

## The "GOSPEL"

Big Idea: The GOSPEL is a partnership

Characteristic: My relationship with the world

I Thessalonians 1:5-6

Good morning! My name is Patrick Gibbs and I am the Administrator here at Moon Valley Bible Church. As always, it is a privilege to fill in for Pastor Bob.

Our text this morning comes from the letter of 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. On Paul's second missionary journey, Paul, Silas and Timothy got kicked out of Thessalonica by the town leaders. Once they reached their next town, Timothy returned to Thessalonica to gauge its progress. Timothy returned to Paul with great news that the church was doing well. Almost immediately, Paul sent the Thessalonica church this letter. He begins by thanking God for them and then briefly recaps the time he spent there. In this midst of this recap, Paul talks about the gospel they have believed in. Let me ask you: What comes to your mind when I say the word "gospel?" I think most people, including myself, instinctively ask, "gospel what?" There is gospel churches, every kind of gospel music, gospel greeting cards, gospel clothing, gospel websites, the gospel according so and so or such and such. Our culture has taken the word "gospel" and turned it in to an adjective to describe anything "Christian." But the gospel is not an adjective. And when we use it as one, we minimize its value. We are going to look at just 2 verses this morning, but in these 2 verses, Paul gives us 6 insights regarding the gospel. And to help us remember these 6 insights, our ► outline this morning will also spell the word gospel.

So let's get started. Our text is 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 5 and 6.

► 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ► 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

So what does Paul actually mean by ► “our gospel?” The word “gospel” comes from two Greek words; the first meaning good and the second meaning “tidings or news or message.” That’s why sometimes Christians will refer to the “good news” when speaking of evangelism or the gospel. Paul uses “gospel”, “my gospel” or “our gospel” dozens of times in his writings. And when he does, he is using a word that his audience understood. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul defines the gospel. ► He writes,

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you . . . 3 that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Then Paul lists the various people that saw Jesus after his resurrection. The basic tenants of the gospel that Paul preached was the death and resurrection of Jesus. One author writes, “The gospel bears witness to every aspect of Christ’s saving work, from his birth and public ministry to his second coming and the last judgment. But Christ’s death and resurrection, the crucial saving events, are the gospel’s most prominent themes.” (Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology.)

That is good news. In fact, that is the ► G in our outline this morning. The good news that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. And this should be good news. It should be good news for every person in this room. If you are here this morning and you have not believed in Jesus for eternal life, the good news is he died to take your punishment for your sin. And the gospel should continue to be good news for those who already believe. That Christ died and rose again means many things for those who believe.

First, the gospel gives us a fresh start.

► Romans 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (NASB, 95)

When we believe the gospel, we get a new start in life. A start with God’s Spirit that helps us live differently.

Secondly, we have power over sin. In Romans 6 again, Paul writes,

▶ 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Part of that new start with God's Spirit means we do not have to let sin control our lives. We can choose to; but more importantly, we can choose not to.

And a third reason the gospel is good news to those who believe is it guarantees eternal life.

▶ Romans 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus promises eternal life to everyone who simply believes him for it. So, there is a reason Paul uses the word "gospel." There is a reason he calls what God did for us "good news." The gospel is more than adjective to describe all that's Christian; it is God's plan to redeem those who trust in what he did on the cross.

▶ Well, Paul continues and writes that this "gospel" did not come in ▶ "word only." What that means is that it did come in the form of words. But it wasn't only words and that will in the rest of our outline. But the truth is the gospel must be presented ▶ out loud. And even though Paul says other things about the gospel, we cannot overlook the truth that the gospel, the "good news", must be proclaimed.

Not less than 29 times (over half the times it is used), gospel is used in conjunction with speaking or preaching or proclaiming. In fact, Paul does it 3 more times in this letter alone.

▶ 1 Thessalonians 2:2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

▶ 1 Thessalonians 2:4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts.

