

**Introduction:** One of our foundational practices since the start of this church in 1998 is the importance of expository preaching. Expository preaching is basically the attempt to study the context of Scripture, usually verse by verse through a portion or through a book and seek to explain it and then apply it to our lives. In the life of our church we have done this through the book of Philippians, 1 John, 1 Peter, and for about 3 years the Gospel of Luke.

- One of the main reasons we do this is because of our view of Scripture. All Scripture is God-breathed and inspired by God. Also, the books of the Bible were written in their complete portions. While topical studies are often helpful, it seems that one of the best ways to study Scripture is to read and consider the separate units in which they were originally given.
- We have, over the past several months since finishing Luke, taken a break from this and been doing smaller expositions (through some Psalms) as well as some more topical studies on our relationship to God. This week we return to our practice of studying through a complete book of the Bible. Over these past several months I have been prayerfully considering what book to study. What makes this difficult is that I haven't had any direct revelation, and mostly rely on a subjective desire.
- While I have considered doing the book of Acts as a follow up to Luke (Pt.2), I decided on covering a shorter book. Also, after preaching through narrative portions for 3 years, I decided to go back to an epistle or letter.
- I have decided that we will study together the book of 1 Thessalonians. I don't have any particular arguments or reasons for doing so, but felt that the intimate and warm-hearted nature of it, as well as its simplicity would be something beneficial to us as a church at this time.
- This week we will consider an introduction to the book to help us understand something of the particular context into which it was written, including something of the city the believers lived in, how the church was birthed there, and an overview of the letter.

## I. THE CITY OF THESSALONICA

- **[Slide – Mediterranean Basin]** Located in Mediterranean basin, above Greece in Macedonia – **[Slide - Mediterranean Basin w/outline]**
- **[Slide – Macedonia and Thessalonica]** The capital and most populated city of Macedonia - c.200,000
- City was founded by king Cassander of Macedon near the sight of the ancient town of Therma, combining that city and about 25 others. He named it after his wife, who was also ½ sister of Alexander the Great.
- Governing board of magistrates called the politarch
- **[Slide – Via Egnatia]** Stood on the *Via Egnatia*, the well maintained and highly traveled Roman road connecting the West to the East
- **[Slide - Marketplace]** A strategic cultural and economic center for the Gospel to be established and spread.
- **[Slide – Mount Olympus]** Stood within sight (100km or 62mi) of Mount Olympus the Greek Pantheon of the gods
  - o Mount Olympus is the home of the Olympians, the principal gods in the Greek pantheon. The Greeks thought of it as built with crystal mansions wherein the gods, such as Zeus, dwelt. **[Slide – Pantheon]**
- **[Slide – Agora in Modern Thessalonika]**

## II. THE BIRTH OF THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH - Acts 17:1ff

- v.1 - **[Slide – 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey]** Paul visits on 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey with Silas and Timothy from Philippi
- vv.2-3 - **[Slide – Ancient Synagogue]** A sizeable Jewish population, indicated by the presence of a synagogue. **[Slide – Paul in the Synagogue]** As was his custom, Paul begins with the Jews who already accepted the OC worldview. He seeks to reason from the Scriptures (which they already accepted), explaining and demonstrated that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of the promises for a Messiah. Particularly focusing on the need for His suffering and resurrection.
- vv.4 – particular interest among the devout Greeks (Gk. barbaros = foreigner, non-Jew) and leading women (wives of prominent citizens). We can only imagine what a stir this would cause. It was one thing for such people to be a part of a legitimized (though sometimes despised) religion, but who were these men? Passers through, with no visible gods, no official meetings places, not ancient traditions but a recently crucified leader.
- v.5 - Jews who didn't accept the message began to persecute [probably out of jealousy and concern for the loss of congregants]. They shrewdly decide not to make this a religious debate, but to make it political.
- The initial impression of reading the passage is that they were only there for three weeks, but it is likely this is only a reference to their time in the synagogue before being ousted, and they had an extended time in Thessalonica.
- v.6 – The Jews stir up some of the evil men in the marketplace (perhaps paying them for their services), and stir up a mob. The tension of political problems, particularly related to the Jews (and seen in recent a mass expulsion from Rome) helps us to understand just how volatile the situation was.
- Apparently a man named Jason (a Hellenized name for Joshua or Jesus) had become the host of Paul and his companions, and possibly the host of the newly formed church. They don't find Paul there, but drag out Jason and some believers out and present them before the politarchs. This is the only time this word is used in Greek literature, and for many years was considered by unbelieving scholars to be an example of a mistake of Luke. Since that time there have been numerous examples of inscriptions, and several from Thessalonica, of the use of the term, demonstrating Luke's accuracy as a historian.
- This is an official complaint, and the specific charge is political. We sometimes use the term "turned the world upside down" in a certain way to talk about the amazing changes that Christianity can have, but in this context it was the claim of

a political threat to the peace of the Roman Empire. It is to say that they are stirring up unrest all over, and now they have come to our city and threatening our peace.

- Not only this, but there is a charge of treason against Caesars decrees. Specifically, a claim that this Jesus is another King. I could not overemphasize the importance of understanding this charge in this particular context.
- If they were convicted of this, the penalty would likely be death.
- v.8 – the response to this report was that it “troubled” the people of the city and these rulers. They had accomplished their purpose. This wasn’t some kind of other worldly debate about the gods, but a real political problem.
- v.9 – Security is taken from Jason and the others (a kind of bond) in which they promise not to harbor these teachers any more, and they are let go. They have not been able to prove that these particular people have done wrong. They are also citizens of the city, and want to preserve them and get rid of the teachers.
- 17:10ff – what follows is the sending away of Paul to Berea...but the Jews from Thessalonica aren’t content and follow him to that city to stir up trouble. There is initial success there, including the more noble-minded Jews. Again Paul is sent away, this time much further South to Athens.
- From what we learn in 1 Thessalonians, it appears that Timothy returns to Thessalonica to check on the church, and then brings a report to Paul.

### III. AN OVERVIEW OF 1 THESSALONIANS

#### A. The Occasion for Paul’s Writing [*Slide - advance*]

- Timothy has returned from being sent to them from Athens, Paul now being in Corinth; he gives a report as to how they are doing as a young church – c. A.D. 51
- This is likely one of the earliest of Paul’s letters to the churches, only 20 years from the resurrection of Christ

#### B. Major Themes [*Slide - advance*]

##### 1. The Testimony of Salvation

- Very encouraging words as to the power of the Gospel in their lives and its testimony in the world
- They (by this time) were largely converts from paganism, and had turned to the living God

##### 2. The Marks of True Ministry

- A deeply pastoral letter with personal references and intimate in tone

##### 3. The Pursuit of a Sanctified Life

- They lived in a thoroughly pagan culture, exposed to many different ways of life
- They needed particular encouragement to live a sexually pure life as well as to work hard

##### 4. The Centrality of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus

- References at the end of every chapter and one of the clearest explanations in the NT

#### C. Basic Outline [*Slide - advance*]

- chs.1-3 “Personal Reflections” and chs. 4-5 “Practical Directions”

##### 1. Thanksgiving (to God for Their Salvation) - 1:1–10

##### 2. Defense (of His Ministry) - 2:1–12

##### 3. Prayer (for the Church) - 2:13–3:13

##### 4. Exhortation (for Sanctification) - 4:1–12

- particularly related to sexual purity and diligent labor

##### 5. Instruction (on the Day of the Lord) - 5:1–11

##### 6. Conclusion (in Exhortation) - 5:12–28

- particularly relationship to church leaders and within the church