

1 Thessalonians 1: 1; "Missionary Men and Church Planters", Sermon # 1 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 13th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The reason that I have had the idea to begin a study in the book of 1 Thessalonians is because I believe that the theme of this book, which is a Persevering Faith, would be a good one for our congregation to focus upon at this time in the life of our church. The Apostle Paul often mentions the faith of the Thessalonian church as something that was real. (See Chapter 1, verse 3 and verse 7, and Chapter 3, verses 2, 4, 6, and 10) But it is evident also, that he wants them to continue to grow and prosper in their faith. You and I need very much to grow in our faith and persevere in our faith so that we can bear good and lasting fruit to God's everlasting glory; so that we will have something to show for our lives at the last judgment and may receive a reward from Christ. As you read this letter, you will see that there do not seem to be many problems in the church of Thessalonica, either doctrinally or in life of their church body that required that Paul write to them and address them in that way. Instead, there is a holy boasting which Paul engages in, when in verse 8 he says, "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." "Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." Even so, Paul did write some very important things in this letter. What Paul was concerned to bring to this particular church is the encouragement to persevere in their faith. To persevere in our faith, as a Christian, is to continue on trusting and following Christ, in accordance with his Word, even though there are many trials that come to us to test our faith, and even though there is much sin and remaining corruption in our hearts to do battle with, and to overcome. The enemies of the Christian are trying to drag him down and make him useless and unfruitful but Christ's grace will bear the Christian up and bring him forward, all the way to heaven and eternal life. This is the great lesson of the book of 1 Thessalonians. But as we shall see, exhortations to faithfulness and perseverance are also very much needed in the life of the Christian to keep him from backsliding and dishonoring God. This book has many exhortations to a holy life in it. So let us be prepared to receive them as we go through this letter and as we go on in the Christian life. To start us out, I would like, today, to simply take a look at these 3 missionary men, Paul, Silas, and Timothy. I want ask first, the question, "How did these men come to be missionaries together? And then 2ndly I want to ask, "How did they come to found the church in Thessalonica? And then I will close with a few lessons from the answers to both these questions.

1st- Who are these 3 men mentioned in verse 1 and how did they come to be missionaries together?

Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are the men who are mentioned. They are the 3 men who founded the church at Thessalonica. Paul was called to be a greatly used

Apostle, especially to the Gentiles. This church was composed primarily of Gentiles. But Paul's commission was wider even, than simply a ministry to the Gentiles. His conversion and his commission to preach are found in Acts chapter 9, if you will turn with me there. In verse 15, after Paul met the risen Lord Jesus Christ, as he was on his way to Damascus, with letters from the chief priest giving him permission to bind Christians and bring them to Jerusalem for trial, he was blind for a few days. It was the greatness of the light that he had seen when he met the Lord. It was the Lord's purpose to make this man who had been such a great persecutor to feel his blindness and his helplessness to accomplish his own will and purpose, for a few days, before He commissioned him to the Christian ministry. God had, in a vision related in verse 7 and following, told a Christian named Ananias to go and find Saul (for that was his name before he was renamed Paul after his conversion), and to lay his hands on him so that he might receive his sight. Ananias objected to this based upon what he had heard about this man. But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles and Kings, and the children of Israel." This man Saul was a "chosen instrument to bear the Lord's name." This is what all those who are called to preach the gospel are called to do. They bear the Lord's name. They represent the blessed truth of God's greatness, His glory, His honor, and His truth before men. In 1 Timothy 1: 12 and following he explains his commission with great thanksgiving. "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Paul was called to be an ambassador for Christ. He was, immediately after his conversion, very active in the work of preaching and teaching the Gospel and the Word of God. In verse 20 of Chapter 9 of Acts it says, "Immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." "Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?'" "But Saul, increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ." So Paul's conversion was one that blew him out of his self-righteousness Jewish pride and persecuting contempt of Christians to become one who "confounded the Jews" by "proving that this Jesus is the Christ." This conversion of his was perhaps the most startling conversion that the Church and the world has ever seen. His commission was very wide and very great, and yet he does not exalt himself above the other 2 men mentioned in this letter, who were his co-workers, Silas and Timothy. He simply puts himself down as one of them. They are all servants of Christ and servants of the gospel. This is how it should be in all Christian work of spreading the gospel and planting churches. We are workers together for Christ and under Christ's Kingship. It was not that he did not have great authority as an Apostle. But that authority was not being questioned in the

church of Thessalonica as it was in some of the other churches, so there was no need for Paul to write the word "Apostle" after his name.

What about Silas; who was he? And how did he come to be Paul's co-worker in founding the church at Thessalonica? Well originally when the Holy Spirit called Paul to be a missionary preacher of the gospel, a man named Barnabas was also called to go with him. In this first missionary journey they preached the gospel in Cyprus, in Perga which is in Pamphylia, then they went to Antioch Pisidia, then after that they preached the gospel at Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Chapter 14, verse 21 says, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed." A little later when the controversy over whether believers need to be circumcised according to the law of Moses came up, we find our first mention of this man Silas in Acts 15: 22. He is called "Silvanus" here in 1 Thessalonians 1: 1. Silas is just a shortening of the longer Roman proper name of Silvanus. This letter on circumcision that was drawn up by the Apostles and the elders who gathered together at Jerusalem to decide the issue, was sent to all the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia by the hands of Paul and Barnabas and Barsabbas, and Silas. They were sent off, it says in verse 30 of Acts 15, and "they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered together, they delivered the letter. "When they read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement." And then Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words." "And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles." "However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there." "Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."

