

Repentance

Call to Worship: Psalm 146

Hymn #218 (1st)- *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*

1st Scripture: Acts 20:17-38

Hymn Insert- *Better is One Day in Your Courts*

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Hymn #582- *My Hope is Built*

Introduction:

Paul has opened his letter to the Thessalonians by expressing how grateful he is to God for His evident work among the Thessalonians. When Paul preached to them, his Gospel came not merely in word, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, such that the Thessalonians became followers of Christ and of the Apostle Paul, as they embraced the Gospel within a context of much affliction and suffering. From the outset, the Thessalonians were a persecuted church, and so, their work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, became evident to all, not only in Macedonia but also in all of Achaia. The light of their faithfulness beamed brightly through the darkness of their afflictions. And in all of these things, their election by God has been greatly confirmed. The hidden will of God's preordained plan for them, became revealed in time and space.

This morning then, we move on to see, how one of the most tangible and profound ways, in which, the testimony of the Thessalonians has blared forth throughout all the world, was in their visible repentance.

I. Repentance Exemplified

Verse 8 begins with the word, "For," and again, we know that as a general principle, when a verse begins with the word "for," it looks back to what has just been stated, seeking to further affirm or add to a stated point. In this case, it points back to verses 6 & 7. Paul has just mentioned how the Thessalonians became followers of him (and his co-laborers in the faith), as well as of the Lord, and that by doing this, they became examples to all of Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul now expands on this in verse 8, where he adds, "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only into Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything."

Now again, verse 9 will build on this, beginning again with the word, "For," but consider for a moment what Paul is saying here about the Thessalonians. Paul is saying that the faithfulness of the Thessalonians, in the face of such great persecution, was so great, that their light has shined brightly not only throughout all Macedonia and Achaia, which would be profoundly significant enough, but also in every place. In other words, so powerful was their testimony, particularly in the face of such great affliction, that the Christian realm was rocked by it, all over the world. Everyone heard about what was going on, and the Thessalonians served as an exemplary model of perseverance. They became a blueprint for Christ, as it were, so that other suffering Christians could say, "But look at the brethren in Thessalonica." [Ex: Pastor Saed Aberdini in Iran. How does his testimony affect us? How does it put our suffering in proper perspective? How does it drive us to deny ourselves daily and to bear our crosses?]

Notice again, the power of Paul's words. Their faith *sounded* forth! It was a loud voice, which, by their example, highlighted and underscored the truth of the Gospel, and its life changing power. "So great is this testimony; so loud is the proclamation of your faithfulness which has gone forth, that, we don't need to say a thing!" We don't even have to bring anyone's attention to it, because they already know. They have heard or seen for themselves the rays of your light. We don't have to point out the star in the sky, because it is so bright in its own right, that it is undeniably obvious!

And again, now in verse 9, beginning with the word, "For," he opens this up further: "For they (Who? Everyone in every place, having been struck by their traveling testimony)... For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you..." They, apart from our reporting about what had happened, when we preached the Gospel to you; they, having heard themselves by the spreading of your testimony, which came by other means; they told us about how they were aware of the success we had among you, in the preaching of the Gospel. They spoke of the powerful way in which our gospel came to you, in accordance with the living fruit that sprouted out of you...without us saying a thing! It spread like a wild fire with no need for us

to tell about it. Everyone, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but everywhere, already knew via other means! It has travelled about like a Facebook post, containing thousands of followers, all over the world.

And what was the profound truth; what was the tangible, jaw dropping truth, which confirmed to all, the real power, which came upon you, when we preached the Gospel? It was your manifest repentance! "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, *and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come*" (vs. 9-10)!

What is it that so stands out among everyone, concerning the testimony of the Thessalonians? Their repentance, which is upheld by a living faith that really believes! And what is the anatomy of this repentance? Is it just sorrow? No! Indeed, sorrow is an element of repentance. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, speaks of a "*sorrow that leads to repentance,*" distinguishing repentance from just having sorrow. The repentance, here exhibited by the Thessalonians was an active repentance! They did what? They turned away from one thing and toward another. They went in a completely different direction. They turned to God and away from their idols, so as to no longer serve those idols, determined to now serve the living and true God. They could not serve two masters. They knew this! They could not keep one hand on their sin and another on God. They could not embrace the best of both worlds. They had to, in contention with the popular practices of the heathen nations, and at the threat of their very lives; they had to let go of all their idols and give their hearts wholly to God. There was a new Master in the house, and the old master had been forever evicted! That's what their repentance looked like, friends! And all of this flew right in the face of their common culture. They were crucified to the world and the world was crucified to them and it got them into major trouble from all angles. Their faith was a threat to the envious Jews, who did not want the threat of Christianity to flush out their self-righteous gospel. And their faith was a threat to the heathen, who found much profit in their idols made of wood and stone.