▶ 1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

▶ The gospel is not something you simply live out. Living out the gospel is important (and we'll talk a little more about in a few minutes), but there is no text in the Bible that allows you or me to live right as a substitute for confronting people with the truth of the gospel. The gospel is not some nebulous feeling of uncertainty about life and so I think there is a God somewhere. The gospel is Jesus Christ died on a cross to pay God's required penalty for my sin and He offers me forgiveness, and His spirit and a new start and power over sin if I simply believe Him for it. People need to hear it, not just see it.

In Romans chapter 10, Paul spells out the progression of belief.

▶ 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

They don't believe if they don't hear and they don't hear unless someone speaks. Someone speaks, a person hears and believes. But somehow in an effort to not offend anyone, many Christians simply believe that if they live a good life and love people, somehow they will believe. And that's wrong. That's not how the Bible portrays the gospel.

Paul continues,

▶ 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, ▶ *but also in power*

The word Paul uses for "power" is the Greek word *dunamis*. *Dunamis* literally means "force." And when most New Testament writers use ▶ *dunamis*, they are referring to a miraculous power. It is often used to describe miracles and the power of God. It is defined as "inherent power or power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature." The gospel has ▶ supernatural power by virtue of its nature. In Romans 1:16, Paul writes,

▶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...

And it isn't a power that comes from Paul or me or you. Paul calls it God's power. It is a supernatural power inherent in the gospel by the nature of what it is: God's plan for humanity.

► The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword... (4:12)

When was the last time your friends or family or coworkers heard you quote Scripture as you shared what you believed? We learn cute little phrases like "Faith alone by grace alone in Christ alone." Or, "By his death and resurrection, Jesus promises eternal life to all who simply believe him for it." I used that one this morning all ready. And those are great and they help us remember. But these little sayings do not have power. The gospel, God's Word- that's what has the supernatural power to penetrate someone's heart. We can't manufacture God's supernatural power, it doesn't come from us and we don't usually see it coming because it isn't our power to wield; it's God's. And that makes the gospel supernatural. It isn't my sophisticated words or my memorized spiel.

In Acts, chapter 2, Peter speaks a sermon to the multitudes and verse 47 records these words, "The Lord added to the church."

What about Peter? He was there. He was the one doing all the talking. But it wasn't his preaching that brought people to belief. It was the supernatural power of his message.

One last thought before we move on. In ► 1 Corinthians 2, Paul again writes,

1 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.

I think it is the times we feel the weakest that God shows up. It is the times we feel like we don't know enough. Or the times we are the most fearful. Those are the times we should be speaking, yet those are the times we clam up the quickest. Maybe we don't see the supernatural power of God's gospel because we only speak it when we feel like we know what we are doing. The truth is, God wants to feel weak and fearful, so He can wield His supernatural power.

► So, the gospel is good news, out loud and supernatural. But the gospel is also ► personal. Let me show you how I know that. Verse 5 again,

► 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and *in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*;

First, it is personal for those who do not yet believe. The Holy Spirit serves several functions and one of them is to convict people of their sin. In John 16, Jesus says,

► 8 And He (the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin...

I hate to disappoint some of you, but our job is not to convict people of sin. When was the last time someone came up to you and said, "The Holy Spirit is convicting me of sin and I need to hear the gospel"? I am guessing never. That's a personal battle between God and that person and most people don't talk about that battle in public. Most of you have no idea what kind of personal spiritual battle is going on in the mind and heart of those you work with or hang with. And because you don't, it isn't up to you to decide who needs to hear the gospel and who doesn't. The time you share the gospel to the guy who will never believe, may just be the moment God is making a personal plea for his heart.

Our job is "out loud." The power and the personal invitation to believe comes from God Himself in the message of the gospel and His word. Our job is to obey in faith when the Holy Spirit prompts us. ► And that leads me to the second personal application of the gospel. It is the ► "full conviction" Paul writes about. Paul had no doubts. He was fully convinced that he was preaching the good news of God and that good news had power and a personal invitation from God. The gospel was personal for Paul. He knew and remembered how the gospel had changed his life. And he had seen it change the lives of those he preached to. When you see the gospel

work, it becomes very personal, very quickly. Otherwise, the gospel is that thing I heard at church. The gospel is personal for those who believe and for those that don't.

