

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 – “The Gospel Changes Everything”

Summary Statement:

Paul shares how the gospel came to the Thessalonians and the effect it had on them. We'll look at how the Gospel provides Power, Purpose, and Promise.

1. The Gospel Provides Power – 1:5-6

1:5-6 - *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,*

This first chapter of 1 Thessalonians is once again Paul giving thanks to the church in Thessalonica and for the great things happening with them. He's rejoicing in their *work of faith*, their *labour of love*, and *patience of hope* (1:3). This is all because of the way they received the gospel.

Paul relays that their gospel didn't come to them in word only, but also in power. And by saying ***our gospel***, Paul is not trying to claim this as his own, or something he's put together. He's received this from the Lord directly. There's only one gospel.

- The term gospel is of an Anglo-Saxon origin, and it means *God's spell*, or you could say, *good spell*, or, *good news*. This is the way this has typically been defined today.
- The Greek word is *euangelion* where we get our word evangelize or evangelism. It's what we are to do with this good news.
- So, what is this good news? It's the news that Jesus has come to give His life as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. He has taken the judgment of God that we deserved and has atoned for our sins. This gift of eternal life is given to all who believe and is given freely by His grace.
- Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:1–4**, *“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”*

It's quite simple! This is the basics of salvation right here. And we need to understand that this is not something we achieve, but rather receive.

This is the gospel; the good news that Paul brought to the Thessalonians. But again, it wasn't in word only (and that is important) but there was another element to this gospel that makes it even more incredible. In came in power! There is power in this gospel:

- **Romans 1:16**, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."*

There is power in the gospel in that this good news reveals the means by which God saves us. It's through the amazing and powerful death and resurrection of Jesus.

But it's also power that changes us. This is what makes the gospel so unique. It doesn't just tell you what you need to do, it gives you the power to do it. It's through the Holy Spirit who takes residence in you and transforms you enabling you to live this life in Christ and for Christ.

- Too often people look at themselves as a hindrance to the gospel. As though God is relying on you to live this life for Him and not blow it. People can put so much pressure on themselves that they don't even receive the gospel for fear of failure.

But understand what's taking place when we receive the gospel. There's no prerequisite to have everything perfect and in place. You receive the gospel because you know you can't put everything in place. The gospel is the good news, but we need to recognize the bad news before we receive the good news. And the bad news is that we're fallen, imperfect people. The bible has a word for that – sinners! We're dead in sin, guilty before God with no way out on our own. That's bad news! But this is what makes the gospel good news! Jesus came to rescue us. He saves us in the condition we are but then transforms us into His image day by day.

The Gospel in Word proclaims people are free. The Gospel in Power makes them free. That's the beauty of the gospel. The law could never do that. The law said, live this way, but gave you no power to actually accomplish it. But now we have the amazing power at work in us to accomplish what God desires for us.

- It's the Spirit of God who gives power to the Word of God to transform the child of God into the image of God.

And this is the effect this gospel is having on these new believers in Thessalonica. Paul says, ***and you became followers of us and of the Lord.*** These early Christians were becoming something they previously weren't. This is the transformation made possible through the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now it seems odd that Paul would place him, Silas and Timothy as the examples to follow ahead of the Lord. He's the One to follow. But we need to recognize that we may be the only Jesus people see. In other words, they're looking for a model of what it looks like to follow Jesus. These Thessalonians didn't know anything about this life in Christ. It was all Greek to them. Paul was their first introduction to what this looked like, and he was more than willing to set that example.

And what Jesus is calling us to is not to join some religion or philosophy, but to be followers of Him. This is about relationship. This is about growing in the likeness of Him. This is forward motion. Not getting saved and sitting down thinking it's all done. Rather it's getting saved and moving on in what Jesus has for you. And you can't follow if you're not keeping your eyes on Him. He wants us to be looking to Him and seeking His way not our way.

And for these new Christians in Thessalonica, it was a big commitment to be a follower of Jesus. You were essentially choosing Jesus over everything else. It could mean loss of family, loss of job, loss of social status. We know that when Paul and Silas were ministering in Thessalonica a crowd gathered to try and stop Paul and his men. He faced persecution in this city at the hands of the Gentiles and Jews. And now these new believers ***received the word in much affliction.***

- We're never promised an easy ride as a Christian. In fact, that was the expectation in this day when a person committed their life to Jesus. It involved sacrifice, yet they knew they were gaining so much more.

That's why it says they received it in much affliction ***with joy of the Holy Spirit.*** They knew that there was far more to be gained than there was to lose. They were now truly experiencing life from the very giver of life! What a blessing – what a joy!

“Suffering and joy are almost always linked. It is the confirmation of John 15:18–21, that those who follow Christ will suffer as Christ did. As Paul later wrote in his

letter to the Philippians, there is fellowship in suffering for Christ, a fellowship with Christ himself (Phil. 3:10). This brings a joy sustained by the Holy Spirit.”¹

Affliction and joy can almost be seen as competing truths, but not for the Christian. Though we may go through times of suffering, the believer knows what lies ahead. We have a strength in the Spirit that allows us to remain steadfast and hopeful, and yes even joy in our trials knowing the good it's actually producing in us.

