

WITNESS IN DAILY LIFE / Sunday School- June 6, 2010

Unifying Topic: VISIBLE TO GOD

Lesson Text

I. Prayers of Thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 1:1-3)

II. Paul's Example (1 Thessalonians 1:4-6)

III. The Thessalonians' Witness (1 Thessalonians 1:7-10)

The Main Thought: And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. (1 Thessalonians 1:6, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People share many things through speech and action. What would be a positive witness in our world? For the Thessalonians, the example of their daily lives became a witness to the world, proclaiming their faith and their commitment to Jesus Christ.

Lesson Aim: To teach how the Thessalonians' witness for Christ went throughout the world.

Life aim: To teach how Christ wants us to become examples to others by allowing our witness for Him to have an impact in our community, on our jobs, in our nation, and throughout the world.

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- 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;
- 1:3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;
- 1:4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.
- 1:5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.
- 1:6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.
- 1:7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.
- 1:8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.
- 1:9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;
- 1:10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

HISTORY:

Paul was personally acquainted with the City of Thessalonica and its inhabitants since he founded the Church of Thessalonica in his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1). The great city was the capital and the largest city of Macedonia. This city had been founded by Cassander, the top military officer of Alexander the Great, after Alexander had died. Under the Romans, the city had been made free because of its loyalty to Rome. As a free city it was allowed its own government and local laws. Because of the city's strategic location and commercial importance, the gospel was bound to spread out beyond to the world rather rapidly. The great city of Thessalonica was the second great European city to be evangelized. Paul had just been evangelizing in Philippi when he entered Thessalonica. This was his first epistle to the Thessalonians. This letter offers an intimate view into Paul's concern for a young and under attack community of faith.

To understand how the church at Thessalonica began, we must read the first ten verses of Acts 17.

Acts 17:1-10 ...they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and {saying,} "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. And when they did not find them, they {began} dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them. And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea... (NAS)

From the Scriptures, Paul reasoned in the synagogue for three Sabbaths. This means he was in Thessalonica between just 15 and 22 days. Some of the Jews and many of the Greeks became believers. Less than a year later, Paul sits

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down to write this letter. Every city established a local church, and then Paul would write them, visit them, and send messengers to them to build them up in their faith and maturity in Jesus Christ. This was not a small task when one considers that the oldest believer at the church of Thessalonica would have been saved for no more than three months. Not only that, but each of these churches was located in a city where they would have had to endure tremendous persecution.

LESSON:

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 Prayers of Thanksgiving

V1a Paul's letter, to the Thessalonian body of Christ, begins in a customary way. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy are introduced as the people that the epistle is from. Paul is the specific author. He has the apostolic calling and authority. He also places his name first, which is typically a custom of signifying importance. As we look at this introduction, and we see these three men, we need to become more acquainted with them.

- We know **Paul** once known as Saul who persecuted the Christians, but was changed, saved and transformed on the Road to Damascus.
- He became part of the body of Christ, a Christian and an apostle commissioned and sent forth by God to the Gentiles with the Good News of Christ.
- On his missionary journeys he would have a small apostolic crew of men with him. Silvanus and Timothy were two such men. Paul and Silvanus ended up in Philippi where God first saved His people out of Europe. God's harvest is not without hardship.
- In Philippi, Paul and Silvanus were persecuted, jailed, and beaten severely. Though they met a lot of opposition, many people came to Christ.
 - It started with Lydia, and then others, like
 - The jailer who watched over Paul and Silvanus (Silas) when they were imprisoned. This was when the Philippian church was birthed and established.
- But because of the increasing pressure, Paul and Silvanus left Philippi. Silas and Silvanus are the same. Silvanus is the Gentile spelling. Silas, in Acts, is called Silvanus in 1 Thessalonians.

Silvanus was probably an Israelite by birth. What this means is that he received His promised Messiah that he had learned about from childhood from the ancient scriptures, and He received His Messiah as the sacrifice for his sins by grace through faith, and now he serves Messiah as his King promised to sit on the throne of David forever.

