

The Greatest of Good News

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to 1 Thessalonians 1.

1 Thessalonians 1. And we may just read from the beginning again. 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.

We give thanks to God always for you all. Making mention of you in our prayers. 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.

[1 : 02] Knowing, beloved brethren. Your election by God. 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 want us to focus on verse 5.

That's where we've come to in our study. And I want us to think about this in terms of the greatest of good news. And its impact.

And its impact. In Thessalonica. And of course the gospel. The word euangelion. Means good news.

And when it's used. In the New Testament context. It has reference to the greatest. Of good news. And it was.

[2 : 04] When Paul and Silas and Timothy. Went as missionaries to Thessalonica. That they saw. A God at work. In a remarkable way there. In Thessalonica.

And he says here. 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 want us just to. Take a few moments. And think about the scene set.

In Thessalonica. As it was. Around 51 AD. It was a strategic city. That's something we can say about it.

And it's. Being. A strategic city. A port. A trading center. A key city of the Roman province.

[3 : 02] Of Macedonia. It was. An important center. And when Paul went to it. It was a center that needed. The gospel.

The greatest. Of good news. And if you think about it. There was a day long ago. In the city of Glasgow. Glasgow. When it grew.

Under the conditions. That were around. For trade. Some people say. The Clyde made Glasgow. Others say. Glasgow made the Clyde. Perhaps.

It. Cuts. Two ways. And. It grew. And. It's. It's success. Linking. North. South. And. East. And. West. Is.

Well. Known. And. Well. Documented. And. It. It grew. As well. Under the gospel. And not just. Under. Trade. And commerce. And so on.

[3 : 57] That was very much. The situation there. In. A.D. 51. Or so. When Paul went. To Thessalonica. It was an important place.

A. For. Trade. And commerce. For making. Gain. And yet it was poor. In the things of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It needed the greatest good news. With urgency. In order to attaining the greatest gain. Of all. And it's with that in mind that we approach this wonderful text.

People you see were wrapped up. In the here and now things. Yes it's true. Religiously there were. Many of them were pagans. Idolaters.

And many others were materialistic. A few as we read in Acts 17. Had attached themselves to the synagogues.

[4 : 56] Because they hoped for something better there. But in the main. The people of Thessalonica. Were. Non-believing. Pleasure.

And treasure seeking. Much like. This city is today. Much like many a city. In. The United Kingdom. And indeed.

And beyond. And so the problem. That faced Paul. Is a problem that faces us today. The fundamental problem.

Was. With Paul in his day. As it is now. That people. Were under the deadening. Influence. The spiritually deadening. Influence.

Of materialism. Of materialism. They were serving mammon. With heart. Soul. Mind. And strength. They were looking. At the greatest gain.

[5 : 51] They could achieve. And they were looking. In the wrong direction. A man's life. Said our Savior. Does not consist. In the abundance. Of the things.

He possesses. Seek. The true riches. So there they were. When Paul. And Silas. And Timothy. These three missionaries. Arrived.

On the scene. And we read. In Acts 17. As. Paul's custom was. They went. To the. To the synagogue. And they reasoned. From the Old Testament.

Scriptures. Demonstrating. That Jesus. Indeed. The Messiah. So. So. I want us. To think about this. First of all. In terms. The greatest. Of good news.

Came. It came. Through the missionaries. As we've just said. A moment ago. The good news. The gospel. Is.

[6 : 45] The greatest. Of good news. For mankind. I remember. Some years ago. Now. In college days. When. The then.

Professor MacLeod. Professor. Of systematics. Emphasized that. Again. And again. And again. Tell the people. Good news. Tell them. Good news. They get enough.

Bad news. Look up. Your papers. Your magazines. Turn on your telly. Whether it's. Sky News. Or. BBC 24. Or whatever.

There's plenty. Bad news. We know. Tell the people. Good news. And that. Is what Paul. Was about. Tell the people. The greatest. Good news.

