

Effectual Calling

Call to Worship: Psalm 33:18-22

Hymn #1- *All People that on Earth do Dwell*

1st Scripture: Matthew 7:21-29

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

2nd Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 1:5-7

Hymn #455- *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*

Introduction:

Having expressed why he continually gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians, for their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ," all of which affirmed their election in grace, Paul now moves on to highlight how God has powerfully and effectually called them and how that calling has manifested itself in the evident repentance of the Thessalonians.

This morning then, we will examine that effectual calling, as it is described by the Apostle Paul here in our text.

I. Effectual Calling

In Romans 1:16-17, Paul states, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

When the gospel is preached, we find it to be the one message that has life giving power; true life giving power is attached to it, such that it leads to the conversion of formerly dead souls. As we have seen last time, Paul excitedly gave thanks to God because of the fruits, which were exhibited by the Thessalonians, which confirmed their election in grace. Their fruits; their work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (all in the face of ongoing persecution and temptation to compromise) were all manifest evidences of the fact that God had elected them unto salvation.

Moving on into verse 5 then, the Apostle exposes the means, by which, God had effectually called the Thessalonians into His grace, in accordance with His elective purposes, ordained before time. To be sure, there is a moment (or a grouping of moments) in time and

space, when God fulfills what He has planned before time, in the lives of His chosen elect. Paul here describes that "in time and space" moment (or grouping of moments) when the Thessalonians were effectually called, unto receive the blessings of regeneration, salvation and conversion. And once they had received these, they evidenced it in the ways described in verse 3, affirming the authenticity of their election. God's hidden preordained will concerning the Thessalonians, became known by their changed lives.

And so, what was the means, by which, God effectually called the Thessalonians into His marvelous grace? It was by the preaching of the Gospel; that sole means, whereby God powerfully quickens His elect unto receiving His free gift of salvation in Christ. But, as we see here in our text, it is not the mere preaching of the gospel alone, which saves them (or which saves anyone for that matter). It is also the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers the preached gospel, such that it penetrates the dead soul with life-infusing power, leading the lost sinner to repent and believe all that has been preached. And so, both are needed, the true proclamation of the gospel and the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel will not change a thing apart from the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will not change a thing apart from any other means than the gospel. This is not to claim any form of impotence in the Holy Spirit. It is just that the gospel alone is the means and the tool, which the Holy Spirit will use to fix broken people. [Ex: The mechanic and his wrench]

Notice again, Paul's words in verse 5: "For [we have confidence in your election, and we rejoice and give thanks to God because] our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake."

And so, what is Paul stating here? Paul joyfully expresses that, when the Gospel came to the Thessalonians, God had His life-changing power accompany the message. When Paul preached, it didn't merely come to the Thessalonians in word; indeed, the message of the gospel is true and faithful, but man is incapable of receiving the truth because he is spiritually dead. Man is in denial of the truth. He is in rebellion against it and naturally an enemy of it. And so, the gospel can be heard thousands of times over, revealing God to us, exposing our sins and pointing us to the only true and living hope in Christ, but, we will reject it, as most do, if God

does not breathe life into our spiritually dead souls. And that is exactly what had happened to the Thessalonians.

The gospel came in word; praise the Lord, the truth must be heard! But furthermore, it came, "in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance..." Though many are called, few are chosen. Though many hear the gospel, few are empowered to receive it (what theologians like to call, "the Effectual Call," given to a fraction of those who receive, "the General Call"). And what is the general inner working of this call? What is the anatomy of the "effectual call?"

In short, the living Holy Spirit of God tears away the blinders of the soul, enabling sinners to recognize their own spiritual depravity and bankruptcy, while revealing the free righteousness of God, offered in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ alone! The sinner is compelled to believe the gospel in truth, humbled by his own natural condemnation and finding peace solely in the righteousness of Jesus Christ! And so, the gospel is preached and as the message enters the ear gate and is processed in the inner man, the Holy Spirit awakens the soul unto believing, embracing and responding to the truth with a living faith. And this living faith justifies, but only because it freely accesses all that was merited and secured by Christ. And as the soul is joined to Christ by this faith; by this dependence upon Christ, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, who further takes up residence in the soul, the desire to obey is ignited and good works are generated inevitably.

"For our gospel did not come to you in word only (not simply the verbal message, as necessary as that is), but also in power (real living power; the same power that literally raised Christ from the dead), and in the Holy Spirit (the very Author of that power; a literal Person; the Third Person of the Trinity; God, operative in us) and in much assurance (with irresistible conviction as to the truth of the entire substance of what we preached), as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake."