- **1 Peter 4:13**, *"but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."*

2. The Gospel Provides Purpose – 1:7-9

1:7-8 - *so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.*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.

These believers have lived such a powerfully changed life that it's been setting an example to all in the region. The very word of the Lord has sounded forth from these lives.

- The Greek word for **sounded forth** is *exēcheō* (ex-eh-heo), and it's used nowhere else in the New Testament. It derives from the word *ēchos* where we get our English word echo.
- Paul is saying that these believers in Thessalonica have modeled a life that is thundering through the area. These lives have stood out in such a way that they are reverberating through the hills and valleys of Greece.
- Other believers are standing strong in the truth they have received because of the witness of these Thessalonians who have placed their faith in God despite hardships. They're living with joy rather than grief.

A changed life is an incredible witness. And transformation comes through the power of the gospel. And now these Thessalonians saw a purpose from the gospel – to glorify God and make Him know. These Thessalonians were made new, and people took notice. It was obvious and evident.

¹ Larson, K. (2000). *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Vol. 9, p. 9). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- You can encounter a person who is addicted to alcohol and swearing every second word. Then they meet Jesus and get saved and you can bump into them a week after and it's like you barely recognize them. There's been a transformation – a metamorphosis – a change from within. They're no longer addicted or swearing; there's a different countenance. That's what the Lord does. And it speaks volumes.
- Is your life being an example? I think of Paul's words to the church at Corinth when he said, *imitate me just as I also imitate Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:1). Is that something we'd be comfortable telling another believer to do? Is your life imitable?
- What would our church look like if everyone was a clone of you? Would it be a fruitful church or a dying church?

So Paul is revealing that their lives have made such a strong witness people have taken note. He doesn't even need to say anything much about the gospel, he just starts to speak and the people jump in saying, *we know Paul. We've seen the difference in the lives of our friends. Your God is real!*

1:9 - *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,*

Paul, Silas and Timothy were all warmly welcomed in Thessalonica by these believers and people all around the area took notice of the kindness shown them.

It was also highlighted that these Thessalonian believers turned to God from idols to serve the One true God.

- These were Gentile pagan worshippers by and large before Paul came to them. They were serving false gods and going with the program of the world. But they received the Gospel and turned to God.
- That's key. It's not just turning from things or being saved from something, it's turning to something greater. It's being saved to Someone. Through the gospel and salvation in Christ they have a new purpose of life. They're not just turning from idols, but they're turning to the One true God and serving Him. What a joy it is to not just see the salvation that God gives but to see the relationship He enjoys after we're saved. He doesn't save us to shelf us. He saves us to be with us. He set us apart to Him where we can enjoy fellowship in Him and service to Him.

- You might think that this seems a little like child labour. Is God saving us just to put us to work? No, He saves us so that we can have the privilege of partnering with Him in His work. These Thessalonians are enjoying a higher purpose than they've ever enjoyed.
- Remember what Jesus said: **John 4:34**, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."*

3. The Gospel Provides Promise – 1:10

1:10 - *and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

The Gospel also provides the hope that there is more to come; that this life is not the best it's going to be. So we don't get discouraged when things seem to be unraveling. We **wait**. And that word wait speaks of an expectancy. Eagerly waiting not for something, but for Someone, **His Son** – Jesus!

- This word wait is a verb, it speaks of action, and it's in the present tense. We wait expectantly as though Jesus could come at any time. This is the doctrine of imminence. We can be assured of His coming because He has been raised from the dead! He's alive. He's preparing a place for us.
- **Acts 1:10–11**, *"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.'"*
- Jesus is coming again where He will rapture us up to be with Him. Why a rapture? Because there's going to be a final 7 years on earth that is reserved for God's specific dealing with Israel. This is known as the Tribulation. It fulfills the last week of Daniel's 70 week prophecy (Dan 9).
- But it's a time of judgment upon a Christ rejecting world. It's a time of God's wrath being poured out. **Revelation 6:15–17**, *"And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"*

The tribulation period is not a time for the church. Yes, we will go through tribulation, but this tribulation is the result of God's wrath.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:9**, *"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,"*

We may not like to talk about wrath and judgment. Some think this is contrary to a loving God. But God would not be a good God or a loving God if He did not judge evil and sin. If a judge in a court of law let a criminal go free because he wanted to show love, you would say he's corrupt. There's no justice! So God in His just judgment must deal with the sin and wrongs in this world. His wrath will one day be poured out. But you don't have to be on the wrong end of that. He **delivers us** who have put our faith in Jesus and received the good news of His salvation.

Titus 2:13, *"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,"*

Points to Ponder:

1. Live in the Power of the Gospel, not the pressure of performance.
The same Spirit who saved you then is the same Spirit strengthening you now. Don't strive in your own strength, walk in His power.
2. Live with Purpose from the Gospel. Has your salvation been stagnate rather than service oriented? Remember the privilege we have to serve our Saviour. We get to partner with God and enjoy fellowship with Him as we do. You have been saved with purpose.
3. Live with Promise and Hope because of the Gospel. Affliction is temporary; glory is eternal. Keep looking up, for "this same Jesus" is coming again.