- The Scriptures indicate that Silvanus was a gifted prophet. He was highly esteemed among the Jerusalem Christian.
- As a worker in the founding of the Thessalonian church, Silvanus endured cruel beatings, and imprisonment. In respect to what Silvanus went through, he is always depicted as being faithful and bold about the gospel--even though he experienced physical hurt in his persecution, and his life was at risks.
- Like Paul, Silvanus was relentless in his witness of the good news of Christ. Paul and Silvanus introduce us to the powerful work of God's grace in saving men out of the bondage of sin, and placing them in the peace of Christ. The same goes for Timothy.

Timothy is mentioned in every one of Paul's epistles except for Galatians and Ephesians. Timothy's natural father was a Roman, and his mother and grandmother were Israelites.

- Timothy was taught the Old Testament scriptures by his mother (*Eunice*) and grandmother (*Lois*) as he was growing up.
- Paul referred to Timothy as his "*true child in the faith*." Consequently, Paul was Timothy's spiritual father in the realm, the doctrines, and precepts of Christianity.
- Timothy served as Paul's special helper during Paul's missions.
- Eventually Timothy became the Pastor over the church of Ephesus, and an ordainer of overseers.
- Timothy had been with Paul later in the planting and development of the Thessalonian congregation.

After leaving Philippi, Paul and Silvanus went to the Thessalonians, and when they arrived in Thessalonica, the gospel of Christ was unknown to the Thessalonians. After Paul and Silvanus entered the city, Paul's typical practice was to begin ministering and preaching the gospel of the grace and peace of God in Christ Jesus in the local synagogues of the Gentile towns that had a Jewish synagogue in their midst. Paul did this in Thessalonica for three weeks, on the Sabbath days. What Paul first began doing was reasoning with Jews and God fearing Gentiles who would attend the synagogue—the Old Testament Scriptures--particularly the amazing prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus, how the prophecies explained in detail the rejection of the Messiah, His suffering, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Paul went from the Old Testament and directed people to the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

The Scriptures explain that Paul also ministered to pagan idol worshippers. Evidently God saved many people from

among the Jews, God fearing gentiles, and pagans in Thessalonica. People who came from all of these groups made up the body of Christ, which is the church.

- First comes conversion, and then comes the more intense discipleship, where people are taught line upon line and precept upon precept.
- First comes the essential milk of the word, and then comes more solid food.
- First comes the introduction into the grace and peace of God, and then comes growth in grace and peace.

By the time Paul sends this letter back to the church of the Thessalonians, those whom he had led to Christ, the most seasoned Christians there had only been saved less than a year--some conservative estimates say only about three months. Think about that. So this letter was written about three to six months after Paul left Thessalonica. And we must understand that Paul is writing to babes in Christ. But this does not matter. They will grow. What is important now, is that they are God's church. This means that they are the body of Christ. Once the body, always the body, and so now it is time to grow, and so Paul writes this letter. How many churches lack strength because their ministers have not remained faithful in exhorting them?

Without people who are committed to the Lord there is no church. The letter was not addressed to a particular group of leaders, but to all the people of the church. Every believer was important, and it took every one of them to make up the church. Several things will always weaken the church:

- Building the church upon a few people or leaders.
- Ignoring and neglecting the needs of some members.
- Failing to involve and use the gifts of some members.

V1b *Grace to you and peace.* Why are we always reading that? Because of the 27 books that make up the New Testament, 17 of them contain this greeting - and it is never "*peace and grace.*" Why does grace always come first? *Grace* refers to God's unmerited favor. We were sinners, deserving of hell, certainly not salvation. We weren't on our way to being better people. We weren't showing signs of turning good. We weren't doing great works that made us attractive to God. He simply saved us because He loved us - He did it purely out of grace. Both grace, and peace, are blessings that are married together in the holy matrimony of salvation. *Grace* means favor. In salvation, grace is bestowed as unmerited favor in Christ's love for you. When Paul wishes grace and peace upon the Thessalonian Christians, it is like a prayer request. Paul is wishing extra favor upon them from God, and the *peace* that passes understanding in the midst of persecution. The order of these two as presented by Paul is important when it comes to our spiritual salvation. There can be no true peace until we recognize that God has bestowed His grace upon us in completely forgiving us of all our sins in Christ Jesus.

