

AM 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 The Gospel and the Church

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[0 : 00] Let us take our Bibles and turn in the Scriptures to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, which in the Pew Bible is on page 1187. 1 Thessalonians and chapter 1.

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[2 : 15] Well friends, I'd like to turn your attention to the passage that we read together just a few moments ago and to take up as our study this morning verses 5 to 10 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 1.

Now if the opening four verses of this chapter focus attention on the Church of God, which if you can remember back to the end of May we looked at, and saw that the Church of God is an assembly of people that lives not only in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, but which is also marked by faith, love and hope, which works, labours and steadfastly endures.

And also that the Church of God and chosen by Him. Then verses 5 to 10 draw our attention to the Church of God.

The Church of God that was produced by the Church of God. And now in the second half of the Church of God. And now in the second half of the chapter we see something about the Gospel that was spread by the Church.

So we're told first of all how the Gospel came to the Church, came to the, should I say, the city of Thessalonica that produced the Church.

[3 : 44] It came, we're told in verse 5, not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

And then we're told in these verses how the Thessalonians received that Gospel that came to them. We're told that they became imitators of us, the apostles, and of the Lord because they received the Word, Paul says, in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

And then in the third place in these verses, Paul shows us how the Gospel spread out from Thessalonica. Look at verse 8. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia, the northern region of Greece, and Achaia, the southern region of Greece, but, he says, your faith in God has gone forth everywhere.

How the Gospel came, how the Gospel was received, and how the Gospel spread. So let's look a little more closely at this passage.

Because in it we see a pattern emerging. A pattern which shows us God's great purpose in the world.

[5 : 12] That he will pursue until the last day when Jesus Christ shall return in glory for judgment. The Gospel comes in power.

The power of the Holy Spirit. There will be a people who will, by the Spirit's enabling, receive it with joy, no matter the personal cost to themselves.

And those people will not only pass on the word of the Lord in turn, but they will also embody that word in a transformed life.

So there is much to learn for us, for every church, in every age, from Paul's reminding the Thessalonians of how they came to know the Lord when he visited them away back in about 50 AD.

So we're not just looking at this letter as a piece of antiquarian literature. This is the word of God.

We want to be like the Thessalonians who received the message, not as the word of men, but as it truly is, the word of God.

[6 : 21] And as we approach the Bible in this way, we want to learn of God and his ways. That we might trust him.

That his word might be at work in us. And that it may shape us to be more like our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So let us ask, how did the gospel come to Thessalonica? And for the answer, we need to look at chapter 1 and verse 5, where Paul says, For we knew, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. How did the gospel come to this city? It came not like the statue of Diana, the goddess Diana of the Ephesians, which according to legend fell directly from heaven.

The gospel isn't parachuted into a place direct from God in heaven. No, our gospel, Paul says, came by weak human agents.

[7 : 39] Paul, Silvanus, that's his Latin name, we know him better by the name Silas, and Timothy. These frail human men, agents, came with the message of the gospel to this city of Thessalonica.

Before they arrived, there was no church. There were no Christians. But when they left, just a few months perhaps later, a church remarkably had been established.

How did that happen? Well, it happened as the direct result of the preaching of the gospel by these men of God. Now notice what Paul teaches about this in a little more detail now.

First he says, The gospel came not in word only. Now we immediately think of what comes next, but we need to pause for a moment, because there's an important lesson to be learned in what Paul says here.

When he says, The gospel came not in word only, he doesn't deny the fact that the gospel came in words. And that's important.

[8 : 59] Because we live in a day and age when words are downplayed, discounted. We live in an image, visual age. But God works through words.

And it's significant that the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is described in John's gospel as the Word.

He communicates the message. He communicates the very being of God. He makes God known. No one has seen God at any time, but the one and only who is in the bosom of the Father.

He has declared him. God reveals himself through the Word and through words. Words are important in God's saving work.