Now we come to the incident that brought the Apostle Paul and Silas together as co-workers in the missionary endeavor. In verse 36 of chapter 15, it says, "Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.'" "Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark." "But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work." "Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another." "And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God." Now you will notice that there was an association of brethren and churches that came together to decide various issues related to both missionary endeavor in those days. Judas and Silas were from the church at Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabas were from the church at Antioch. It was not simply every church for itself. You see also that there was a disagreement that took place between these two men Paul and Barnabas, both

godly men. Barnabas believed that even though John Mark had failed them in the past, that he could still work with them and help them now. Paul thought it was not good to take with them someone who had "deserted them" it says in the NAS. Barnabas was not commended by the brethren as Paul was in this case. Paul chose Silas, and that is how he came to be a missionary with the great Apostle.

Let's speak of Timothy now for a few moments. When Paul and Silas came to Derbe in Chapter 16 of Acts, it was here that Paul met Timothy. Timothy it says in verse 1 "was the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was a Greek." "He was well-spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium." "Paul wanted to have him go on with him." This is exactly what he did. He took Timothy and had him circumcised because his father was a Greek, and then they went through the cities delivering the decrees which the churches were to keep. And the conclusion of the matter is found in verse 5, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." This is the story of how the 3 men came together. What lessons can we learn from the history of these men? Well we see that there is an importance of a call to the mission field. The Holy Spirit had said, "Set apart Barnabas and Saul" That was a personal call. But that call was verified by the church at Antioch. It was not simply these men putting themselves forward. It was the church who "sent them away" to the work. Paul especially had wide ranging call to this work, not only to bear God's name before the Gentiles, but also to Kings and to the children of Israel.

Men may differ in what they are called to in relation to missions and the ministry. And men who are godly may disagree about what should be done in missions and ministry related to missions. What a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, and only one man was commended by the brethren; yet both did well in relation to what they were called to do. Paul did not want to take John Mark with them to the work who had previously deserted them. But Barnabas working patiently and faithfully with John Mark did succeed in bringing him to a place of great usefulness in relation to Christ's cause and missionary endeavor specifically. For we read at the end of the book of 1 Peter these words: "By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand." "She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son." Many commentators believe that this was John Mark, Barnabas's sister's son, the one that Barnabas nurtured to maturity in the faith. It is not always true that if a man has failed in moral courage at one point that he will always disappoint other believers around him ever after. And if we turn over to 2 Timothy 4 where Paul is appealing to Timothy to bring help to him; that Demas had forsaken him for the world, and had departed for Thessalonica, Crescens had gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia; that only Luke was with him. He then asks Timothy to "get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. So God did and does work all things together for good in the life of His people who are called according to His purpose.

Now 2ndly - How did these men found the church at Thessalonica?

Well, we must turn back to the book of Acts again; this time, Chapter 16, verse 6. After Timothy joined Paul and Silas at Derbe, the three of them went through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, preaching the Word of the Lord. But after that they were forbidden to preach the Word in Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them to enter there to preach. So they by-passed Mysia and came down to Troas. And here Paul had his Macedonian vision, a man stood and pleaded to Paul in a vision, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." They sailed from Troas to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which was the foremost city of that part of Macedonia. Perhaps you remember the story. On the Sabbath day, they went out of the city to the riverside and they spoke to some women there. The Lord opened a business woman's heart, a lady named Lydia, to respond to the gospel. She urged them to stay at her house and so they did. But when they went to prayer there was that slave girl with a spirit of divination who bothered Paul and the others for some days by proclaiming who they were and what they were there for. So Paul finally cast out the demon out of this woman, but her masters brought charges against him and he and Silas were beaten and thrown in prison. In the middle of the night God sent an earthquake which so shook up the jailor that he asked Paul and Silas to tell him how he might be saved. They preached to him and he and all his household believed and were baptized. After this the magistrates of the city asked them to depart from the city. After they went back to Lydia's house and saw the brethren they departed and went through Amphipolis and Appollonia, and then came to Thessalonica. It says in chapter 17, verse 2, "Then Paul, as his custom was, went into the synagogue, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." "And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas." "But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people." "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." "Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus."

This, my beloved brethren, is how the church at Thessalonica came into being. It was God's purpose to have a church raised up there. It came into being amidst great opposition. Only 3 men planted it, and yet those who opposed them said that they turned the world upside down. God's power is exceedingly great. What can we learn from these men? We learn to persevere in the work of the ministry and the work of spreading the gospel. We learn that God orchestrates the direction that the gospel will go in its advances and that it takes faithful men to

preach in such a way that churches can be planted. Let us pray for our church that we would be found faithful and be able to reach out to others in this community and other places as well with the gospel of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.