

1 Thessalonians 1:5-8

The Church and the Gospel

Introduction

Paul moves from God's church to God's Gospel – a natural progression since they belong together. The church exists because of the Gospel, and it is by the church that the Gospel is spread. Each depends on the other and each serves the other. The Gospel shapes the church, and the church seeks to live a life worthy of the Gospel. In these verses Paul describes three stages in the progress of the Gospel in Thessalonica.

The coming of the Gospel to Thessalonica

The Gospel did not come by itself, neither was it parachuted from heaven. It was brought by three men, Paul, Silas and Timothy. By the time they left, the church had been planted and taken root. The cause was the preaching of the Gospel. This is described in four terms. Firstly the Gospel came in word, εν λογω. Words are very important in spreading the Gospel. Need to be well chosen and carefully used and clearly expressed. Its spread is greatly aided by accurate communication of sound understanding of the Gospel. By words we explain meaning of the great truths of the Gospel – God, Christ, redemption, sanctification, justification, heaven, hell. Words are important, but not enough on their own. F.B.Meyer spoke of one preacher whose exegesis was correct, illustrations were spiritual, and whose spirit was sincere. He could give an above average pulpit production. But the hearer failed to be moved, because the preacher was not moved. The message did not kindle, because the preacher did not glow.

**Our gospel came to you not simply with words** (1 Thessalonians 1:5) The Gospel also came with power, εν δυναμει. The Gospel came to men whose eyes were blind and hearts were hard, who were indifferent, proud and self-satisfied. So words spoken in human weakness need to be confirmed with divine power. By the Holy Spirit's power, the Word penetrates people's mind, will, heart and conscience. **My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power** (1 Corinthians 2:4). We can never divorce what God has married together – His Word and His Spirit. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. The Spirit without the Word is weaponless. The Word without the Spirit is powerless.

It is so important to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). G.H.C.MacGregor said, "The Holy Spirit creates a revolution in Christian service. He brings new boldness and also new attractiveness so that when we speak for Christ the attention of men will be arrested and they will listen... Words spoken in the power of the Spirit will make men think and waken them to reality and importance of spiritual things."

Also the Gospel came in deep conviction or assurance, και πληροφορια πολλη. Preachers need to speak with conviction and confidence. They must be sure of their message, its truth and relevance. Only possible when they know the power of

the Gospel in their own lives. **We speak of what we know, and testify to what we have seen** (John 3:11). Paul on the road to Damascus was appointed by God to be a witness of what he had seen (Acts 26:16). Hence the preacher needs to preach the sermon to himself before he preaches to others. Confidence and courage are two ingredients missing in many modern preachers. Doubt and uncertainty paralyse the preacher. It is usually traceable to unfaithfulness and disobedience in his life.

Fourthly, the Gospel came with the Holy Spirit, *εν πνευματι αγιω*. Left till last, because it is the source of the first three items. The Holy Spirit gives the truth of the Word power and conviction.

Then notice how what they said was reinforced by how they lived. **You know we have lived among you for your sake**. Every sermon needs an illustration, and the best illustration should be the life of the preacher. The preacher's life is the best visual aid.

Dr. Wilber Chapman, an American Presbyterian Evangelist, said his whole life was altered by a sentence of F.B.Meyer – that our usefulness in God's service is largely affected by the question of whether we work for God or whether we allow God by His Spirit, to work and speak through us.

#### The Thessalonians welcomed the Gospel

They welcomed the message in spite of severe suffering. Luther said, "If Christ wore a crown of thorns, why should his followers expect only a crown of roses?" The authentic Gospel message, but not much modern preaching, always arouses opposition. It challenges our pride and self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. There is resistance to the idea of grace and not merit. The Gospel highlights our weakness and frailty and helplessness.

But suffering, though inevitable because the world is at war with God, need not break the spirit or embitter people or cause them to desert God. The Gospel was also accompanied by joy received from the Holy Spirit. **You welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit** (1 Thessalonians 1:6). The Holy Spirit gives power, and also gives joy. He works at both ends – in the speakers and in the hearers. Wherever the Gospel goes and people respond, there is joy. There were good tidings of great joy when Christ was born (Luke 2:10), and there is joy in heaven when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7). There was great joy in the city of Samaria when Philip preached Christ (Acts 8:8), and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing in Acts 8:39.

Outward opposition and inward joy are a constant pattern in church history. When Samuel Rutherford was imprisoned in an Aberdeen jail, he said, "I never knew in my nine years of preaching so much of Christ's love as He has taught me by 15 months in prison."

Then the power of the Gospel was seen in transformed lives. **You became imitators of us and of the Lord**. There was a profound change in their lives. Not an intellectual acceptance only, but a total change and close following of Christ and the Apostles. They became examples for everyone in Macedonia and Achaia, the two main Roman provinces in Greece. The imitators were now the imitated. They were examples and

models, even though they were only recent converts. How wonderful is the power of the Gospel. It affects relationships in four ways – the opposition of the world, joy from the Holy Spirit, imitation of the Lord and the Apostles, and finally good example to other Christians. When the preacher has truth, conviction and power, the hearers respond with joy, courage and obedience.

### The Gospel is now preached by the Thessalonians

**The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia; your faith in God is known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us** (1 Thessalonians 1:8,9). Rang out is ἐξηχῆται, from ἤχος, the word for echo or noise. This verb is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It means to sound, ring, peal, boom or thunder. Often used of bells or trumpets. The perfect tense is used – the sounding out was continuing. The Gospel proclaimed by them made a loud noise over hills and valleys of Greece. Everywhere – to Rome in the West and Ephesus in the East. Their Gospel preaching and the quality of their faith was the talk everywhere. Every church has a reputation. This church had a good one! As God’s trumpet, they made His voice heard through all the uproar of the world.

God needs us to be His trumpets. The trumpet note should be clear, no hesitation or uncertainty in our witness. It also needs to be penetrating, heard above the noise of the battle. Here is the little church of Thessalonica, composed of recent converts, situated in the stronghold of self-confident organised heathenism. They insisted on being heard. They reached well beyond their immediate neighbourhood. No one knows how far our influence will go. The trumpet’s note should be really musical and tuneful. Our message must not constantly be harsh and scolding. Also the trumpet note must be rousing, not sending people to sleep. Spurgeon spoke of some preachers’ sermons as having a soporific effect! “Watch and pray says the text! Go to sleep says the sermon”!

*“O for a trumpet voice  
On all the world to call,  
To bid their heart rejoice  
In Him who dies for all.  
For all my Lord was crucified’  
For all, for all my Saviour died”*

If the church is a trumpet, who blows it? The answer – God, by His Spirit. Therefore we need to live in communion with God, and let Him breathe through us. He must first of all address us, and then through us to others.

### Conclusion

The Gospel needs to come with assurance and the Holy Spirit. It needs to be welcomed and lead to transformation. Then it has to ring out from us to everywhere. This is God’s continuing purpose for His Gospel and His church throughout the world. This is a relevant word for all – preachers and hearers.