V2 It is God's will that you and I thank Him for real Christians. God wants the glory because it is all about Him and His power. The point is that when it comes to salvation, God wants us to give all the thanks to Him, and glorify Him for His comprehensive power and His right, wise, and perfect decision in doing what He does. One of the primary ways for you and me to do this is by making mention of the people God has saved, in our prayers. Paul says that he does this always. Whenever we take the other members of the body for granted, then we will either seldom thank God for them, or we will quit thanking God for them. Whenever we are being carnal and sinning because we are perturbed with a brother or sister to the point of treating them in contempt, then we quit having thanks for them. But think about what is going on when we do this. We are not appreciating them, and when we don't appreciate them, we are not appreciating God's work in making them for His glory. And so we are not glorifying God. *Thanks*, is a manifestation of love. We always seem to thank God for people we like. It is not unusual to thank God for people we get along with. We are so grateful for the ones that want to be around us. It is so easy to thank God for people that He puts in our lives that we can get something from; or we respect a whole lot. But God wants us to thank Him, with love in action, for what He thinks is of the greater eternal value than all of that. The fact of the matter is that we should be thanking God for all the Christians that we know, and the reason that God is telling us to do it, is because God saved them! Two things:

1. First of all-- Paul wasn't getting anything from the Thessalonians that merited his thanks.
2. Secondly-- Paul wasn't leaving anybody out.

V3 Paul bears in mind in His thanks to God concerning the truly saved of Thessalonica is their labor of love. The labor that the Thessalonians did, that Paul is talking about, was hard effort. The kind of labor that Paul is talking about is self sacrificing works and action that is a manifestation of the Law of love that the Holy Spirit puts in the hearts of true believers. Paul is not talking about labor for personal gain, like someone who becomes a workaholic for the sole purpose of making a lot of money. This labor is out of godly generated love, which is labor that comes because of God's Spirit convicting His true children. It is consistent love-work that keeps on going, even to the point of fatigue.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6 Paul's Example

V4 First we notice that Paul calls the Thessalonians, brothers. This is family language. It has to do with God sovereignly adopting those whom He has elected out of the domain of darkness. When God saves us, He makes us a part of the family of God through this adoption, which is also part of the power-miracle of being born again into the first born heir who is Jesus. Paul says that he knows that those he is writing to were elected. Election by God originates from His sovereignty over all things. God elected all who will be saved in the person, and work of Christ Jesus, and God did this before He created the world. It is almost too deep to understand that God's election unto salvation is from the beginning, before the foundation of the world, but it is. God ordained the end, which is salvation. He also ordains the means to that end through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the key. The Holy Spirit sets apart those who have been elected to certainly have faith in the truth of the gospel when it is preached. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes. The Holy Spirit changes us.

A strong church is seen to be elected by God. The word "*election*" (*eklogen*) means that the church has been selected and chosen by God. This means two things:

1. Believers are elected and chosen by God to be his *beloved people*. God has called believers out of the world and away from the old life which the world offered—the old life of sin and death. He has called believers to be separated and set apart to Himself, and the new life He offers—the new life of righteousness and eternity.
2. Believers are elected and chosen to be *beloved brothers*; they are called to hold one another ever so closely to their hearts and to count one another as precious and deeply loved.

Two strong lessons:

1. The proof that a church is truly elected by God is that...
 - a. The members act like the *beloved people of God*.
 - b. The members treat each other as *beloved brothers*.
2. A people can show that election is only a false *profession*...
 - a. By acting like they are not the beloved of God—living in sin and shame, dirt and pollution, worldliness and greed.
 - b. By treating one another as anything but beloved brothers: being critical and divisive, prideful and arrogant, angry, and hurtful, envious, and prejudiced, superior and super-spiritual.

V5 The gospel is brought to the elect who are effectually called and saved in power, but the power actually effects the heart of the hearer in such a way that the elect are effectually called, convicted, and are saved through the miracle of regeneration. In other words, the gospel is more than just mere words to the elect. The word "*gospel*" (*Gr euangelion*) means "*good news*."

"*In word only*" refers to the effect of the gospel. It was not mere human words. The words contained a mysterious power, the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. The model church had ministers who preached the gospel as it should be preached. When Paul went to Thessalonica, he went for one purpose and for one purpose only; to preach the gospel and to minister to the needs of people.

