

1 Thessalonians 1 verses 1- 10 Sunday 11th June 2017

Background

This is the first of four talks on the book of 1 Thessalonians. This is the first of two letters Paul sends to the Church in Thessalonica, in modern day Macedonia.

This letter is written to a fledgling Church, born out of great persecution. It is in response to a visit by Timothy to the Church and his report to Paul.

Paul, Silas and Timothy had been to Thessalonica and had been driven out as a result of a riot caused by the Jews. The Church sent them out by night for their own safety and they ended up in Berea. Jason is the one mentioned as hosting the new Church in his house (**Acts 17 verses 1-10**).

Chapter One: Encouragement under pressure

Verse 2: THANKS & PRAYERS: Paul gives thanks for the Church and he says he prays for them. He appreciates who they are and what they have been through.

Application for us: *Do we pray for and thank God for each other?*

Verse 3: FAITH & LOVE: Paul commends and encourages them for three things:

- Their faith
- Their labour of love
- Their perseverance under great pressure

How must Paul have felt when he had to leave them in the throes of persecution? How pleased he seems to be that they have continued in their faith. Here were a people of faithfulness under such pressure. Their perseverance was founded on the help of the Holy Spirit in their lives who had begun to work in them as a result of the word of God being heard and made real to them. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to us.

Application for us- *Do notice and do we appreciate sometimes the struggles others have been through? Who inspires us in our faith? Discouragement can come in different ways and at times weigh us down. Do we have others we can trust to go to when we are under pressure and discouraged? Do we dig deep into Jesus to help us through the Spirit to keep us going?*

Verse 4: GOD'S CHOOSING: He reminds them, '**knowing, beloved of God, His choice of you.**' That is the building block of their faith, and ours; that God has chosen them and loved them. **We are chosen of God**, valued and important to Him. But this has implications for our own lives. Paul says, '**....I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**' (**Ephesians 4 v 1**)

Application for us- *This is something we can always remind ourselves of in time of struggle and difficulty.*

Verse 5: WORD IN POWER: Paul reminds them that the message he and his team shared was not just words- not just a preach! It was accompanied by the effect of the power of the work of the Holy Spirit. Words are dead without the Spirit's life in them. It was the Holy Spirit who took their words and brought a conviction within them to respond to the gospel.

Application for us- *Where the Holy Spirit is working there is always an effect. This was demonstrated throughout the book of Acts, both internally in people's lives and externally as evidence of His work. It is the same for us today if we have His Spirit living in and through us.*

Paul describes how the word of God shared in power had impacted the Thessalonians leading to changed lives. When we read the bible everyday are we allowing the word to impact us and get deep into us so we apply it, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us from the text? Are we growing in our faith and learning from the mistakes we make to change and be more in line with how God wants us to be?

Verses 6-9: IMITATORS & EXAMPLES: As a result of the Spirit's work in them through the reception of God's word, they became both:

- IMITATORS of the lives of Paul's team
- EXAMPLES to all believers in the district.

The Church in Thessalonica began under great pressure. Paul is encouraged, that despite the Church they have continued. As a result there is a joy in them which is both evident and distinctive; their good reputation. Later in the letter, Paul expresses his great affection for them (**1 Thessalonians 2 v 8**) because of this and in this passage he expresses that in fact they have moved from being people of idolatry to ones who worship the true and living God.

Application for us: *Do we get inspired by other's faith and do we inspire others? Our testimony is only as valid as yesterday. Can we testify to the work of Him in our lives this week?*

*If you are working with the Holy Spirit in your life there will have been a change in our heart, attitude and behaviour towards others. That is the reason He has come to make His home in us (**1 Corinthians 6 v 19/ Romans 8 verse 9b**).*

Let us not get in the habit of quenching (not doing what He asks of you) or grieving (making God cry for you, as you miss out on His best for you) the Holy Spirit and the work he desires to do in our lives.

We are natural witnesses by our very presence where we are as the love of Christ will flow from us, sometimes without us really knowing it. Our presence, actions and words can be a witness to others. Lord make us more effective for you where we are.

Verse 10: THE HOPE OF THE SECOND COMING: He then connects all this quite naturally to a theme he returns to later in the letter; the hope of the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Timothy had reported that some in the Church were saying Jesus had already come back and others feared for those who had died in the Lord that they would miss Him. Paul addresses this later in the letter. For the purposes of this chapter Paul uses the Lord's coming as a comfort for these Christians under persecution.

Application for us: *I think it is a lesson for us all to remind ourselves of His eventual coming to restore all things, despite the misery we see reported in the world today (recent attacks in UK). This is our hope as Christians that we will be with Him forever and the troubles of this world will one day be gone. Hallelujah!*

Summary application for us: ENCOURAGEMENT

This the theme of this first chapter and which continues throughout the letter, even as Paul gives specific instructions about things later they are in the context of encouragement to build them up in their faith.

Do raise up or pull others down? Paul encourages these believers for their faith and witness. Paul in **chapter 5 verse 11** encourages the believers to carry on what they were doing in the way they encouraged one another. What personal encouragement do you give others in the midst of struggles

and persecution? The root of the word encourage in this verse is 'to prod'; we need to prod each other to move on in their faith and be encouraged with kindness.

It seems many struggle with doing this. What are the reasons why others do not get encouraged?

- We cannot be bothered and are at times too wrapped up in ourselves that we do not notice others. Jesus always notices us.
- We do not want people to become big-headed. The impact of our encouragement to others is not our business, we are asked to encourage.
- We can get envious when we see and hear of other's faith and success
- We simply lack the confidence to do so. Start in small ways.
- We ourselves were never encouraged so it has never really come natural to us. What is natural is that we as Christians have the Spirit of God in us; He encourages and as we allow Him to work in and through us, he can help us.
- "It's not cultural for me." The last time I looked we as Christians are not bound by our culture. Jesus brings us a new way of being.

If you struggle with giving encouragement or are resistant to it, surrender this to the Lord, ask Him by His Holy Spirit living inside you to make you an encourager and notice people. The Holy Spirit changes us so we will want to encourage.

We all need to be seen and noticed and heard. Encouragement builds up the body of Christ and enables us all to function in the way we should

Discouragement: It is easy to pull down, criticise and destroy others with our words. When we do this we are joining the enemy in his work of aiming to rob, steal and destroy (**John 10 v 10**); that is the world's way. When we pull others down we disempower them.

God always wants and desires to raise us up. In **Psalm 3 v 3**, the Psalmist rejoices, '**You are my glory, the one who lifts my head.**' We can hold our head up high, knowing God's approval of us.

If Jesus, despite our sinfulness and weakness before Him died for us to have His life and to raise us up why do we find it so hard to do this for others?

Conclusions

- Are you an encourager or a 'puller downer?' Do you want the Holy Spirit to change that in you?
- Are you being effective in your walk with Jesus? Do you want to be more effective?
- Who inspires you in your faith? Have you told them this lately?
- Do you read and hear His word expecting to be changed by what you hear from God?
- Are you open to God to challenge you in your life and build you up into what He wants?

1 Thessalonians 5 v 16: 'Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance.'