And what was the testimony that went forth because of this? What was the declaration attached to their repentance and their new commitment to serve the living and true God? That

they were waiting for the Son of God, their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom God had raised from the dead, to return and to deliver them from the wrath to come! Their entire hope; their entire lives were fixed upon a settled conviction; a confident hope, that the Jesus who had come to them in the power of the Gospel, would Himself one day return, bring them home, and deliver them from the only wrath that not only kills the body, but also eternally ruins the soul! That hope drove them to stand firm in their faithful commitment to God, to maintain their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in their Lord Jesus Christ!" Their eternal state, governed how they lived in their temporal state. And they were elated with the joy of the Holy Spirit, even in the face of great conflict and the threat of losing their very lives, because they knew that that one eternal weight of debt to God, their sin, was completely paid in full, by the Christ to whom, they were now joined, and eagerly awaited His reappearing.

The tangible change of their lives to this end, in a context of satanic dominion and unrelenting idolatry, sounded forth, affirming the word and power of the Gospel, connected to this spreading Christianity! They were a testimony that King Jesus was building His church and the gates of hell would not (could not) prevail against it! For, a large gate in pagan Thessalonica had just been torn down and tossed aside, by One, much stronger than Samson!

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

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

1) Note, that what made the Thessalonian church stand out so powerfully, was their separation from the surrounding, dominant idolatrous culture, in the face of great opposition. At the threat of their very lives, they parted ways with the very things that once offered them, paper thin, short lived comfort and security. They were no longer in bed with the idols of the Greeks, the Romans and the Jews, and this stood out. Their holiness; their separation; their turning away from idols and toward God, to serve God, was a laser beam, thrust into the eyes of the surrounding world. They no longer looked like the status quo, and stated by their very lives that they were waiting for a new and better home, whose Builder and Maker was God! And this went

out to the world, encouraging their fellow Christians, while invading the gates of hell with a Gospel life preserver, for deceived, lost souls, who were presently chained there.

And so, let's bring this to our own hearts and homes, brethren? Let me ask you, "Do we stand out in our lust-driven, materialistic, idolatrous culture?" Or, do we look so much like the world, that the church's light has all but blended into the background of our culture? Have we sacrificed true, authentic Christianity; cross bearing, self-sacrificing, holiness pursuing, fervent praying, "this is not our home" Christianity, for an Americanized version of Christianity? Why is the light of American churches so dull? Why is the opposition not stronger against us? Could it be because we speak like the world, walk like the world, look like the world, live like the world, crave the world's ideals and interests, while holding onto a side of Christianity? Do we, like those of old, declare by our very lives, that we seek a better home, whose Builder and Maker is God?

Oh brethren, so, so, many churches are compromising at this very moment! They are in bed with the false prophet and they will align themselves with the tyranny of our anti-Christian government, presenting a softer, safer, more accepting, grossly tainted Christianity, and the temptation to compromise will grow multi-fold, amongst those who presently preach the true Gospel. And when the threat of losing everything and having nothing; and when the noose is wrapped around our very necks, will we stand out; will we be a bright light to the watching world, saying boldly that we serve the Living and True God, and we wait for our Blessed Savior, who is coming and who will deliver us from the greater and more permanent and far more powerful wrath to come?

If we are shallow in our faith now; if we are not running the race now; if we are not in the battle now, we will never survive then. And so, let us be ready now, brethren. Let us watch and pray, so that we enter not into temptation, not dreaming for a moment that we are strong enough to resist the power of the enemy, in our own strength! Let us stand out now, while we still have our freedoms. And with Thessalonica, let us pray that our light shines forth throughout the whole world. Not for our own glory, but that the world may see and know that there is a righteous, holy and gracious God in Israel, who caters not to the wicked designs of men!

2) Recognize the critical importance of Biblical repentance in the life of the redeemed sinner. So, so many today, preach half a Gospel (which is no Gospel at all), welcoming everyone to come to Christ, for a free salvation by faith alone, without calling sinners to repent as well. Repentance (a change of heart and the direction of one's life) is a critical part of the Gospel call. John the Baptist's entire ministry was a ministry of calling sinners to repentance, and he baptized his followers with a baptism of repentance, calling them to prepare their hearts for the coming Christ. Jesus Himself, went everywhere calling people to repent and to put their trust in Him. In our first Scripture reading, Paul, who was seeing the Ephesians elders for the last time, told them, that when he was among them for some three years, that he constantly preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, here's the real issue. One cannot truly come to Christ by faith, without the whole hearted willingness to follow and obey Christ in that faith. Imagine coming to Christ for salvation with your arms wrapped around the very idols that He came to save you from. It is impossible. [Ill. Coming for a cure, while being unwilling to get rid of the poison]

The Thessalonians turned to God and away from their idols, to serve the true and living God. Their manifest repentance is the tangible evidence, which encouraged the Christian world and shocked the heathen world. You cannot possibly be saved and remain in your sin. In fact, the entire Christian life, is a life, composed of ongoing repentance, as our salvation is worked out with fear and trembling. To the unbeliever...

3) Brethren, rejoice in the glorious work that has changed your desires! Christ has been revealed in His glory and He is most precious to you. And who will go?

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25