

Scripture: Mark 1:9-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

The Power of the gospel.

In our Mark reading today, we learn that after his baptism by John the Baptist Jesus went into the area of the Sea of Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God saying ¹⁵“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” He started calling humble fishermen and others to follow him, to leave their everyday jobs and commenced equipping them to reach out with the very same gospel he was proclaiming. John the Baptist, Jesus’ forerunner was murdered soon after this time for standing up to the truth of God’s word – the fate of many, even in our day, of those that Jesus calls to follow him. This same fate – death - was to come to the apostle Paul for holding forth the message of salvation. For Paul knew the power of the gospel and what it would cost him. We know how his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road changed his whole life - from being a person of terror dragging Christians before the courts and approving of their death - to following Jesus himself and dying for his faith. That’s the power of the gospel in a person’s life. We know about the trials that Paul went through – there’s a list in 2 Corinthians 11 – I trust that you are familiar with some of the circumstances Paul found himself in. That’s homework for you– i.e. read 2 Corinthians 11 before the day ends. It should challenge you!

Some of the challenges for Paul occurred in Thessalonica. He was instrumental in the founding of the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey.

Background to the Thessalonians story

¹⁷ When Paul and his companions … came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city … shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, … They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. …

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. … They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

From this letter to the Thessalonians, we learn that there was a Christian fellowship formed in Thessalonica which continued to thrive in the missionaries’ absence. Although Paul had to suddenly leave this young church, his deep concern for them prompted this letter. Paul eventually found his way to Corinth where his companions Silas and Timothy joined him (Acts 18:5)

Have your Bible open at 1 Thessalonians 1 – let's have a look at these ten verses of 1 Thessalonians 1.

Paul had two companions when writing this letter, Silas and Timothy are mentioned at the beginning of the letter. They had been with Paul in Thessalonica and Berea when he attacked because of the gospel message.

Silas, and

We know Silas was also known as *Silvanus*. He was a long and experienced companion of Paul who went through a number of trials with him. On their way to Thessalonica, they went through Philippi where Paul and Silas were imprisoned and then God freed them through what seemed to be a localised earthquake – their gaoler and his family came to faith at that time which we read in ([Acts 16:19-30](#)). A well-to-do woman called Lydia and her household also believed and were baptized. Paul and his companions then travelled on from Philippi to Thessalonica. [MAP]

Timothy

We know a little bit more about the co-author Timothy. He was a resident of Lystra, joining Paul's travels there. Lystra was a city in the province of Galatia ([Acts 16:1-3](#)). He was the son of a Greek father ([Acts 16:1](#)) and a Jewish mother named Eunice ([2 Timothy 1:5](#)). From his youth he learned the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother whose name was Lois ([2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15](#)). Timothy was a trusted companion and associate of Paul, and he accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys. When Paul had met up again with Timothy in Athens he sent him to visit the Thessalonians believers. ([1 Thessalonians 3:2](#)). The three then met up again in Corinth. Paul was greatly encouraged by the news that Timothy had brought about the Thessalonian believers, and the three of them wrote this letter, 1 Thessalonians, to them.

[To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.](#)

From this verse we know that the letter was specifically addressed to the Christians who were the church in Thessalonica, those who had persisted in worshipping together even through the opposition they faced – the same opposition which had driven Paul out of the city, causing him to be separated from Timothy and Silas.

In verses 2-4, they reminisce about their relationship with the folk in Thessalonica. They express their gratefulness for their partnership in the work of the gospel. It's important to note that they encouraged the church there by stating that the Thessalonian believers are continually held up before God in prayer. [2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.](#)

Do you have a list of people you regularly pray for? When you happen to catch up with them, do you encourage them and tell them that you pray for them regularly, once every few weeks, or maybe once a month – depending on how many people God places on your heart for prayer. And what are the topics for prayer? We read Paul, Silas and Timothy thank God for the work of the gospel in the Thessalonians and among their community because that was a result of their faith. [3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith,](#)

[Faith, hope and love and perseverance in ministry](#)

