

1. The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica (3Q 2012—1 and 2 Thessalonians)

Biblical material: Acts 16:9–40; 17:1–4, 12; Jer. 23:1–6; Isa. 9:1–7; Isaiah 53; Rom. 1:16, 1 Thess. 2:13.

Quotes

- The gospel begins and ends with what God is, not with what we want or think we need. *Tom Houston*
- The gospel is neither a discussion nor a debate. It is an announcement. *Paul. S. Rees*
- The gospel has the hallmark of heaven upon it. *William J. C. White*
- Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting. *Francis Schaeffer*
- Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words. *St. Francis of Assisi*
- If he has faith, the believer cannot be restrained. He betrays himself. He breaks out. He confesses and teaches this gospel to the people at the risk of life itself. *Martin Luther*
- The question confronting the Church today is not any longer whether the man in the street can grasp a religious message, but how to employ the communications media so as to let him have the full impact of the Gospel message. *Pope John Paul II*

Questions

How does Paul present the good news to the Thessalonians? What lessons can we learn from this? How is the good news defined, and what is the context? What had just happened to Paul and Silas? How does their experience remind us of the issues and consequences in the great controversy? What should we expect as we share the gospel?

Bible summary

Acts 16:9–40; 17:1–4, 12 tells the story of how the gospel came to Thessalonica. After being severely beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, they had been sent on their way, and arrived in Thessalonica. As Paul’s custom was he went to speak at the synagogue, and it’s recorded that “Some of the Jews who listened were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with many God-fearing Greek men and quite a few prominent women.” (Acts 16:4). Sadly once again opposition is stirred up and he is forced to leave once more. So the beginning of the gospel in Thessalonica is a brief visit.

Paul’s focus is on presenting God’s message. For the gospel must never be about ourselves, even if we are the ones doing the presenting. As Paul says to the Thessalonians very directly, “Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13 NLT.

Paul presents to the Thessalonians a Messiah who is the suffering servant (see Jer. 23:1–6; Isa. 9:1–7; Isaiah 53), not the avenging warrior who would throw off the Roman yoke of bondage as the Jews hoped. Here we see God in all his “otherness,” always

thinking of the other first, working for the freedom of every thinking being in his vast universe. This is the good news of God that Paul is not ashamed of (Rom. 1:16).

Comment

The truth is that sharing the good news, which should be such a wonderful experience for everyone, is a dangerous activity. We are in a war—part of the great controversy over God’s nature and character. So while you might expect a welcome reception, often there is great opposition as the experience of Paul and Silas shows. Paul details how much he has suffered for the gospel—not to show he is a martyr but to explain the very real consequences of speaking for God.

Yet this should not dissuade us. While there may be much pain and suffering, the joys of sharing the good news in partnership with God are truly wonderful. What could be better than dedicating our lives to speaking well of God, representing him in all we say and do, knowing that we are “a spectacle to angels and to men.”

Paul’s strategy of working with those he could relate to is a good example for us. He went where he knew he could get an audience, even if he also knew that his message would stir up controversy. He shared with the Jews their mutual appreciation for Scripture, and their hope of the coming Messiah. It was a natural extension to explain that Jesus had fulfilled the promise—the good news is that Messiah had come to save them! The rejection Paul experienced was part of his turning to share the good news with the Gentiles, the “foreigners” in the eyes of the Jews. The realization that the good news was for everyone came about in the context of Paul’s missionary work—that God wanted everyone to come to him and receive his healing salvation.

The real question here is “what is the gospel?” This question can be answered on many levels, but what is absolutely clear is that it must be good news, and most of all good news about God! Sadly in our attempts as Christians to share the gospel we have at times misrepresented God in both the message and methods we have used. Only as we truly speak well of God, making sure the gospel is truly good news about God and his character, are we rightly doing the work of evangelism.

Ellen White Comments

The love and honor and perfection revealed in the Gospel are a revelation to man of the character of God. {ST, February 24, 1909}

The work of Christ was to free the truth from the rubbish of error and superstition, that men might behold the true character of God, and serve Him in spirit and in truth. Those who proclaim the truth for today have a similar work to do. The truth must be lifted from the obscurity of men’s traditions and errors, that the world may behold the marvelous light of the gospel of the Son of God. {PH078 23.2}

The minister of Christ who is imbued with the Spirit and love of his Master, will so labor that the character of God and of His dear Son may be made manifest in the fullest and clearest manner. {Ev 330}

The work of the disciples was to spread a knowledge of the gospel. To them was committed the work of proclaiming to all the world the good news that Christ brought to men. That work they accomplished for the people of their time. To every nation under heaven the gospel was carried in a single generation. {MH 141}