1. Paul did not preach in word only. He did not stand before people using nothing but his own words to reach people. His preaching was not dependent upon his eloquence, his ability, his wisdom, or his appearance. When Paul stood before people and preached, he was not concerned with words and eloquence. He was concerned with only one thing: sharing the Word of God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Paul preached in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.
 - a. Preaching in "*power*" (*dunamis*) means preaching in the power and energy of God Himself. The gospel itself is the power of God operating, working, stirring, convicting, and energizing a person to believe and accept the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i. This is the reason it is so important for the preacher to be completely surrendered to God—living ever so closely to Him—living and moving and having his being in the Lord.
 - ii. The preacher must be under the control of God so that the power of God can rest upon and flow through his life.
 - iii. The preacher must become nothing but an instrument in the hands of God.
 - b. Preaching in the "*Holy Spirit*" means First, Without the Holy Spirit, there is no power. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is more than just a power; the Holy Spirit is a person. The "power" is the result of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of people. He is doing what God had sent Him to earth to do: convict the hearts of the hearers and convince them of the truth of the gospel:
 - i. That Jesus Christ did die for their sins.

- ii. That Jesus Christ does provide righteousness for men; that His righteousness does stand for the righteousness of men.
 - iii. That Jesus Christ did bear the judgment and punishment of sin for men.
 - c. Preaching in assurance (*conviction*) is a critical point. The answer is found in point 3.
3. Paul lived what he preached. He lived a life that was completely surrendered to Christ. He lived and moved and had his being in Christ, walking and living ever so closely to Him. "Assurance" and confidence come from obedience—knowing that we are doing what we should be doing. It comes from knowing that we please God—that we are living pure and clean lives, praying and studying God's Word every day and witnessing to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a. Obedience is the secret to assurance.
 - b. Obedience is the secret to the presence and power of God upon our lives and preaching.
 - c. Obedience is the secret to bearing fruit through preaching. This was the secret of Paul. Paul obeyed God; therefore, Paul was convinced that his preaching would be in power and in the Holy Spirit.

V6 It was because of their "*reception*" (*Gr dechomai*) of the Word (which means to receive in a respectful obedient and favorable way) that they became followers. They received the Word (the gospel) despite opposition and persecution. Remember, unbelieving Jews had opposed Paul and aroused some of the city troublemakers against him. The persecution became so threatening that Paul had been forced to flee the city. However, his absence did not stop the persecution. In fact, it seems that the attack upon the church and its young believers become even more fierce. The Jews had convinced some of the Gentile citizens—some countryman of the believers—to join them in trying to stop the gospel and destroy the church. But Paul says the gospel still bore fruit and the Holy Spirit rewarded the believers' commitment to Christ. One fact is important: the believers became followers of Paul and Christ. The word "*follow*" (*mimetai*) means to imitate. A. T. Robertson says:

'It is a daring thing to expect people to 'imitate' the preacher, but Paul adds 'and of the Lord,' for he only expected or desired 'imitation' as he himself imitated the Lord Jesus, as he expressly says in 1Corth.11:1. The peril of it all is that people so easily and so readily imitate the preacher when he does not imitate the Lord.'

(A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol.4. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931, p11.*)

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" 1Corth.11:1.

He stirred joy in their hearts and lives, giving them full assurance of their eternal salvation and deliverance from death. Someone who loves God, and realizes the grace of God for them, and has truly been regenerated, will be joyous concerning their experience in receiving the Word of the Gospel which gave them life. Even in the midst of persecution, they had joy at the overwhelming weight of glory that outweighs any persecution they experienced. In the midst of the tribulation, they had the kind of joy that is not of the flesh. It is the joy of the Holy Spirit that He produces in true Christians, and so once again, it is His power.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 The Thessalonians' Witness

V7-8 Paul says that the Thessalonian church was a "*pattern*." He says that they were examples not only to the heathen, but also to believers. This is what we want to be: examples of those who believe through our speech, our conduct, our love, our faith, and our purity. Their example is primarily found in their strong conversion and in their thundering forth the Word of the Lord. The model church became examples to other believers.

Two strong lessons:

1. Nothing, absolutely nothing, should keep a person from receiving the Word of the Gospel—not even opposition and persecution.
2. Believers—preachers and laymen alike—must guard their lives ever so closely and make sure they are living for Christ and living ever so diligently for Him. Why? Because others are watching and following us—some child, some adult, some neighbor, some friend. There are people who look up to us and follow after us. Whether or not we like the fact, they are. Therefore, it behooves us to follow Christ as perfectly as we can.