He says. The greatest. Good news. Our gospel. Did not. Come to you. In word only. But it. It came to them. And that's the first thing. The greatest. Good news.

[7 : 40] Came to them. And it came. To them. Through heaven. Sent missionaries. Through the apostle Paul. And his missionary friends. Silas and Timothy.

And. When Paul. And. Silas and Timothy. Sought. To help the people. Understand. They did all. That they could.

To bring. The word of God. To bear upon. One. But he says. It was not. In word only. Why did he say that?

What was he getting at? He could have just said. Our gospel came to you. It came to you. In power.

In the Holy Spirit. And in match assurance. Why? Not in word only. Well you have to. Think about the context here. That is the context.

[8 : 39] As it was. In that Roman province. Of Macedonia. You have to think about the whole. Educational background. Context. You see.

The great. The Greeks. Before them. And the Romans. Too. Put great. Store. On the art. Of communication. The great.

Great. Store. On communicating. The word. The great. Store. In this. Art.

The ability. To communicate. The message. And. That is so relevant. To today. It's so relevant.

To our own day. Think of the. Emphasis. In. In. In. In. In. In the world. Today. On. The communication. Of the message. On the best way.

[9 : 37] To convey. The message. You want to convey. People get. University degrees. Now. In communication. Studies. The art.

It's not. Communication. In the sense of. BT. Electronics. And so on. It's. The art. Of communication. Of the message. People. Can. Can.

Go. Far. In. The art. In the science. I should be calling it. Art and science. Of communication. Media messages.

Media images. Media pictures. So on. All. All. To do. With communicating. The word. Some people say.

That. A picture. Is worth. Ten thousand words. But. You see. The point is. The picture. Is making you think. And think words. And.

[10 : 35] Paul says. The greatest good news. The gospel came to you. Not. In word. Only. Paul says. Much more.

Was needed. To make a radical difference. Among these Thessalonians. Than the mere. Communication. Than great. Art. And skill. And. Oratory.

And. If you. Have a mind. To do it. Which I certainly. Commend. If you have a mind.

To study. The great. Preachers. Of the. History. Of the church. You will find. That it was. Not. Great. Oratory. That turned.

Multitudes. To Christ. Doubtless. Some of the great. Preachers. Were. Good. Communicators. But it was. Not. Their.

[11 : 31] Communicating. Skills. That made. The difference. It's not. You see. That they. They had. Some. Knack. Of. Of. Touching.

The spirits. Of people. That moved. Them. Emotionally. That made. The difference. I know. As you know. We talk about this.

Preacher. And that. Preacher. This. Preacher. Is a bit. Academic. This. Preacher. Is a bit. Dry. This. Preacher. Is. A bit. Wondery. This. Preacher. Is. Something. Else.

But. This. Other. Preacher. He. Touches. Your. Emotions. My. Dear. Friends. Guitar. It. Dia. recommends. It.

It. If. Take. in word only. Now study the great preachers, I say, and you will discover it was not about their great ability as communicators.

[12 : 34] Some people tell us that preachers nowadays should be experts in the soaps. They should know EastEnders and Holby City and River City and whatever else city.

They should be experts in that. They should relate to people in these things. Or they should be great jokers. They should be experts in crafting like the comedians of our day with innuendo.

They should be experts in innuendo. Know a thousand times we say to that. In fact, Paul tells us when he wrote to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 2 and verses 1 to 4, that he went to them not with eloquence, not with superior wisdom or clever philosophy, not with the wise manipulation of words.

That's what was the norm in those days. No, not even in presenting the gospel did he come like that.

It's not about that. Some people say when you're communicating the message, you mustn't get them bogged down in talking about the miracles as if they're real.

[14 : 00] You mustn't talk about the virgin verses if it really happened. You mustn't talk about Jesus walking in the water and all that.

