

Sunday May 3, 2020

Messages

Acts 17:1-9, I Thess 1:1-10

To the churches of Green Bay and Thalberg in God the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to all of you and peace from God Our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ is Risen

If you are going to start a movement or in Paul's situation a church, you go where the people are. This is exactly what Paul and Silas are doing in this morning's readings. I will give you a little bit of the background about the area they come to. Thessalonica was on the Roman super highway of the day called the Egnation Way. This was how the Romans kept their empire connected and made it easier to govern. Thessalonica was the largest city on the coast of northern Greece. It was the capital of Roman Macedonia. This city was very cosmopolitan with peoples of diverse backgrounds, cultures and religions. This city has untapped potential for what Paul and Silas want to do. It is not surprising that they would start to preach there. The words of Paul's preaching would take off in Thessalonica and spread to the surrounding areas. The church in Thessalonica would be very influential. "The word of the Lord has sounded forth, from them, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." 1 Thess 1:8.

Paul founds the church in Thessalonica in the summer of 50 AD while on his second missionary journey. The first chapters of Thessalonians reflect the Greek world that Paul preached and evangelized in. There was a pattern in the Greek world when sending letters. I used it this morning in this message. The first part identifies the sender, then the addressee's and then the greeting itself. Paul follows this pattern with most of his letters but he adds a very Christian twist. Paul addresses and greets the Thessalonians in

the name of God and most importantly the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whose ministry amongst us he will share with them.

I will focus on the passage to the Thessalonians for most of this message. As with any good prayer, Paul starts the letter to the Thessalonians with giving thanks to God. The spirit of thanksgiving is constantly the prayer of Paul. Romans 1:8, "First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." To speak positively about the communities in Rome and Thessalonica is very encouraging to them and other communities. In a way it expresses how the Holy Spirit is moving in that community by how the people have taken to the preaching of Paul's message. It confirms the good work done in Rome and Thessalonica. Paul focuses very strongly on this in verses 7-10 in Thessalonians. People everywhere are speaking about them and their church. The role of a good pastor is to speak positively about what their communities are doing. This is very encouraging to the community and that is why Paul does it. They are shining examples of how the Holy Spirit is moving in these communities and building up the church.

Paul uses the word follower in verse 6. The Greek translates this word as imitator. It expresses the point that as followers of Christ, we should also imitate Him. The apostles and disciples also imitated our Lord and they are our earthly examples. The lives of the saints are full of such examples. St. Ignatius wrote of this in the second century. He says, "Let others be instructed by you, at least by your deeds. With their wrath you be mild, with their boastful speech you be humble-minded, with their abuse you offer prayers, with their deceit you be firm in faith, with their cruelty you be gentle, not eager to imitate them".

The later part of verse 6, Paul talks about the Joy of the Holy Spirit. It can be confusing because there is not much joy in it. This is not a spiritual high. It is more of the

satisfaction that you remained true to your faith in the face of difficult and trying times. The spiritual life is not easy and we need to persevere. Like the parable about the salt that lost its taste. It is useless because it cannot preserve anything. Paul is warning the Thessalonians of difficult times that will come to them for being Christian. The ones who suffer for the faith will be the ones comforted by the Joy of the Holy Spirit.

Paul certainly has his share of troubles and difficult times. The passage in Acts reflects some of the troubles he had. Spreading and sharing the gospel would have its challenges. We still have similar ones even today in our society. Yet we persist as followers and imitators of Christ. He is the one who overcome this world and destroyed death and in Him we have victory. A very high ideal to follow. So encourage one another in their journey to imitate and follow Our Lord. God's peace and Love to you all, Pastor D