Indeed, they are of vital importance. And we're not just being old-fashioned or conservative or traditional by coming to a church where the pulpit is central and elevated because it's the throne of the Word of God.

[10 : 09] And we sit and gather under its sound. We don't just do it because this is what we've always done. But we do it because we believe the Bible to be the Word of God, the revelation that God has made of himself.

If man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, then how do we do that? what rule do we follow? The only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God is the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

And as the Word is preached, something remarkable happens. it doesn't just remain words that disappear into the air or fall down to the ground.

But the voice of Jesus Christ is heard as we were trying to explain to the children. There's a remarkable passage in the letter to the Ephesians where Paul says that Jesus Christ came and preached peace to those who were far off and to those who were near.

And when he says to those who were far off, he's actually saying to you who were far off. But Jesus Christ never, ever visited Ephesus, a city on the western side of modern day Turkey.

[11 : 54] So how did Jesus Christ come and preach peace to you Ephesians? He came when Paul and others preached the Gospel.

He spoke in and through their ministries, in and through the word that they preached and declared. And his voice was heard.

in that lovely passage in John chapter 10 where he speaks about being the good shepherd, he speaks about other sheep I have.

The good shepherd not only gathers the sheep, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, he gathers the lost sheep from every tribe and language and people and nation.

He is the good shepherd who seeks until he finds. He calls his sheep by name.

[12:57] And that calling takes place whenever, wherever the Gospel is preached. Thank God that he speaks through his word.

Do you hear his voice speaking to you, calling you this morning? Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ says Paul in Romans 10, 17.

God uses words. Our Gospel, Paul says, came to you in words. That's the first point. But the second point is so much more important.

Not only does the Gospel come in word, but it must come in something more in order to be effectual. It must come in power. Words by themselves, on their own, are not sufficient of themselves.

No matter how well they are spoken, no matter how expertly they are delivered, great preaching is not to be confused with great oratory.

[14:09] Now don't get me wrong, a mighty orator or a public speaker can hold great sway over an audience. We all know this, don't we? We've seen it in 20th century history, how one man and his oratory can sweep a whole nation off its feet, as it were, and do dreadful things.

He can employ all the rhetorical tricks of the trade to move people perhaps to tears, laughter, or to acts of selfless generosity or daring bravery. A Christian preacher may even learn and adopt such techniques and may be able to get people to do certain things that come to the front in great numbers and profess to have made a decision for Christ.

Christ. But only a divine power can truly convert a soul and bring somebody from death to life, from sin to faith in Jesus Christ.

And when you read this passage, you have to say, well how did these idolaters, people who were wedded to worshipping idols, how did they turn from their idols?

Or if you read through the rest of the letter, you begin to see issues and problems that were amongst the people in Thessalonica. Issues like gluttony and greed.

[15:46] How does a glutton moderate his diet? Or how can the sexually immoral become chaste and pure? How can the lazy become hardworking and industrious?

How can the greedy become generous? How can a drunkard sober up and stay sober? How can a drug addict break free from his addiction? How can a lover of the world become a worshipper of God and a self-denying servant of Jesus Christ?

Not by word only. There has to be a power at work for these things to be accomplished. Words alone can be misunderstood.

They can be disregarded. They can be quickly forgotten as every preacher knows only too well. Words need to be enforced and this is what happened when the gospel came to Thessalonica by Paul, Silas and Timothy.

There was a divine power present when they preached to the Thessalonians. They felt the power of the apostles' message.

[16:57] The message had a lasting impact upon them which words alone could never achieve. There was a power.

But there was also a full conviction with the word. We've been thinking about the power but now we've got to think about this second thing which the apostle refers to as full conviction or much assurance.

And you might ask yourself well what's the difference between preaching in power and preaching with full conviction? Well we could put it something like this. The power was outward.

It was objective. It was something the Thessalonians recognized as they listened to the word being preached by Paul and his companions. They were aware of this power the force which accompanied the words that they heard.

