

LET THE WORD OF GOD BE HEARD!

When Paul reached back to the church in Thessalonica, doing so with his first letter; which is believed to be the earliest letter we have from Paul, it is interesting that Paul made several references to the Word of God. I don't know if you noticed that or not as you were reading 1 Thessalonians this past week, but when I call them to your attention, you may be surprised at the number of them.

- For example, in **verse 5 of chapter 1**, Paul says, *“Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”* Notice the word “gospel” in that passage. Then in verse 6, he says, *“for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”*
- Again in **2:2**, Paul equates the Word of God with the gospel of Christ, which he said he had boldly proclaimed among them. In **verses 8 and 9** he refers to the Word as *“the gospel of God.”*
- Notice especially what Paul said in **verse 13, of chapter 2**. Paul writes: *“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”*
- He calls attention to that word again, in **4:15**, when he says, *“For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”* He said a couple of verses later, “Therefore encourage (or comfort) one another with these words,” these words from the Lord.

The passage I really want you to focus on this morning, is what Paul said with reference to the Word in **verse 8 of chapter 1**. In commending this new congregation of saints, Paul says that *“the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia.”*

This morning, brethren, I want to share with you the secret of real church growth:

- I'm not talking about the kind of growth that takes place because of swarming. Sometimes that happens. Whenever a church gets a new preacher, or builds a new building, or starts some new thing, there will be people who will get excited and go there, at least for a time. When we lived in Rancho Cordova, California, we had eleven congregations in the Sacramento area and brethren were all the time moving from one congregation to another.
- I'm not talking about the kind of growth that takes place because we put the on the best show in town. This is something that is going on a lot in the world today. Churches are

competing with one another in trying to attract people by offering one thing or another. When I was in Madill (OK), someone mentioned to me that the church across the street was offering doughnuts and coffee to people before worship. I said, "No problem, we will offer better doughnuts and fruit, make a continental breakfast out of it." It wasn't long until the "battle of the doughnuts" broke out! I'm kidding of course, but it gets about that silly when churches make it their goal to offer people the best show in town.

- I'm also not talking about the kind of growth that might take place by preaching a watered-down message, where everyone is accepted just the way they are and no one is expected to change, or repent. That kind of thing really goes on in the world today. We know that the truth offends many people. They come expecting to be told how good they are for even believing in the Lord, and showing up. They don't want to hear that they might be lost, or that they need to repent of some sin.

Can I show you something? Turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 3:1,2**

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2)
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

What did John preach? He preached that people need to repent didn't he? Now folks, when you tell someone that they need to repent, what are you saying to them? You are saying to them that they are wrong in some way, aren't you? And people don't like to hear that, and people don't like to say that to others, but it is something that often needs to be said, and heard, isn't it? (see also verses 7-10)

Look also at **Matthew 4:17** and notice what Jesus began preaching and teaching. This was following Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, and he had moved to Capernaum and verse 17 says: *"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* What did Jesus tell people? He told them the same thing John did, didn't he? He told them they needed to repent!

Have you read the sermon on the mount? You know, you can't really read that and come away with the idea that becoming and being a follower of Christ is something you can do without making some serious and abrupt changes in our thinking, attitudes and actions.

Friends, repentance is something that we don't hear much about these days. I don't guess it is politically correct, but as Jesus said in Luke 13:3 and 5, unless people repent, they are going to perish. And people are not going to repent if they are led to believe that whatever they do is fine. Unless they are challenged to think about what they are doing, and how they are talking, and about their attitudes, they are going to go through life never really knowing that they've done anything wrong, or serious enough that it might cause them to lose their soul.

In Luke 24:44-47, Jesus gave his apostles the great commission, and in Luke's version of that, he tells them that "repentance" is to be preached in his name to all the nations. Over and over

again in the NT, the message of repentance is proclaimed; so don't tell me that Christ wants us to preach nothing but love and grace!

Let me tell you something folks, the truth that is not the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is really not the truth. Just because something has some truth in it does not make it safe to believe or do. There are a lot of perversions of truth out there today, and while they may capture the attention and hearts of a lot of people, in the end it is doomed to fail because the only thing that that makes men truly free, is the truth; the truth of God's word!

I believe Paul tells us a lot about church growth right here in this Thessalonian letter and it is always going to get down to the business of sowing the Word of God.

Open your Bibles to a very interesting passage—**Acts 6:7**. Would you read that for yourself for just a moment?