No, no. Leave these things and I... Don't get into these words. You've got to drop the atonement and the meaning of it. You've got to not speak about hell or people will get upset.

No, no, no. Paul said our gospel came to you. It did come to you. A full-on gospel. The whole counsel of God.

The greatest good news in all its angles. But it wasn't just in word, he says. We've got to have the gospel.

We've got to have the whole gospel. We've got to have the whole counsel of God. Yes, a thousand times. We've got to assert and maintain and defend the doctrines of the greatest good news.

[15 : 04] We can't negotiate them away. We mustn't omit them because it's easier. But in saying all that, it's not just about bringing the message.

It's not in word only. Paul was no different than all the other apostles. He knew the importance of asserting and maintaining and defending the gospel.

He knew that there were people he calls dangerous wolves in Acts 20 who will come in and spoil the flock. They want to harm people.

And in all the great eras of the gospel when God changed villages and towns and cities and nations, the gospel in all its purity was proclaimed.

But it was not in word only. It was not in the crafted skills of the professional.

[16 : 20] And that brings us to the second thing. The gospel came with a threefold impact. He tells us it came in power, in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance.

And so we have three subdivisions that are easy and obvious. It came in power. Paul tells us when he wrote to the Romans the gospel, he said, I'm not ashamed of it.

People are saying I'm ashamed of it. That's why I never went to Rome. No, no, he said. There was a practical problem there. I was hindered. But that same Paul said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God and to salvation to everyone who believes.

It's the power of God. It is the power of God. The word that is behind this is dunamis, the word we get dynamite from.

And William Hendrickson, the American New Testament scholar from a Dutch background, he has a nice way of putting this. He says that the gospel is dynamite, but it's dynamite with a difference.

[17 : 35] It is both destructive and constructive. And he says it destroys our idols. And he said it builds in its constructive aspect.

It builds new attitudes and new appetites and new interests. It builds a throne in our hearts for Christ. So it's both destructive of all that is of sin and selfishness and self-centeredness.

And it is constructive in it. It builds a throne in our hearts for Christ. And it builds new attitudes to him and to other people, new appetites for spiritual things and new interests.

It has the power to lay bare to us what we really are. Sometimes preachers get the blame for that, you know.

When somebody comes under the power of the gospel and they're not converted, they're not following Christ, it stings them, it hurts them, it offends them, and the poor preacher gets the blame.

[18 : 54] But it's not him. It is the gospel coming in power. Unless that message is showing us our sinnership, unless it is laying us in the dust, it's not doing its job.

Because it's from the dust that we look up to Christ and we see him as the one who can raise us up. He took me from a fearful pit and from the mighty clay.

And unless we know ourselves to be there and we're looking up to him to rescue us, then we'll never be rescued. And you see, the gospel is power in that it lays bare our sinnership in order to fix our gaze on Christ.

It is, it came in power. It came in power. Now what we've been saying here is that the gospel is the power of God and to salvation.

And it's important to believe that the gospel is power. That the gospel itself is power. It is powerful.

[20 : 16] John Murray, that is, Professor John Murray, says in his commentary on the words, the gospel is the power of God and to salvation.

He translates it, it is the power of God operative and to salvation. In other words, it is the power that does the job.

it operates and to salvation to everyone who believes. And therefore, we've got to believe not only that it is the power of God and to salvation, but that the power in it operates in us and to salvation.

God grant us to believe in the power of the gospel and that it is the power of God to us and to salvation. The gospel came with a threefold impact.

First, in power. Second, in the Holy Spirit. Now, we mentioned 1 Corinthians 2 a moment or two ago and in verse 4 of that same passage, the apostle Paul links the demonstration of the Holy Spirit in his preaching with the power associated with that spirit.

[21 : 36] And he tells us that his preaching was not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Not at all about man, but in demonstration of the Holy Spirit and of power.

