



17. 'Releasing the power'

Acts 17.¹⁻⁴

Background

Paul's ministry in Thessalonica may have been brief – little more than 3 weeks, it would seem (v.2) – but it was certainly eventful!

What makes his ministry there particularly interesting and instructive for us is the fact that we are given two different perspectives in Scripture on this ministry. **Luke's** narrative in these opening verses of Acts 17 is something of an 'eye-witness' account, recounting what was taking place – in effect, what *Paul* was doing – so far as the human eye could see. Whereas **Paul** in the opening part of his first letter to the church at Thessalonica takes us 'behind the scenes', as it were, highlighting for us what *the Lord* was doing through Paul's ministry.

This study, therefore, looks at both passages, because that dual, or 'bi-focal' perspective provides a very helpful and necessary *balance* for us in all our thinking about evangelism.

We're enabled to see, for instance, on the one hand, that while it's important to present the gospel clearly and to argue 'the case for Christ' (to use the title of a useful, evangelistic book by [Lee Strobel](#)), without the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit no amount of persuasive arguments will see people brought to faith.

At the same time, on the other hand, we're enabled to see that while it is indeed the Holy Spirit alone who opens eyes and enables people to 'see' the truth, there's nothing 'magical' about His work, for the Holy Spirit generally uses means – and in particular the 'means' of clearly reasoned preaching which points people to Jesus.

Hopefully this study will help tease out the precise interplay between the work of the Holy Spirit and the use of reasoned arguments and evidence in people being soundly converted. Hopefully, too, it will prompt us all to be the more earnest and the more expectant in praying for that convicting and converting work of the Holy Spirit through the clear preaching and teaching of His Word!

Read both passages (Acts 17.1-4 and 1 Thess.1.1-10) – they're not long! And if you're pressed for time then '**days**' (1), (5) and (7) are the ones with which to start. You'll find some additional 'Community Group' questions there.

1) Monday 26th June – it makes perfect sense!

Read [Acts 17.1-3](#)

“.. he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving ..” (Acts 17.2)

The need for revelation is compatible with the exercise of reason: and the necessity for the Spirit’s illumination is compatible with the case for Christ being clearly argued. God has given us minds, and it’s the *minds* of people we’re to engage.

When someone argues that ‘faith’ involves you abdicating your ‘reason’, how would you answer them?

If people can’t be argued into the kingdom of God, why is such stress laid on ‘reasoning’, ‘explaining’ and ‘proving’ these gospel truths?

With Jews it made sense for Paul to start with their Scriptures: where do you start with those who today are biblically ‘illiterate’?

What evidence would you use to point people to Jesus?

Prayer: *Lord, I need You to help me share the good news with others! Help me to know where to start and how to explain the gospel clearly to those I’m with.*

2) Tuesday 27th June – joining the church

Read [Acts 17.1-4](#)

“.. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas ..” (Acts 17.4)

The message demands a verdict. The ‘explanations’ and ‘proofs’ given by Paul (vv.2-3) were used by the Spirit to open eyes and generate faith. Note that the response of faith in Jesus finds expression in joining His people. Is that a step you should be taking?

Why is it so important that those who trust in Jesus *join* His people?

What does ‘joining the church’ entail and how do you go about it?

Prayer: *Thank You for the fellowship of Your church, Lord – the variety of backgrounds is great, but it can be challenging too! Help me to be fully committed to Your church!*

3) Wednesday 28th June – God’s new humanity

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.1-3](#)

“.. we always thank God for all of you ..” (1 Thess.1.2)

Three weeks created strong bonds between Paul and the Thessalonian believers. It’s a family bond which believers share (‘in God the Father’), a unity of the Spirit rooted in the lordship of Jesus and expressed in mutual prayer for one another.

When you pray for your fellow believers what are the qualities for which you are careful to give thanks to God?

How does the hope you have in Jesus instil 'endurance' in your living?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for those who faithfully and constantly pray for me. Keep me faithful in praying for others and delighting in Your work in their lives.

4) Thursday 29th June – transformed by grace

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.1-4](#)

".. we know .. that He has chosen you .." (1 Thess.1.4)

The gospel has grace at its core. What God has done and does is far more significant than anything we may do. In elective love God creates in believers the faith, love and hope which produce lives of costly service, hard work, and faithful persevering.

How can you grow in the assurance that you are loved by God?

Why would Paul have been keen to impress on the believers at Thessalonica that they had indeed been *chosen* by God?

Prayer: What an amazing thing it is, O Lord, that You should have chosen to show Your glory in saving a wretch like me! Help me so to live that others are stirred to praise!

5) Friday 30th June – only by God's Spirit

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.4-5](#)

".. not simply with words but also with power .." (1 Thess.1.5)

Paul could certainly string some sentences together! But he was very aware that it was never the force of his reasoning so much as the power of the Holy Spirit which effected conviction of sin and the consequent repentance and faith.

"Prayer is evangelism shorn of all its carnal attractions." Why is prayer so integral to the work of evangelism, and in what ways do these verses challenge you about your own prayer life?

What was Paul aware of that enabled him to recognise so clearly the power of the Spirit of God at work in the lives of the Thessalonians?

What has been your experience of the Holy Spirit using the words of a preacher to bring about 'conviction' in your heart?

If conversion is so entirely dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, why do churches often pull in well-known speakers for evangelistic events?

Prayer: As preachers prepare for ministering Your Word on Sunday, Father, help them in that preparation to learn from Your Spirit the words which He would have them use.

6) Saturday 1st July – embodying the gospel

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.6-7](#)

“.. you became imitators of us and of the Lord .. you became a model ..” (1 Thess.1.6,7)

People’s “getting the message” has as much to do with their experiencing the gospel as with the gospel being expounded. As Paul *embodied* the new life of the believer, so the Thessalonians, having seen and heard the gospel, then *modelled* it for others.

In what ways has the Lord used the *example* of believers to help you come to faith and grow in Christ?

Is ‘the joy given by the Holy Spirit’ a characteristic of your living which impresses itself on those who know?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for those whose living has helped me catch a glimpse of Jesus and stirred in me the longing to know Him better. Help me to live in that way myself!*

7) Sunday 2nd July – live by faith

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.8-10](#)

“.. you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God ..” (1 Thess.1.9)

The believers at Thessalonica provided a great ‘model’ of saving faith. Here’s what such faith comprises. A turning from sin: a reliance on God: a commitment to serve: and a longing for Jesus. Is that you? Rejoice today in God’s saving work in Jesus!

How does what Paul says here about the Thessalonian believers mirror the ‘faith .. love .. and ..hope’ to which he’d referred earlier (v.3)?

Would what Paul writes about the Thessalonian believers well describe your own conversion?

What were the ‘idols’ from which you turned?

How does your having turned to ‘serve the living and true God’ find expression?

Do you think that Christians have been ‘frightened off’ speaking clearly to others about the reality of ‘the coming wrath’?

The faith of the early church was future-focussed in quite a marked way: to what extent has the church in the western world lost that sort of focus?

Prayer: *Lord, before You who can stand? How grateful I am for the gift of Your Son! How amazing is that grace by which He’s rescued me from the wrath I’d have to face!*