

“For Our Gospel Came Not ...”

“... unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance ...” (1 Thess. 1:5).

When Paul spoke of “our gospel” it is to be understood that he included both Silas and Timothy with him as proclaimers with him of that gospel. It must also be understood that Paul did not claim authorship of the gospel, only that it was what he (and his companions) preached in the midst of those brethren. Early on it was said that the early disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine ...” (Acts 2:24); a simple affirmation of the message that was unique with them but which originated with Christ and which He had commanded that they preach (Mk. 16:16). Paul strongly argued that the gospel he preached to the Galatians was not through man, nor from man (Gal. 1:11). Later in this epistle to the Thessalonians he thanked God that the brethren there had received from them the word of the message, even the word of God, and that they had accepted it not as the word of men, but as it was in truth, the word of God which, said he “also worketh in you that believeth” (1 Thess. 2:13).

When Paul said the gospel came not in word only but also in power, at least two things may be inferred by these words. First, the word (gospel) was neither lifeless nor powerless. The Hebrew writer said it was “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12) for it is God’s saving power (Rom. 1:16). The word is capable of moving individuals to courses of life they had never traveled; to heights they had never attained. It can bring about remarkable, impressive changes for good in our homes, neighborhoods, churches, and nations. There is also a second inference from Paul’s words that the “gospel came with power” to the Thessalonians. As these preachers went into alien areas where they were regarded with suspicion and their message of a future resurrection greeted with skepticism and scorn, it was necessary that God provide them with strong testimony their message was true. He did this by empowering them with the ability to work miracles. Philip wrought many astonishing miracles in Samaria (Acts 8). Paul caused an opposing sorcerer to be smitten with blindness on Cyprus (Acts 13:11) and healed a man who was born crippled in his feet (Acts 14:8-11). It was said that he wrought many miracles in other cities in which he preached. It is true that Luke’s account of the evangelists stay in Thessalonica (Acts 17) makes no mention of any miracles done there by Paul but that does not mean he did not perform any. Luke often gave only “bare bone” accounts of the work of the apostles in places where they preached, and Paul, in his letters, often mentioned details of the same place and time which Luke did not record.

The gospel came to the Thessalonians also in the Holy Spirit. Perhaps Paul means by this that the Holy Spirit was the inspiring fountain for the words preached to the Thessalonians. Jesus had promised His apostles the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, assuring them in their times of trials and testing that they were not to be afraid for the Holy Spirit would give them words to say (Jn. 14:26; Mt. 10:19). These first century preachers needed not only signs to confirm their message as true, but the Holy Spirit to guide their tongues that they might inerrantly speak the words of God.

The gospel also brought much assurance to the Thessalonians. That assurance would certainly include assurance to them that the long anticipated promise to Abraham (“In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”) was now available to all men. That blessing — forgiveness of their sins — would obviously give assurance and hope to those who believed and received the gospel. The “much assurance” of the gospel would deal with both present and future blessings. Presently, the Thessalonians would have assurance that God’s ears were open to their prayers (with His promise to grant their petitions if they asked according to His will). They would also be comforted in that He would provide their daily needs and be with them in their tribulations and cares. In addition to assurance for present blessing would be their hope of future things; of eternal life, of dwelling with God, of a place in heaven prepared for them by Christ. Such assurance would sustain them in the most trying circumstances, for however vexing such might be, they knew those trials to be temporal and they were looking at things eternal. Multifold are the blessings the gospel brought to the Thessalonians and to us!

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