Paul was not afraid, you see, to be branded a fanatic because he emphasized the mighty ministry of the Holy Spirit upon his own preaching. No, no, he wasn't fanatical and he didn't care if people thought he was.

No, rather, he cherished and he constantly sought that his ministry would be in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. And if you love your minister, and I hope you do, you'll pray for him that his ministry would be like that.

What else do we want from him but that his ministry to us would be in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that our faith, I'm quoting Paul, may not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And Paul, you see, acknowledges his total need of the Lord in this. It was the Holy Spirit's power that made these Thessalonians turn from idols to God.

[23 : 05] And it was the Holy Spirit's power in other apostolic ministries and every gospel God-honored ministry down through the centuries that made countless millions turn to the Lord.

There's no explanation for why Peter's sermon had such an impact that 3,000 were converted in one sermon but that it came not in word only but in power and in the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us about in Acts 24 that what made Felix tremble was the Spirit of God speaking through him to that man.

Acts 24, 25 what made Agrippa shout out Paul to some extent or almost you persuade me to be a Christian but that he felt the power of the word because the Spirit of God was at work.

And what made Festus cry out much learning has made you mad. He was stunned by the logic on fire that was coming at him.

[24 : 36] And the Calvins and Luthers and Knoxes and the Whitfields and Wesleys and the Lloyd-Joneses and yes and the Billy Grahams too.

And many is another besides. What made their ministries great was it was not in word only but in power and in the Holy Spirit.

Of course the preacher should do his best in his preparation. I have to say I'm not for this business of I'll get my word from the Lord and the preacher's coming up into the pulpit.

He hasn't a clue what he's going to say. I don't think that's honoring to the Lord. Now we're to do our best. We're to be workmen, we're told, by the apostle, we're to be workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

But we can't rely on that. No, he says, the word came not in word only, however eloquent and clever it might have been, not in word only.

[25 : 51] There's a very interesting story told about the 18th century New England Puritans or folk from that, that background, Samuel Davis and Gilbert Tennant.

And these fellows were red-hot theologians and very acquainted with good sound theology. And they came to England to hear George Whitefield.

I suppose they wanted to suss him out before they invited him across. And that particular week that is on record, when they came to listen to him, Whitefield had a very, very busy week and he had had no time to prepare a fresh sermon for the occasion.

And what he did manage was a bit cobbled and it was a poor sermon. I'm using the language of Tennant and Davis. It was a poor sermon. These guys were men who could craft sermons, who were careful.

They were erudite fellows. And their comment on his sermon was that it was a poor sermon. But they said this, the unction that attended his ministry was such that they would gladly risk the dangers of the Atlantic to sit under its gracious influence.

[27 : 27] Not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit. That's a very insightful, very profound thing they said.

They would risk the dangers of the Atlantic. And there was a long crossing in those days, and a risky crossing. To listen, to be under the unction, the Holy Spirit's power, and the gracious words in that context, in the Spirit.

And I say again, the best you can do for your minister and for other preachers of the word, is pray that their ministry would be attended in that way, in power and in the Holy Spirit.

Lloyd-Jones called true preaching logic on fire. And of course he meant the ministry of the word thought through and delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Indeed, our Lord Jesus Christ in that wee synagogue in Nazareth, when he read in the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 61, he read these words, the Spirit of the Lord God has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.

[28 : 57] And as it was with the master, so it must be with his servants. You do us a great service. You do your own souls a great service to pray that the ministry will be in power and in the Holy Spirit.

And the last thing within that point, and then we have one thing to say and we finish, it was with much assurance. As if Paul is saying, you knew and I knew there was something going on here.

something's going on and we know what it is. Both preacher and hearer alike knew that the Lord was at work.

Not merely I, Paul, speaking to you, but the Spirit using me, Paul, and Silas and Timothy. We knew it and you knew it, he's saying.

I'm sure I've told you the story that one of the few places in my own experience where the manifestation of the power of the Spirit simply came down was in the prayer meeting in Laird many years ago.

