



1. 'A model church'

1 Thessalonians 1.¹⁻¹⁰

Background

Over the next few weeks we'll be studying this letter which Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica. Luke narrates the way the church came into being in [Acts 17.1-9](#) and it's worth having a read of that, if only to refresh your memory about the origins of this church.

Given that Paul may have been there for as little as three weeks (the reference in Acts 17.2 to "three sabbath days" is at least suggestive of that) – and was certainly not there for any great length of time – it's remarkable that there was actually a church at all, far less such a vibrant church whose testimony seems to have gone 'viral' (to use the jargon of today)!

In contemporary Scotland with the decline of the Church of Scotland, the phenomenon of churches closing is matched by the proliferation of church planting activity. It's instructive, therefore, to see both how it was that a church was planted in Thessalonica, and also how that young church of new believers was able to survive and thrive in the face of the opposition which had been plainly in evidence.

This brief first chapter of his letter provides us with the apostle's perspective on what took place in Thessalonica: if Luke has given the 'recorded highlights' of that brief visit, these 10 verses provide a 'post-match analysis' by one of the key players in the drama which had unfolded. What's immediately evident is that, so far as Paul was concerned, all that happened was due to the activity of God Himself: *the Lord* was at work in power and it is therefore, from the start, to the Lord that Paul addresses his thanks (vv.2-3).

Perhaps that serves as a reminder to us of the priority which prayer must have in our lives – and indeed in our life as a congregation of God's people. No amount of charisma, no amount of strategizing, no amount of enthusiastic effort – nothing but the work of the Spirit of God effects the sort of change which was seen in the lives of these Thessalonian believers. Do we believe that? Do we want to see that?

There's a small book by E M Bounds called 'Power through Prayer' which is worth a read in this regard. Here's an extract from early in the book – *"The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer."* Start, then, with **'days' (2), (4) and (5)**.

1) Monday 9th October – in Christ

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.1](#)

“.. in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ..” (1 Thess.1.1)

These three ‘musketeers’ who first brought the message to the Thessalonians (see [Acts 17.1-9](#)) were there a matter of weeks only, but a church came into being – and there was an immediate change of address for the new believers! ‘Home’ for them was now in Christ.

Paul was never a ‘lone ranger’, but shared the burdens of ministry with companions: who are your companions in ministry?

What is Paul underlining when he describes the recipients of his letter as he does rather than ‘the church of God in Thessalonica’?

Prayer: *You have brought me in to Your family, my Father, and have made me belong! Give me good friends who will draw out the best in me – and help me to be a good friend to others.*

2) Tuesday 10th October – transformed lives

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.2-3](#)

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

The work of the Spirit of God in a person’s life is characterised by a 3-fold change of focus: upwards in faith, outwards in love, and forwards in hope. Such a glorious change is wrought by the Lord Himself (hence Paul thanks God) and issues in work, labour and endurance.

Do you take time in praying for others to remember with gratitude the gracious work of God in their lives? For whom are you prompted to pray like that today?

Conversion is always a miracle of God’s resurrecting power: why do we see so little of that in the lives of those around us?

How desperate are you to see such conversions?

In what ways can you see that your faith has issued in ‘work’, your love has found expression in ‘labour’, and the hope you have has given you ‘endurance’?

Prayer: *How I thank You, Lord, for the ways in which You work in the lives of Your people! And how glad I am in the assurance You give us that You always bring to completion Your work!*

3) Wednesday 11th October – secure in His love

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.4](#)

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

God is never random in anything. He acts in love and that love in Him prompts considered, careful choices and issues in deliberate, generous action. To be loved by God is to know that He has chosen to set His love on you, an intentional, enduring commitment on His part.

It can be difficult sometimes to see ourselves as 'loved by God': how has that conviction been impressed on your mind and heart?

Here's a question people sometime ask – If God chooses whom to save why are we blamed for not responding to Christ? How would you answer them?

Prayer: *Help me, Lord, to bask again in the amazing gift of love the Father has bestowed on us, the sinful sons and daughters of men, to call us children of God: and to know that's so!*

4) Thursday 12th October – convicting power

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.4-5](#)

".. our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power .." (1 Thess.1.5)

The love of God lay behind the choice of God, that deliberate activity on the part of God whereby He brings a person to faith: His love (and the choice He thus makes to act in a certain way) is matched by the power He has to fulfil His will. Paul the preacher was also a spectator!

What does Paul mean by 'deep conviction'?

What experience have you had of that deep, convicting power of the Holy Spirit in and through the preaching of the Word?

Are you burdened for the lostness of those who are outside Christ and are 'without hope and without God in the world' ([Eph.2.12](#))?

Alongside his preaching, what will it have been about Paul's 'living' which prompted him to make reference to it at the end of v.5?

How does what Paul says here inform the way in which you will pray for the preaching of the Word of God?

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, from creation's birth, giving life to all that God has made, show Your power once again on earth: bring the presence of the risen Lord to renew our hearts – make us whole.*

5) Friday 13th October – the power of example

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.6-7](#)

".. you became imitators of us .. you became a model to all the believers .." (1 Thess.1.6, 7)

The Holy Spirit uses example alongside exposition as the twin-channels down which He impresses the truths of the gospel. The believers saw the work of God in Paul and his friends which mirrored what they heard in the message: and they became an example to others.

Why is example such a powerful means of communication?

Who have provided for *you* a clear demonstration of the truths of the gospel in the example of their lives?

How and in what respects did their example leave such a powerful impression on your life?

In what ways, to what people, and by what means are you able to 'model' the gospel message to others?

How do you avoid people misunderstanding your *example* as equivalent to a message about good works?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the people through whom You have worked in my life, to open my eyes, to reveal Yourself, and to fire my heart with an eagerness to serve You as my Lord.

6) Saturday 14th October – attracting attention

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.8](#)

".. your faith in God has become known everywhere .." (1 Thess.1.8)

There was something very striking about the new-found faith of the Thessalonian believers: such a clear change in the whole direction of their living, evidenced in their 'work', their 'labour' and their 'endurance' (v.3), that people everywhere couldn't but take notice!

In what ways could it be said of you that "the Lord's message (rings) out from you"?

What do you think would have been the characteristics of the Thessalonians' faith which became known everywhere?

Prayer: As we gaze on Your kingly brightness, Lord, so may our faces display Your likeness: ever changing from glory to glory, mirrored here may our lives tell Your story – shine on me!

7) Sunday 15th October – saving faith

Read [1 Thessalonians 1.9-10](#)

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

Get back to the basics – here's what saving faith looks like. A **turning** (from sin to the Saviour). A **servicing** (no longer the self but the Lord). And a **waiting** (no longer for wrath but for resurrection life). Faith, love and hope. Always the same. And centred always on Jesus.

"When our Lord Jesus Christ said 'repent' He meant that the whole of the Christian life should be repentance" (M Luther): how does that find expression in your life?

Given how basic it was for the apostle Paul, is enough focus given to the return of the Lord Jesus in the preaching and teaching of the church?

Prayer: Come in power, O Lord, among Your people today as we gather for worship: deepen our faith, empower our service, and kindle in our hearts that longing for Your return.