Vs 18 –** As Paul writes from Corinth, less than a year after the church had formed, he says, we have wanted to come to you, in fact I myself, multiple times.

BUT… Satan hindered us. Remember back to spiritual warfare from Daniel. Things are happening in the heavenly realm that are having an impact on the earthly realm.

The word hindered brings with it the idea of cutting off a person’s course.

**Satan can really do things to hinder us.**

**Vs 19 *- For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?***

Notice this is now the second time the return of the Lord has been mentioned:

The first time: *“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” (1Th 1:10 ESV)*

Here Paul paints the picture, that these believers in Thessalonica are his hope, his joy, his crown of boasting before the Lord (at Jesus’s coming).

The picture is Paul’s labor (these believers), being found in the Lord, at the Lord’s return.

If you have been a part of a person coming to Christ or their growth in Christ, they are **part of your joy** and **crown of rejoicing**, they are your **work**, in the Lord, to be presented to the Lord, at his coming!

**Vs 20 - For you are our glory and joy.”** He concludes reminding the believers in Thessalonica, that they are his glory and joy!

The Greek word is **δόξα** (dox’-ah) – fame, praise, or honor.

The people that you have been (spiritually) instrumental in their lives. They are your glory and joy!

*“Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.” (1Co 4:5 ESV)*

**Why do you do the things you do?** My hope and prayer for each of us is that we are doing, what we are doing, for the glory of God. Because one day, each one of us, will receive our commendation, our **praise from God**!

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**Faith Lessons from I Thessalonians Chapter** 2

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