► Fifthly, the gospel will be ► embraced. Look at what Paul writes in verse 6.

► 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

► Acts 2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

► Acts 4:4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

► Acts 17:34 But some men joined him and believed

But not everyone believes. Look at the wording of these verses: "but many believed"; "But some men joined";

► In 1 Corinthians 9:22, Paul says,

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

► In Acts 17:32

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."

The gospel will be embraced, but not by everybody. And just because you spoke the gospel once and that person didn't believe doesn't mean you need another approach or it doesn't work or you need to learn more. No where do I see the apostles taking credit or blame for whether or not someone believed. They just obeyed and left the rest to God; *because they could*.

► Let me explain what I mean by that. Let's read these verses one more time.

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

What do you think Paul means by “just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”? He could leave the rest to God because he knew he had done his part: he spoke out loud and his lifestyle matched his message. His life did not contradict his message.

► Listen to what he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 10-12

7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

► The gospel is meant to be lived. Paul was a man who lived what he preached. Verse 9 of our text, Paul writes,

9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

And in verse 6 of our text:

► 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

The word ► “imitators” in verse 6 means just what it sounds like. It means, “try to be the same as” or “follow the example of” or “copy.” After reading and studying this passage, I can’t help but ask myself, what is my life a reproduction of? Or maybe, “what do my coworkers think I am a reproduction of?” “What does my family think I am a reproduction of?”

► These fairly new believers heard the good news of the gospel that came to them out loud in the supernatural power and personal invitation of God and embraced that message and lived it. That's how the gospel is supposed to work.

And that brings me to the big idea of these 2 verses: ► The GOSPEL is a partnership, not an adjective. And our characteristic of completeness this week is my relationship with the world.

Several years ago, I had the gospel all wrong. I knew it was good news for me, but I didn't really consider it good news for the heathens outside these church walls. After learning how to "evangelize" door to door in junior high, I quickly learned in high school that door to door was not that cool. So I downgraded my technique to handing out tracts or leaving them on door knobs so I wouldn't have to talk to people. And the reason I didn't want to talk to people was because I didn't feel like I had a good presentation. I wasn't convincing enough and what if they said, "Get out of my face you religious freak"? I had isolated myself pretty well from "non-Christians" so I didn't even have anyone I knew who needed the gospel. Doing cold call evangelism soon turned me into someone who didn't really believe anymore that the gospel would be embraced. The one thing I was good at was living the gospel, or so I thought. But my living the gospel was certainly not the way Paul described it.

8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

I can honestly and am embarrassed to say, I had no one in my life that I cared so much about to share my life who needed the gospel. Once I got my first real job, I was pretty knowledgeable about the Bible and I loved to debate. My first real job was at Honeywell where I was paired up with Satan himself. This guy had more open sins than I had ever witnessed in my sheltered life. But instead of the gospel route, I chose the sin route. I won every debate about sin. And I went home enjoying the fact that Mark had gotten another lesson in something he shouldn't be doing. I liked convicting people of their sin; it made me feel better about my own struggling Christianity. I knew the intellectual part of the gospel and I was able to share that with some people. But this passage taught me the heart of the gospel. And I learned the heart of a God that chooses to use

me in His plan to reach people with His good news. He asks me to speak out loud and let my life reflect His message of hope and love. He supplies the message, the power, and the personal invitation for people to believe, the conviction of their sin, and He seems to enjoy doing all that when I am at the end of what I know to do.

Because the gospel is partnership, not an adjective. I trust this year, Moon Valley Bible Church- meaning all of us the people, not the building- will do our part by speaking out loud and living right.

Will you pray with me?