This young church was so committed to the Lord that their testimony spread all over the world. When Rome had conquered Greece, it had divided the country into two provinces: the Northern Province being Macedonia, and the Southern Province being Achaia. Paul clearly says that the testimony of the church had spread all over Greece, both northern Greece and southern Greece. Then he adds that their faith had spread out beyond the borders of Greece. This must mean all over the world. Their excitement and enthusiasm for Christ and the opposition and persecution against them must have been the talk of the city and world.

V9-10 The model church turned to God from idols. Remember that Paul had been forced to flee to Thessalonica for his life. The only way he knew how the young church and its believers were holding up was from others who had

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been to Thessalonica to visit or conduct business. What he had heard thrilled his heart: the believers were standing fast in the gospel he had preached. There were three things in particular that struck him about their testimony.

1. The believers had turned to God from idols.
 - a. They did not seek to clean up their lives by themselves. They did not try to reform themselves by turning away from idols and then turning to God.
 - b. They turned to God first, then with God's help and strength, they repented and turned away from idols.

What is an idol? Very simply, every man has an idea of what God is like and what God allows and does not allow. Some men take their ideas and make images of them by carving wood or melting and molding metal or porcelain. Other men just hold the images in their mind and picture God as being like this or like that. Either image is as much an idol as the other. An idol is merely an image of some god created by the mind of man—an image other than the God revealed by the scripture (Rom.1:21). Note the sharp contrast made between these images of man's mind and God: God is the living and true God; the images are only the lifeless and false notions of men.

2. The believers had turned to God because of the promise of Christ's return. It was God's Son who was returning to earth, the Person who had died for them so that they might be acceptable to God and live with Him forever. They believed with all their hearts that they were to live with God forever. This was the reason they were waiting for the return of Christ. The word "*wait*" is in the present tense. This means that their hope for the return of Christ was alive. They expected Christ to return at any moment and eagerly looked for Him to rent the skies. Their expectation was a daily expectation.

Note one other significant fact; how do we know that Christ is going to return to earth and take believers to live with God forever? Because God raised up Christ from the dead. By resurrecting Christ, God...

- Proved that He is the God of all power.
 - Proved that He has the power to raise the dead.
 - Proved that He is going to do just as Christ taught: raise all men, some to eternal life, and some to eternal death, that is, to be eternally separated from God.
3. The believers had turned to God to escape the wrath of God. A day of wrath is coming. It has to come, for man and his universe are corruptible and imperfect and are in rebellion against God. The world is already condemned; the day of wrath is already set. But this is the glorious news of the gospel: we can be delivered from the wrath to come. The word "*delivered*" (*ruomenon*) means to rescue; to deliver us right out of the wrath. The picture is that of God rescuing and lifting us up out of the wrath.

SUMMARY:

The Apostle Paul and his associates write a letter to the believers in Thessalonica with prayers of thanksgiving for they are remembering them in their labor of love and patient hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's letting them know that whenever they bring the good news, it's not in their own powerful words. That's why he has complete assurance because if you looked back at how they once were and the Thessalonians received and became followers of them and Christ. It was not merely the human strength of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy that moved them to minister and see fruits of harvest for the kingdom. It was the supernatural power of God Himself, the Holy Spirit which worked within them. They also manifested the same joy that the apostles expressed in the same Holy Spirit. This is the example of imitation we are given by God. The Thessalonians became a sounding-board from which the gospel would echo across the world. One of the fruits of the Spirit is that we recognize that God has called and anointed us. All of us should respond to the Good News as the Thessalonian believers did: turn from sin, serve the living and true God, and look forward to Jesus' return. This is part of the proof of true conversion. Christ is coming back!

APPLICATION:

Are you really thanking God for every Christian? Are we seeking to imitate Paul by praying like Paul prayed? or Are we seeking to imitate Jesus by praying as Jesus did? Witness by being examples daily!

ⁱ <http://www.bridgewaybiblechurch.com/index.php/sermons/1-thessalonians-study/133-1-thessalonians-1-1>