[30 : 25] John McLean used to go off to committees and I would do his Tuesday prayer meeting. And we would just get going to whatever I had to expound. And all of a sudden the place was like it was filled with a thick silence.

I knew it and they knew it. And the senior elder then, Willie Monroe, used to look up at me and as I said, are you aware of it?

in power and in the Holy Spirit, with much assurance to preacher and hearer alike. And we need to crave that from the Lord.

We need to not be satisfied with anything less than his mighty presence in the ministry. Lastly, the gospel transformed their lives.

And we'll just consider this briefly because we'll be looking at this in more detail as we journey on. But Paul says here, you see, our gospel came to you not in word only.

[31 : 40] It did come, it came through us, but it didn't come just in word. No, it came in power and the Holy Spirit with much assurance. As you knew what kind of men were among you, their lives were changed.

these folks had been transformed and we have already looked at some of the things that Paul identified.

Verse 3, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, the works that were produced by the faith that's a gift of God. The labor of love, agonizing in what they did in service to the Lord because they loved him and loved people.

their stickability, patient perseverance of hope in the Lord Jesus. The evidence was there. So much so that it proved to Paul their election by God.

The difference was manifest. Their likeness to Christ was so evident. in fact, there's an interesting reference in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 where Paul tells us that the Thessalonian Christians excelled in giving.

[33 : 03] And they didn't excel in giving because they were wealthy. They excelled in giving even out of their rock bottom poverty. In fact, Paul uses them as an example to other churches in Macedonia and beyond.

These folks knew how to give because they gave themselves first to the Lord. That's what he says about them.

Their lives were different. They became models. Look at verse 7 just briefly. So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and in Achaia.

you were a model to them of how Christians should live. And it's true, of course, that they did run into some serious difficulties in their lives.

But Paul could say they were model Christians. And this is a great proof, if you like, and testimony to their true conversion to Christ and to the true and lasting effects of the gospel coming in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance.

[34 : 21] For Paul, the doctrine he brought mattered. He communicated it. But the doctrine was translated into Christian living and that mattered too.

They saw Jesus not only as their Savior but the Lord of their lives. And that's the way we should be.

King of my life, said the songwriter, I crown thee now. Thine shall the glory be. That's the way we're to think.

That's the way they thought. The Savior was first and foremost in their minds. There's one pub in Mary Hill and the name of it rattles me every time I see it.

The first and the last. It's a blasphemy. Jesus alone is the first and the last. And he should be first and last in your life and mine.

[35 : 33] That's what Paul saw when the gospel came to them not in word only but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance.

God and let us not rest on anything less than transformed lives. Lives that are absorbed with Jesus and how best to serve him in the wee while that's left to us in this world.

Let's make it our great and main business. peace. And I can't leave it without saying it again. You must pray more earnestly for your minister that the ministry he's bringing will be in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance so that lives are transformed.

steady and deepening progress in the life of faith. Living more and more unto Christ. Looking for better ways to serve him.

I'm sure you've heard this before but John Kennedy of Dingwall tends to be remembered as Dr. Kennedy. Tends to be remembered for being a very sound and powerful preacher of the gospel.

[37 : 00] Very orthodox. But in his day people thought he was a bit strange. Do you know why?

Because he gave away far too much. He gave away far too much. He didn't look to himself look to themselves but to the Lord.

And they found ways to serve the Lord better. And as sure as John Kennedy ultimately was not the loser neither will we be. He will give us what is good.

Let us pray then that under the influence of the ministry of the word our lives will be changed markedly. And that others may be brought to see their need through our own help and under God's blessing.

That there might be evidence of the transforming effect of the greatest good news in us and in those to whom we speak.

[38 : 22] Don't be afraid to take up the prayer and ask the Lord to grant that the Lord would so empower the ministry that it would be a ministry blessed to you and to others who hear you.

Amen.