

The Birth of the Church in Thessalonica

Acts 16-20

- I. INTRODUCTION
 - A. Our time in Thessaloniki
 - 1. Refugees; Sex trafficking; An almost absent Christian witness; Electric Scooters
 - B. Going to work through 1 and 2 Thessalonians during the summer
 - 1. Verse by verse, section by section
 - 2. Would encourage you to begin reading it on your own or even w/ your DG if you're looking for new content
 - C. Today we are going to explore the biblical background for this letter and for this town through the book of Acts
- II. When reading the Bible, you need to ask a lot of questions.
 - A. Some of those questions you are already quite familiar with
 - 1. What does this teach about God?
 - 2. What does this teach about mankind?
 - 3. What will I do in response? Who will I tell?
 - B. Those are great basic questions, but you can ask more
 - 1. How does this look to Jesus? Point back to OT? Further the theme of the book?
 - C. Today we are going to look at Acts. Why? Because we want to ask the question, "What does the Bible tell us about the foundation of the Thessalonian church?"
 - 1. We could just jump straight to a commentary (and they are valuable), but by asking the right questions we can learn a lot.
 - 2. Some questions that we want to ask today:
 - a) What does this teach us about Thessalonica?
 - b) What does this teach about Paul's ministry?
 - c) What do we need to keep in mind as we read 1&2 Thessalonians?
- III. Acts 16:1-10
 - A. God speaks (through natural and supernatural means) and man is expected to respond in obedience.
- IV. Acts 16:11-15
 - A. God has already prepared people, and Paul knew where the spiritually open people tended to hang out.
 - 1. Where do spiritually open people tend to gather in our towns? If we want to learn from Paul's example, we need to go to them - not just wait for them to come to us.
- V. Acts 16:16-24
 - A. Seems like a nice thing that they do, but it is costly! But God has a plan...
- VI. Acts 16:25-40

- A. Again, God prepares people and although you should look for them in places that make sense (like Lydia), you are called to be on mission everywhere you go.
 - 1. Don't just think missionally at an outreach - think missionally all the time
- VII. Acts 17:1-9 & Overview leading to Corinth
 - A. What does this teach us about Paul's custom in ministry?
 - 1. Part of Paul's missionary strategy was to begin in the major cities and then have it spread from there to the rural areas.
 - a) Expats can reach cities, but it often takes locals to reach the rural areas, which often makes them exceptionally more difficult.
 - 2. Paul went to places with spiritual people first
 - 3. Paul would dialogue with people (asking questions and discussing) from the Word
 - a) This is one reason why we love the DBS
 - 4. Paul proclaimed Christ (a person, a King), not a religious system
 - 5. Paul knew that near-culture people (God-fearing Gentiles) could reach far-culture people better than himself
 - a) MBB 1/5; CBB 1/100; Foreigner 1/1000
 - 6. Paul knew when to move on and how to coach from afar
 - 7. Paul was always traveling with people whom he was developing
 - a) Best way to really develop leaders!
 - B. What does this teach us about Thessalonica?
 - 1. It was a city
 - a) Actually it was the second largest city in Greece after Athens
 - b) Historians estimate that its population was around 200,000 people
 - c) It was strategic for Rome
 - (1) Gateway between Asia and Europe → "Roman Roads"
 - (a) E.g. Do you remember when Turkey released all the refugees to go into Greece? This is where they would have wound up
 - (2) Right on the water for seafarers
 - d) It wasn't exactly the most reputable place in the world
 - (1) Less noble than the Boreans
 - (2) Sailors (Cabiri worship - promoters of fertility and protector of seafarers)
 - C. What do we need to keep in mind as we read 1&2 Thessalonians?
 - 1. Paul didn't spend a lot of time there
 - a) These people have the basics, but the church was arguably planted in less than a month (we overcomplicate things...)
 - 2. If they traveled 40 miles to chase Paul down, you can bet there was persecution on the homefront for the very new believers
 - 3. They are new believers in a city with a reputation
 - 4. Paul sent Timothy and Silas back to check in on the Thessalonians and didn't go himself
- VIII. It is these scenarios that lead to the writing of 1 Thessalonians

- A. A hasty departure... A young church... Paul not being able to return in person... Dirty sailors (jk)... Big city living... Persecution and opposition from both Jew and Gentile...
 - B. As we read Thessalonians, we will see Paul dealing with these various hiccups and hurdles.
 - 1. He desires to reconnect with them relationally, let them know that the fact that he sent Timothy and Silas isn't because he doesn't care but simply because he couldn't go
 - 2. Persecution was still continuing and hadn't abated over time
 - 3. They had misconceptions about Jesus return, even wondering if someone died before his return if they would miss the boat
 - 4. Some were so hung up on Paul that they didn't want to listen to their own leadership in the church
 - 5. And of course, being so young in the faith many struggled with basic issues of holiness and purity
 - C. Paul writes to address all of these things
 - 1. He wants them to see that their faith in the accomplished work of Christ will save them (even if they die before Jesus' return)
 - 2. He wants to encourage them to live holy, loving, dutiful lives today (even in the midst of persecution)
 - 3. He wants to see them looking forward to the second coming of King Jesus with anticipation, eagerness and joy.
- IX. And so we realize that the Thessalonian Letters are relevant to us as well
- A. In many respects, we are plagued with the same struggles as these brothers and sisters almost 2000 years ago
 - B. Thessaloniki is still a gateway city, but no longer for Romans - now for refugees
 - C. Sin is still sin - it is insidious and destructive, seeking to decimate new believers, and derail mature believers
 - D. Persecution hasn't changed much. The tactics have shifted but it always comes down to King Jesus vs. another king
 - E. We can still learn a great deal from the Apostle Paul
 - 1. His missionary methods and tactics
 - 2. His servant's heart
 - 3. His relationship with those to whom he ministered
 - 4. His love for the Lord
- X. THIS WEEK:
- A. Read through the book of 1 Thessalonians a few times (it won't take you long) and ask a few key questions:
 - 1. What are the main ideas of this letter?
 - 2. Big picture, what does this letter teach about God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit?
 - 3. Big picture, what does this letter teach about mankind?
 - 4. What does this letter command or encourage me to do?

5. Who do I know who would benefit from reading this letter (maybe with you!)?
- XI. HOW DO WE SUMMARIZE TODAY?
- A. Jesus is building his church and the gates of hell won't prevail against it.
 - B. We worry so much about the details (and they matter), but ultimately it always comes down to the word, spirit, and people.
 1. Paul didn't church plant thinking about buildings, budgets, and programs (even tho there's nothing wrong with those things)
 2. He looked for Spiritually open people, brought them to the Word, and assembled them around Jesus Christ → and then kept coaching them
- XII. WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?
- A. Paul looked for spiritual people... how can you?
 - B. Paul would dialogue w/ people from the Scriptures to show Jesus was King. Write down the names of five people you interact with on a regular basis and begin praying for opportunities to dialogue with them from the Scriptures.

TABLE TALK

1. Paul would actively go to places where he knew spiritual people would be present. Where are places in our own community that have spiritual people and how can we go to them to bring the gospel?
2. Paul would often dialogue with people from the Scriptures to show Jesus was King. Do you know anyone who might be open to such a dialogue? Invite them to begin reading the Creation to Christ Discovery Journey with you.
3. What are you most excited about learning as we look at 1 Thessalonians and why?
4. What struck you the most from today's overview of the Thessalonian church and how will you implement it this week?