The full conviction on the other hand was something inward and subjective and something that the Thessalonians saw in Paul and his companions as they preached the word.

[18:14] It was something wrought in their hearts by God. It was an assurance. It was if you like an overwhelming confidence that the word that the apostles were delivering to the Thessalonians was not the word of man but it was the word of God.

And so the apostles spoke with an inward conviction that was full or deep and at the same time the words that they spoke as we've seen came to the Thessalonians with a power which could not be explained in merely human terms.

They felt the power of the words but they also saw in the apostles the deep conviction of the truth of the words. They could see it in their faces.

They could see it in their very behavior and in the deportment of the preacher. The preachers acted and behaved in a way that was consistent with the word and the message that they believed they were handling.

There was no contradiction between this word from God and the earnestness and the seriousness of the preachers who declared it.

[19 : 37] Paul's preaching was not only powerful in its effect but it was confident in its presentation preaching. He often speaks about boldness in preaching and this is what he's referring to.

He was a man who was sure of his message. He was convinced of its truth and he was absolutely convinced of its relevance to those to whom he was preaching and as a result he was bold in proclaiming it.

Paul was both confident and courageous in his preaching and as the Thessalonians listened and looked at these preachers they must have seen in them an earnestness and a seriousness and a deep rooted conviction about the absolute truthfulness of the message that they proclaimed to them.

In other words these men weren't putting on an act. This wasn't a performance. they were not trying to impress or persuade at all costs.

No they were in utter earnestness convinced that what they were declaring was the word of God and not the word of man.

[20 : 54] And I'm reminded of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 2 where he says but we have renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with the word of God.

But by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. We've got nothing to hide. We're not relying on the tricks of the oratorical trade. We're not professional public speakers. We've got a message from God. We want to declare it clearly and boldly and confidently because we believe it is God's word.

And we pray to God that he would accompany our preaching with power. So that your eyes might be opened, your ears unstopped, and your hearts opened to receive this word from God.

And that brings us to the source of all these characteristics of authentic gospel preaching. The word of truth, divine power, full conviction.

[22 : 06] These are the things we've been looking at. Where do these things come from? The gospel came in the Holy Spirit, he says in this verse that we've been considering.

I've kept that to the end because really this is where all the other things come from. The Holy Spirit, preaching in the Holy Spirit.

I was staggered a few years ago when a friend of mine told me that the great Puritan theologian John Owen once wrote words to this effect.

And these words might stagger you as well. You'll think, what a heretic. But he wasn't a heretic. He was speaking the truth when he said, without the Holy Spirit, we might as well burn our Bibles.

Isn't that a shocking statement? It's published in a book by the Banner of Truth Trust. What a shocking thing for the Banner of Truth Trust to publish.

[23 : 29] But what did he mean? Well, he's put the truth in a very stark way. It certainly gets our attention. It makes us sit up and take notice. Without the Holy Spirit, we might as well burn our Bibles.

What did John Owen mean by that? Well, he was making the point as graphically as he could, that without the Spirit, the truth of the Gospel, the conviction with which we should preach it, and the power of its impact upon others would all be lost to the Church, and utterly impossible to reproduce by our own skill or strength.

There's many churches across the world, especially in the Western world, but also in other developing world countries as well, where there's every effort being made to reproduce what everybody knows is missing, and it just doesn't work.

work. We need the Holy Spirit. We need his presence, we need his power. We need him to work in and through and by the word.

If God's work is to succeed and prosper and continue, without him we can do some things, many things, nothing, no thing.

[25 : 15] We need him. And I suppose one of the points that John Owen was thinking about when he made that staggering statement, without the Holy Spirit we might as well burn our Bibles, was the fact that for over a thousand years the Jewish nation had the word of God, the word of the prophets, Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, in their own language and in their own possession.

And yet remember what the Lord Jesus Christ said to them, you search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life, life.

The very fact that God has given us the Bible shows that we have eternal life, that we are the people of God. He hasn't given his word to any other nation.