We know that the Scripture says faith without works is dead, so we know that these people are living out their faith by sharing the gospel, not just in a casual way, for our writers say that the Thessalonian Christians labour in that task. [Your labour prompted by love.](#) And that labour for the sake of the gospel is prompted by their love of God and the people they are reaching out to. They persevere – holding out hope because of their belief in Jesus –verse 3 still: Your [endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.](#)

Three great Christian virtues were evident among them - faith, love and hope. Paul talks about these three qualities in the Christian faith in quite a number of his writings. At the end of 1 Thessalonians (5:8) when the Thessalonians are being encouraged about the return of the Lord Jesus in glory, there is reference to the battles ahead and they are urged to put on **faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet**. In the letter to the church in Colossae, which was meant to be read in other churches as well, a circular letter, we find a similar theme. **Colossians 1: 3 We always thank God**, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4 because we have heard of your faith** in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— **5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel**. Notice the recurrent theme – prayer and thanking God for the Christians' faith, love and hope.

The Thessalonian church is given the encouragement that not only does God love them, but God has also chosen them. God chooses us to follow him, and yet there is a responsibility on our side to respond to that love, we are given a choice – answer God's call on your life or reject his sovereignty over you.

4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you,

What evidence is there that these people have responded to the call of God on their lives? **5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit**

It wasn't just a response to hearing God's words through Paul and his companions – there was evidence of a powerful change in their lives. Verse 5 shows strong conviction and clear evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. Paul said **16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.** [Romans 1:16].

Living the gospel.

Paul and his companions spent several weeks with the Thessalonians, teaching in the synagogue at least three times whilst they worked to support themselves – so maybe they were there a few months. Their actions were observed by the people, as this letter reminds the church.

You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord,

Living so that others see the gospel's truth in your actions is so important for a Christian. To demonstrate your faith has more impact than just to speak about it. That's gutsy! This is the power of the gospel to change lives. Can you recall someone, or more than one person, who has or have been role models in the faith to you? That person whom you have learned truths from, who has encouraged you in your Christian journey, who has pointed you to Jesus Christ's teachings, who has demonstrated faith to you? God desires us to try to draw others into accepting the message of salvation found only in Jesus Christ. In his second letter to Timothy (3:10), Paul is able to point to his own life, probably shortly before his death, and say **10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, [my] faith** He encourages Timothy to **14 continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.** In 2 Corinthians Paul wants his life to be an open book for the sake of the gospel. **5:11 What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.**

So the Thessalonians followed Jesus Christ as Lord because the words, the actions and the way of life of these pioneer missionaries struck them to the core of their being – even though they were being persecuted – check verse 6: **for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.**

We learned earlier that the evidence these people in Thessalonica were Christians was through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and here we further find that even through persecution they were able to be joyful in their newfound faith.

From imitating these missionaries, we further find in verse 7 that the Thessalonians are now commended by these same men, Paul, Silas and Timothy, for the fact that they also are modelling Christian life – to believers throughout a wider area – Macedonia and Achaia [which was part of Greece].

⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. And not only those specific areas verse 8 tells us: ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

The news of how these Thessalonian Christians accepted the gospel had reached far and wide – and the stories of their conversions have been circulated and talked about in many places. Their faith was like a bell, the news rang out ... everywhere. There had been a radical transformation in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica. They had turned away from idols—a significant shift in a culture steeped in paganism—to serve the living and true God [v9]. This highlights the genuine repentance and a new spiritual allegiance to the one true, living God, by this group of Thessalonians.

They had come to believe in the one crucified for the sin of each person, who became sin himself for you and for me also, releasing us from the bondage of sin and the punishment due to us when not giving God the glory in our lives as verse 8 and 9 tell us: Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell 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—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The Thessalonian believers were now looking forward in hope and trust, expecting the imminent return of Jesus Christ from heaven, and they knew that in Jesus himself was eternal life, for his salvation protects us from the punishment of sin, which is the central promise of the gospel.

1 Thessalonians 1 paints a beautiful picture of a community whose faith was not only personal but profoundly public - ringing out - echoing across Asia Minor in testimony, transformation, and hope.

The letter paints a picture of the power of the gospel to transform lives. I pray that you too are challenged by the words of Paul, Silas and Timothy and the response of the Thessalonians, encouraging to persevere and endure in the face of challenges that you face in your daily life as a Christian.