

“Gospel Power”
1 Thessalonians 1:5
(Preached at Trinity, March 10, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we've seen, this letter comes in the context of Paul's second missionary journey. He and Silas had traveled to Philippi where he faced much opposition and was soon forced to leave. In the midst of the opposition God saved Lydia and the Philippian jailer and others. Leaving Philippi, he traveled to Thessalonica where he again faced great hostility and again was forced to leave—but not before seeing many come to faith in Christ. Leaving Thessalonica, he proceeded on to Athens and then to Corinth.
2. Paul was distressed, not knowing how these new converts were doing. In the face of so much hostility, were they enduring? He sent Timothy to minister to them and to bring back a report on how they were faring.
1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore when we could endure *it* no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,"
1 Thessalonians 3:6-7 NAU - "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, ⁷ for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;"
3. Paul was greatly encouraged and comforted at the report of their faith. His heart was filled with great gratitude as he heard of their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope."
4. Paul knew that this wasn't merely human endurance. It was the outward demonstration of the power of God working in them.
1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit"
5. Paul's confidence was always in the power of the Gospel to save.
Romans 1:16 NAU - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
6. As Paul traveled from city to city he encountered a diverse people culturally and socially. His methodology changed little and his message did not change at all. He preached the Word. There was no need for Paul to alter the message in the least. He simply proclaimed it. He knew that the preaching of God's Word was sufficient.
 - A. Paul knew this was God's method of saving sinners.
1 Corinthians 1:21 NAU - "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

- B. Paul commanded Timothy:
2 Timothy 4:1-2 NAU - "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."
7. Paul's method was to enter a town, preach the Word, and after seeing a number of new converts, he would plant a church.
- a. Then he would see that elders were raised up and trained that they might continue in the ministry of the Word.
Titus 1:5 NAU - "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you"
- b. It was all about teaching and preaching.
2 Timothy 2:2 NAU - "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
8. Paul knew that the power was not just his power of persuasion. The power was with the Holy Spirit taking His Word and applying it effectually upon the hearts of sinners.
1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"
 Paul expressed this same thought to the Corinthian church from where he was writing this letter.
1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NAU - "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
9. I want us to consider the power of the Gospel this morning.
- I. First of all, it is powerful because of God's sovereign purpose
- A. Redemption was decreed from eternity
1. God made a covenant in the eternal counsel of the Godhead. We call it the Covenant of Redemption.
 - a. In this covenant God the Father elected a multitude from among the race of fallen humanity and pledged them to His Son whom He sent forth as Savior
 - b. The Son came in obedience to the Father to save His people from their sins and restore them to a state of righteousness.
 - c. It was determined that the Holy Spirit would go forth and effectually apply the Gospel. This work is absolute, infallible, unassailable.
 2. Nothing is left to chance. Nothing can frustrate God's purpose
 The Gospel is the power of God because it is God's plan.

- B. God's purposes cannot fail
- Isaiah 46:10** – “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:”
1. God has planned and purposed every event in all of history down to the smallest event. Nothing occurs without God having ordered it.
 2. God planned every detail in the redemption of the elect
 - a. It was by God's divine order that Jesus was born and that He was crucified for His people
Acts 4:27-28 NAU - "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."
 - b. When Jesus had accomplished all that the Father had sent Him to do He boldly exclaimed, “It is finished.”
 3. God is accomplishing the salvation of His people. Not a single one of the elect will be lost.
2 Peter 3:9 NAU - "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."
John 6:39 NAU - "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."

II. Second, it is powerful because of the infallible Word of God

- A. No man can be saved apart from the Word of God
1. The Word of God is God's means of imparting faith to the sinner
Romans 10:17 NAU - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."
1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU - "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."
2 Timothy 3:15 NAU - "and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."
 2. The Word of God is the source of the Gospel. It contains the Gospel message. Salvation demands that this message be proclaimed, understood, and believed.
Matthew 13:23 NAU - "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."
James 1:21 NAU - "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

- B. The Bible is God's own Word.
1. The Bible is the voice of the Almighty
Isaiah 46:11 NAS - "Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it, surely* I will do it."
 2. "Thus saith the Lord" is recorded 413 times in the Bible
"The Word of the Lord" is recorded 255 times
 3. God's Word is an infallible Word
Hebrews 4:12 NAU - "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
Isaiah 55:11 NAU - "So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it."
 4. God's Word is His effectual, everlasting, all powerful declaration
1 Peter 1:24-25 NAU - "For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off,
²⁵ But the word of the Lord abides forever." And this is the word which was preached to you."

III. Third, it is powerful because of the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit

- A. God attends the preaching of His Word with great power
1 Corinthians 1:18 NAS - "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
1. Paul often places the words Spirit and power together.
Acts 1:8 NAU - "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
Romans 15:13 NAU - "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
 2. The Holy Spirit takes the Word and illuminates our minds enabling us to perceive and comprehend the spiritual truths of the Word of God. This effectual call is His powerful work upon the human heart.
 3. The Bible cannot be known or understood by the lost man. He is incapable of discerning spiritual truths without the help of the Holy Spirit. It demands a new heart. This is clearly seen in the case of Lydia
Acts 16:14 NAS - "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."
- B. The greatest power in all the universe accompanies the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit works effectually in the heart of the sinner.
1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"

1. Some powerful changes need to take place before a man will flee from sin and Satan and turn to God.
2. Man by nature is opposed to God
Romans 1:30 NAU – “haters of God”
Romans 8:7-8 NAU - "because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."
3. Human nature is predisposed to sin
Romans 3:9-12 NAS - "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; ¹¹ There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; ¹² All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."
Ephesians 2:2-3 NAS - "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."
 - a. The lost man has a total inability to make any of the changes necessary to restore himself to a right relationship with God.
 - b. Since we are also born enslaved by Satan we need a powerful rescue
 - c. How can a man be brought to forsake that which he loves?
There needs to be a powerful and miraculous transformation
4. Who can perform such a transformation?
Only God by His Spirit can bring the great transformation upon man –
Only God is able to recreate him
 - a. Only God can cause light to dawn upon the sinners darkened heart
2 Corinthians 4:6 NAS - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."
 - b. Only God can bring new life to the dead sinner and draw him powerfully to Himself
 - c. Only God can powerfully deliver the sinner from sin and Satan

Conclusion:

1. The same confidence Paul had is the same source of our confidence today. The Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. The Holy Spirit still works effectually upon the hearts of men.
2. It has never been in the ability of man. It is not in our ability to persuade. We are dependent upon the Gospel in the hands of the Sovereign Spirit.
What is taking place upon the hearts your hearts at this very moment. It is the Holy Spirit that puts the power in preaching.
3. In the Parable of the Sower the Good Seed of the Word of God was scattered abroad.
The only variable was the condition of the soil.
Only God can prepare a man's heart to receive His Word. Only God can open blind eyes.
4. The power of the Gospel must never lead us to laziness. Although the working of God's saving grace is His work alone this does not mean we do not plead with Him for His saving power. No pastor should preach without pleading for this power. We call it unction. You must also be praying for the power of God unto salvation. You must plead for your children. You must plead for the ministry of the Word at our church.
But we pray in confidence, knowing of the power of God in the Gospel.