But Jesus says these are the scriptures that testify of me, yet you do not come to me that you might have life.

something more than the word, than the mere word is required.

[26 : 38] We need the Holy Spirit. The gospel came, says the apostle, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

salvation. I think this, if we're going to apply these words to today, I think this points out one of the great deficiencies in the church in the churches today.

And if we're honest and open and don't feel that we have to defend the party position, the party line, we recognize that, don't we?

And if we've read anything from church history, and there are so many great historical accounts of the great works that God has done in the past, then we're acutely aware that there is a change in the times between those periods of revival and awakening.

The 18th century was called the great awakening because there were many awakenings, but this period from roughly 1734 to 1770s was a period of great awakening.

[28 : 29] And we are conscious that these things are not happening in our own experience today. people have to see the deficiency because then it will drive us to our knees.

And we remember the words of Jesus to his disciples that if we know how to give good gifts to our children, shall not your Father in Heaven give good gifts, but Luke says the Holy Spirit, the best of the good gifts to those who ask him.

And this should really rejuvenate our prayer meetings, our gatherings for prayer. we feel the need, but we're conscious that God wants us to approach him, to express our need to him, that he might glorify his name in answering our prayers and giving us what our hearts desire as we take our delight in him.

And I was greatly encouraged many years ago when I was reading through 1st Thessalonians and I came, sorry, both letters to the Thessalonians and I came to chapter 3 of 2nd Thessalonians, the second letter.

And Paul makes a request of these Christian believers in Thessalonica. But in doing so, he reminds them just a little bit of church history.

[30 : 23] Listen to what he says. He says, finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured and then these words, as happened among you.

Now, you have heard the message this morning and this is only a quarter of a message, so next time I come, I'll preach the rest. But I'm going to stop here on this note because it's so encouraging, especially for a small church like Dumfries.

And our church in Livingston is much the same. These words are so encouraging to us. Paul the apostle asks for prayer of these Thessalonian Christians.

Paul's a missionary, he's an apostle, he's a missionary, he's preaching the gospel here, there, and everywhere. And he asks them to pray for him. That the word of the Lord, the word that he preaches, the same as the word he preached to them, the word that he preaches might speed ahead, spread rapidly, and be honored.

Just as it was in Thessalonica. Five years ago, whatever the time period was. So he's recalling church history.

[31 : 57] He's recalling what we might call this period of revival and awakening. And as you read through 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, you see just what a transformation the gospel in the power of the Spirit brought upon this city that acted like a sounding board so that the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole of northern Greece, the whole of southern Greece, and even further afield.

And he says, I want you to pray that this may happen on the same scale, to the same degree as it happened five years ago when we visited Thessalonica.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. So you say, when you come together for prayer, can we really honestly, in good conscience, pray that the Spirit of God might so bless the preaching of the word here and elsewhere that we might see results as amazing as in Thessalonica in AD 49-50? Can we really pray for such things? My friends, it's written in the word of God. For our example and for our encouragement, take these words and pray them, and pray them again, and keep on praying them until the Lord hears answers.

How much do you love him? How much do you honour his name? Do you want to see his will done on earth as it is in heaven?

[33 : 53] How is that going to happen? How did these pagan idolaters turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven?

How were they changed that their faith produced works, their love produced labour, and their hope in Jesus Christ produced steadfast perseverance?

It was through the spirit accompanying with power the preaching of the word that achieved these results, that produced this transformation, that brought honour and glory to God.

If we love God and we love his word, we want to see others converted and transformed, that God's name may be hallowed, and his will done on earth as it is in heaven.

So I leave this passage half preached on this morning, but what an important and encouraging message it is for us.

[35 : 02] our gospel came to you. How did it come? Not in word only, but it did come in word and that's important. Let's focus on the word.

But we need more than the word. Not in word only, but also in power and with full conviction, because the Holy Spirit was present and working in might.

May God bless his word to us.