

THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND POWER  
1 Thessalonians 1:5

Intro: In my opinion Paul's letters to the Thessalonian believers are among the most delightful that he ever wrote--and, as far as we know, they were his first Epistles. They are warmhearted, full of his love for them and his joy in them. It is very apparent that God had done a very great work in the hearts of the believers there, and Paul's thanksgiving for them is very obvious.

As an illustration of how Paul felt about them, read 3:6-10.

It is hard for me to read just one chapter at a time. It all flows together. Paul really had no doctrine to correct in these Epistles, just added light to give along with a lot of encouragement for them to keep on living for the Lord, and serving Him, as they were already doing. Thessalonica was a pagan, Gentile city, but Paul, a Jew, was bound in heart to them with a bond that could not be broken.

In verse 5 of chapter 1 Paul was telling how the work of the Lord got started in Thessalonica, and I want to examine this verse with you tonight for the help and inspiration that it might be to us. It would be wonderful to see the Lord do in our midst the same kind of work that He did in Thessalonica.

(Read the text.)

Notice that verse 5 explains the background of what was going on at that time in Thessalonica. The unbelieving Jews had made it hard for Paul, so hard that he had had to leave Thessalonica before he wanted to. And they followed him to Berea. And he had to leave there, and went to Athens. It had been very difficult for Paul, but God had been at work! That is the important part.

But let us look at what Paul said here.

I. THE COMING OF THE GOSPEL: "For our gospel came unto you . . ."

This "gospel" was a message. It was the message with which the Apostles were entrusted. Cf. 2:4. God was its Author. Christ was its Subject. Salvation was its Theme. Its purpose (as verse 4 indicates) was the redemption of the elect.

It was not a message that they grew up with in Thessalonica. It "came" to them. This word which Paul used 8 times in this Epistle, and only 5 times in his other Epistles, suggests the movement of an outside force

(Milligan, p. 9). It came through Paul and Silas and Timothy, but it came from GOD!

There was a time when Thessalonica did not have the Gospel, but then the day came when through the leading and blessing of God, Paul "came" with this life-giving message of salvation.

Paul called it "our gospel" not because they owned it, but because they had believed it, and this was the message that they preached. He had in mind a particular message of salvation for sinners. They were bearers of the truth of the Gospel. They came preaching the doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ--Who Christ was, why He came, what He did, and so on. Nobody was preaching that message until Paul and his co-workers arrived.

But there was something unique about the preaching of Paul and those who were with him. Paul did not indicate here that all of the blessing had come through him; he used the first person plural all through this passage--through verse 6.

And so we need to notice:

- II. THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL'S ENTRANCE: "not ... in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

When we first read this we might think that the Gospel "came" in three ways, but a closer look will make us see that there were four ways.

#### A. "In word."

He did not say that it did not come "in word," but that it did not come "in word only." It did come "in word." What did Paul mean by this?

He meant that the Gospel was made known by word-of-mouth. They came bearing verbal testimony. They proclaimed the truth of the Gospel. They preached.

People do not know what the Gospel is unless someone tells them. It is important that the Gospel be spoken. People do not know about Christ. They may know His Name because they have used it and/or heard it in curses, or at Christmas. But they need to be told Who He is, why He came to the earth, and why they need to do about salvation.

So the Gospel "came" in word, but "not ... in word

only." There is more to the effective preaching of the Gospel than just the verbal communication of a message. It is that, but it is more than that!

It was also:

B. "In power."

This preaching of the Apostle Paul and his companions was not an ordinary speech. They were not ordinary men. There was a difference when they spoke. There was a "power" that stirred the hearts of men--some to want to hear more, but others to resist and oppose.

And this "power" changed the lives of many of those Thessalonians who listened to Paul. It was "power" that convinced many of the hearers that what Paul was telling them was the truth, the truth of God. It may never have been to Thessalonica before, but that made no difference. It was a message that carried with it its own conviction of truth. When the Gospel is presented in power, it does not require a lot of external proofs; it is its own proof.

But look at the third expression:

C. "And in the Holy Spirit."

I use the word "Spirit" because that is the word Paul used.

The power of Paul was not his great speaking ability (because he said elsewhere that he had none). Nor was it his impressive appearance (because he recognized elsewhere that he had none).

He told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:3-5),

And I was with you in weakness, and in fear,  
and in much trembling.  
And my speech and my preaching was not  
with enticing words of man's wisdom,  
but in demonstration of the Spirit and power:  
That your faith should not stand  
in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

The power with which the Apostle Paul ministered with his companions was nothing short of divine power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

The best witnessing, the best preaching, in the world, will never be effective in turning sinners to

Christ unless it is with "power," the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 17 shows that it does not mean that the Gospel will be welcomed, and that everyone who hears will believe, if it is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. But it does mean that this power is essential, and that it is the Holy Spirit Who uses the Word to reach the hearts of people the Lord intends to save.

More about this in a moment.

Let us look at the fourth characteristic.

D. "And in much assurance."

We really could translated this word, full assurance.

This word has a richness of meaning that we need to understand.

Paul meant that he had no hesitation or questions about the truth of the Gospel. But it also means that he did not doubt but that the Lord wanted this message to be proclaimed. And what is even more to the point, he believed that the Lord wanted the Gospel preached THERE in Colossae! Paul believed that there were people in Thessalonica who were chosen of God for salvation, and that he was there by divine appointment, fulfilling a divine commission.

These were not qualities were not reserved for those early servants of our Lord. They not only are for us as well, but are essential to any effective witness.

And so let us look at the last part of our text where we have:

III. THE SINE QUA NON, THE INDISPENSABLE AND ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT, FOR EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN SERVICE: "Forasmuch as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sakes."

Cf. 2:10-12.

Paul not only was concerned about his own life in witnessing to people, but he stayed concerned after he had won them to Christ.

We have several reasons for needing to be what the Lord wants us to be:

- 1) Because this is the only way to please the Lord--and that should make it very, very important to us. We have no more important thing to do any day of our lives than to be pleasing to the Lord.
- 2) Because this is the way of blessing for us.
- 3) Because this is what brings the power of God upon our lives as we witness to others.
- 4) Because those we win to the Lord need an example of the way in which they should be living.

It is blaspheming God when we preach one thing, but live another. O how careful we need to be about our lives--in secret, as well as in public! How important it is for us to be a holy people! In seeking to win others to Christ we must have the blessing of God upon our lives. That is where the power comes from. So we need to be careful about sin, about our relationships, about our interests and goals in life--even about our thoughts. Holiness and fruitfulness go together; where you find one, you will always find the other.

Concl: As I sought to bring out this morning in speaking about the earthquake in the Bay Area of California, these are days when we need to be walking in daily fellowship with the Lord, living for Him, and bearing testimony to lost people concerning the grace of God in salvation.

If we are pleasing the Lord in our lives, then we, too, will experience the spiritual joy that filled the heart of the Apostle when we see the Lord using us in the lives of others, seeing them saved, and then going on with the Lord and growing in Him.

May God enable us to see real blessing in these days as we,  
too, go to people with the Gospel in word,  
in power,  
in the Holy Spirit, and  
in much assurance.