Finally, the Apostle Paul affirms that the lifestyle and integrity of those who ministered to the Thessalonians (Paul, Timothy, Silas...etc), helped adorn the truth of the gospel, by the fact that their own lives were in conformity to it. Paul and his companions could not be charged of being charlatans, who were using the gospel as a means of personal and financial gain. They could not be viewed as those who were distanced from the types of sufferings, which the

Thessalonians had faced in their being persecuted for their faith in the Gospel. Paul and Silas bore the scars of persecution. Just prior to their coming to Thessalonica, they had faced great opposition in Philippi, where they were beaten and jailed for their faith. And the Thessalonians were not unaware of this (see 1 Thess. 2:1-2). And furthermore, they were chased out of Thessalonica and then Berea, in the very presence of the brethren of Thessalonica. And so, their own faith and their own integrity helped adorn and confirm the truth of the Gospel! They were seen as those who truly believed what they had preached!

And so, because of all this; because the gospel had come to them with such power in Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, the Thessalonians embraced the calling of the gospel, taking up their own crosses and following Christ.

II. The Fruit of Their Effectual Calling

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe" (vs. 6-7).

What was the result of their effectual, Holy Spirit empowered call? Like the Lord Jesus, who bore His cross before them, and like the Apostles, who continued to bear their crosses, the Thessalonians were now bearing their crosses, having received the word in much affliction. They have faced and continue to face the same afflictive opposition, which has come, on account of the gospel! And they do so with the joy of the Holy Spirit! The same Holy Spirit, who has effectually called them, has so assured them of the truth of every hope that is encased in the gospel, that they are willing to joyfully lose their lives in the present, knowing full well that their eternal destiny is eternal life in and with Christ. The victory over their sin is forever assured; that which has separated them from God has been removed! What else have they to fear? What can man do?

And so, especially in light of the heavy persecution which they had faced, their faithfulness, which shined all the more brightly through that persecution, was evident and pronounced throughout all of Macedonia and Achaia! Their light travelled great distances because of their dark opposition!

III. Conclusive Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through our main text for this morning, brethren, let us then conclude our time by considering a few closing thoughts and applications:

1) See again, the vital necessity of the Holy Spirit's role in salvation.

a- Compromising the gospel message in any sense is to disregard this critical reality.

Without the Holy Spirit; when churches develop new and creative ways of seeking to win souls, outside of proclaiming the true, unadulterated gospel, churches will be filled with goats alone. If the soul cannot be won with the pure gospel, then it is not the will of God for that soul to be won.

b- See again, the critical role of private and corporate prayer in the life of the church. We must plead with God not merely to give us eloquent or powerful preachers, but His Holy Spirit, who alone can empower the messenger and the message, unto the salvation of lost souls. A preacher at his best gives a "general call." The Holy Spirit of God, alone, makes that call "effectual!"

2) See, in the example of the Thessalonians, in the example of the Apostles, and most of all, in the example of Christ, that often times, the light of our Christian Faith shines brightest, in the face of difficult trials and persecution. [III. Flashlight analogy... The beam is seen clearly, when?]

I am not wishing for persecution, brethren. Believe me, I'm not. But, if and when it comes; and whenever we face difficult trials in any sense, just know that your testimony will often shine brightest, as you persevere through such trials, not wavering in your faith and hope in Christ! The testimony of the Thessalonians, and how they handled constant persecution (how they pursued holiness, exhibited mutual brotherly love...etc) was known in all of Macedonia and Achaia! Take away the persecution, and the ray is not as bright, is it? Their trials drew the attention of the outside world, and how they handled them, made all the difference.

God's evangelists also include the suffering of His people [Stephen, a faithful deacon, full of the Holy Spirit is martyred. The church spreads out through the persecution that follows. The Gospel is preached to Gentiles in Antioch. A gospel stir morphs into a large following there. Barnabas goes up to help establish a church there. He fetches Paul from Tarsus. They stay at

Antioch for a year and establish that church. That becomes the home base for all of their missionary endeavors, into Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia and the whole world! How did it start? With the stoning death of a faithful man of God]

3) Recognize the importance of your own integrity and character, as an adornment to the Gospel or a barrier. Paul could say to the Thessalonians, "And you know how we conducted ourselves among you..." Can you say that, in the presence of those to whom you witness [Ex: Josh Duggar. Not to throw stones, but look at the great damage done and the reproach brought upon Christ and the Gospel]

4) Finally, have you been *effectually* called by God into the light of His grace in Christ? Is the Holy Spirit's power evident in your life, in any sense? The Gospel!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25

Amen!!!