

“Even As Ye Know ...”

“... what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sakes. And ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5b-6).

There is no sermon more powerful than an example. Paul has mentioned how the gospel had come to the Thessalonians not just in word, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. We earlier discussed some of the ways that assurance had come to the Thessalonians: all practical and true, but Paul’s word found in our text showed another element of the assurance which came to the brethren; it was the assurance the messengers had generated in Thessalonica by their deportment and attitudes which the Thessalonians had seen demonstrated among them.

The messengers (Paul, Silas, and Timothy), had assured brethren of the truth and value of the gospel by the way they demonstrated they viewed the gospel they had made known to them. They believed it. A salesman must believe in his product to be successful and these preachers believed in their product! They showed they believed by enduring the trials and persecutions they experienced. And, can we not assume they lived by the instructions they gave to others about trials? “Do all things without murmuring ...” (Phil. 2:14). So, they had never complained nor blamed God for their adversities. By their behavior they showed their unquestioning faith in the message they brought to these Thessalonians.

But, Paul demonstrated to these brethren more than an unswerving faith: he had showed his concern and love for them and for their well being. He had not exercised a cloak of covetousness (1 Thess. 2:5). He had been gentle in their midst as when a nurse cherishes her own children (2 Thess. 2:7). He had been as a father to them, exhorting and encouraging and testifying to them that they should walk worthily of God (1 Thess. 2:12). He had imparted his very own soul to them (2 Thess. 2:8). Such a life lived before the brethren could hardly fail to be of great assurance.

That example with its assurance had its desired results, for the brethren became imitators “of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction” (1 Thess. 1:6). Men scarcely know today what it means to make a decision to become a Christian, knowing that they will pay a heavy price for their decision. Occasionally one hears of a disciple who has been disowned by parents for obeying the gospel (and how such a person needs our help and commendation), but such cases are few and far between. In the first century it was different. Persecution was not long coming to Paul and his company, just as it had not been long coming to the Lord. The Thessalonians received the word in much affliction.

But, they received the word also with joy of the Holy Spirit. The historian Luke tells in several places of the joy produced in the hearts of obedient hearers. On Pentecost some were filled with anguish when they became convinced they had killed their Messiah and God’s Son and had asked, “Brethren what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

When told, those who gladly received the word were baptized (Acts 2:41). Philip the evangelist preached to the Samaritans and as a result of his preaching and their obedience “there was joy in that city” (Acts 8:8), which joy had first come when Philip had wrought signs and wonders to convince the folk of the truth of the gospel. When Philip later preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, and he had been baptized, he separated from Philip and “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). When Jesus lifts the burden of sin and guilt, the freed child has joy and a “peace that passeth understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

The Thessalonians followed the examples of their teachers and their Savior, then they became examples to others. Their joy overflowed in their lives and moved their tongues to tell others the good news of the gospel. They were excited. They wanted to share with others how they too could receive remission of sins and thus rejoice: “For from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith to God has gone forth ...” (1 Thess. 1:8).

Is it too much to wish for that today all who call upon the Lord would have the same earnestness and zeal in spreading the gospel? When persecution befell saints in Jerusalem and they were scattered abroad, they “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). Do you not suppose that if all of us who claim to be Christians would sound out the word that the results would be electrifying? How the church would grow! How God would be glorified! How much happier all of us would be!

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