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

The New American Standard renders that, "*And the word of God continued to spread*"

What is that verse telling us? It is telling us that there is a direct correlation between the sowing of the Word of God and the number of disciples made. I called attention in my bulletin article for today to **Acts 5:42**: "*And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*" Again and again we see this connection.

- Back in **4:4**, Luke tells us: "*But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of men came to about five thousand.*"
- **2:41** tells us: "*So those who received his word, were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*"
- Turn over to **Acts 8:4**: "*Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*"

We need to think about it, don't we? Think about the lesson to be learned from the parable of the sower? Of course there is the sower, the seed, the four different kinds of soil; and the results. But in explaining that parable, in Luke 8:11, Jesus tells us that the seed in that parable represents the Word of God. He calls it the seed of the kingdom. Well, think about that:

- What if sower had not gone forth?
- What if he had not sown the seed?
- What if the seed had been something other than the word of God?

You see, that is our job; our assignment and mission, our purpose—to make sure the word of God gets out to as many people as possible, again and again.

In **1 Timothy 3:15**, Paul calls the church *“the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

“but if I tarry long, that you may know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Notice Paul equates the house of God with the church of the living God, and says that it is the pillar and ground of the truth.

What does that mean? That the church is the pillar and ground of the truth?

- It means that Christ has entrusted the truth of God’s Word to the church.
- We have been given a stewardship in connection with the truth, the only truth that can save men from their sins.
- It is our responsibility to handle it correctly, to preach and teach it constantly, and to defend it against all enemies.

So that is why what Paul said about the Thessalonians was extremely significant, when he said, *“for...from you has sounded forth the word of the Lord.”*

Can the Lord expect the same from us?

- Are we going to teach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about ourselves; our sinfulness, and our need to repent?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about baptism for the remission of sins, and about it being a re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about the church; what its doctrines should be, what its practices should be, what its priorities and work should be?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about what worship is, what is and what isn’t pleasing to God?

- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about how to live our lives in all holiness?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about this world and universe we live in, where it came from, how it got here, and what is going to happen to it one day?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about where we came from and why we are here?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about the second coming of Christ, the end of the world and the judgment day, when every man will stand before the throne of God to give an account for all of the things they have done in this life, whether good or bad?
- Are we going to teach people what the Word of God says about all of those things that the world wants to turn a blind eye to today?
- Are we going to let the Word of God be heard in our Bible classes, from the nursery class on up? Or are we going to pursue those things that tickle people's ears, and maybe arouses their interest but makes no real different in eternity?
- Are we going to let the Word of God be heard in our worship assemblies, from our pulpit and other opportunities we have to make know the saving message of God?
- Are we going to let the Word of God be heard when we go into the jails and when we have the opportunity to teach men and women through Bible correspondence courses?
- Are we going to let the Word of God be heard throughout the community, in aggressively pursuing every avenue we can find to seek for one more soul who is seeking the Lord?
- Are we going to let the Word of God be heard by our generous support of all kinds of mission efforts, to take the gospel to places where it is not well-known?

Finally this morning, I want to ask you to turn in your Bibles to **John 12th chapter** and look at **verses 44-50**:

And Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. 45) And he that beholdeth me beholdeth him that sent me. 46) I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me may not abide in the darkness. 47) And if any man hear my sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48) He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day. 49) For I spake

not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. 50) And I know that his commandment is life eternal: the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak.

Notice, in **verse 47**, Jesus said, he did not come—that first time—to judge the world, but to save it. But then he says in **verse 48**, the one that rejects him, and does not receive his word, has one that judges him, and it is the word of the Lord. He said, that word is going to judge men in the last day.

So folks, one day every person who has ever lived, and I want you to think about this: most of the people who have ever lived on earth, have lived in our lifetime. You may not understand that, and it might not make sense to you, but think about it and I think you will see why I said that. One day, every person who has ever lived is going to stand before God in the judgment, and do you know what they are going to be judged by? According to Jesus in this passage, what is it? It is His word; the words that he received from the father.

So, if that is what the world is going to be judged by, don't you think that we who are Christ's people have an obligation to let the Word of God be heard so they can know what His will is?

I am not opposed to our being the kind of church that people enjoy being a part of. I want us to be a church that has wonderful and exciting experiences. I want us to be a church where the worst sinner in the world will feel welcome, but I just hope and pray that we will always be a church where the Word of God governs everything we believe, we teach, we do!

Thank God for Paul and thank God for Thessalonica, and may we learn from them to always "let the Word of God be heard!"