

Series: Acts

Lesson #77

Title: Pressed in the Spirit

Scripture: Acts 18: 1-11

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Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

In Thessalonica, in his sovereign power the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit called out some Jews and many Gentiles. But persecution arose in the city by the unbelieving Jews, who incited the lewd and baser citizens, so that Paul and Silas were sent away by night unto Berea. Then they came to Berea and persecuted Paul to Athens.

Acts 17: 14: And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. 15: And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

When Timothy and Silas came, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica:

I Thessalonians 3: 1: Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2: And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:...5: For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

So after he sent Timothy to minister to them, he sent Silas to know the status in Thessalonica. He was left alone at Athens. Then he made his way to Corinth. It has been a long time since Paul was in Thessalonica and he has no word on the situation there.

I. PAUL'S DISCOURAGEMENT

At Corinth Paul is down cast. He had experienced much contention and persecution—he had been stoned and left for dead, he was beaten at Philippi, ran out of town at Thessalonica, and Berea. He had witnessed so much vanity in Athens—idolatry, the philosophy, the wisdom of the Greeks. Now he is at Corinth—a business center, full of materialism, a city full of harlots and idolatry—a city set on money and pleasure and vain religion. Paul is torn between working every day making tents and trying to preach the gospel every week in the synagogue. Paul is without his companions Timothy and Silas.

From my own experience and yours in situations like this we begin to reflect. At times I find myself thinking of my manner of preaching, what I have said or could have said, how it is received or how there may seem to be no apparent response. Paul may have began to think on his mistreatment and how he was having to labor so much while others seems to be enjoying themselves.

Now let me speak directly to myself and you see if you can glean something from it. The moment I begin to look to the runners in the race, toward the clouds in the sky, or toward my own feet, I have ceased to press toward the mark set before me. Sin besets me, and all these weights cumber me about and those things make it impossible to run the race.

Hebrews 12: 1: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy

that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3: For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 4: Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5: And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

II. PAUL'S STRENGTH.

The Lord does something for Paul.

Acts 18: 5:...Silas and Timotheus [came] from Macedonia,

When they gave the report to Paul verse 5 says:

Acts 18: 5:...Paul was pressed in the spirit,

We do not have to wonder what that means. Paul tells us exactly.

I Thessalonians 3: 6: But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also *to see* you: 7: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: 8: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. 9: For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

The Lord used his work in these saints to turn Paul's eyes away from himself God-ward. As we read this first epistle to the Thessalonians we learn exactly what the Lord did in Paul to renew his inward man. The Lord used the brethren at Thessalonica to turn Paul away from Paul, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote the letter to the Thessalonians after receiving this news. So in it, we hear what Paul realized and what pressed him in the spirit while he was at Corinth—God works effectually in his elect in spite of all opposition.

I Thessalonians 1: 1: Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2: We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 3: Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; 4: Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

This is what Paul was thankful for: knowing your election of God. We have the greatest of assurance that Jesus shall save is people from their sins, that all God's elect shall be brought to repentance, and that God will provide all things for us in this world. Do you know what that assurance is? God chose a people in Christ and predestinated them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1: 4: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6: To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

In eternity, the eternal God, put his people in the eternal Son, in an eternal covenant between the eternal three in One, wherein the eternal God made his people eternally accepted in the Son of his love. This is exactly why the Spirit of God says we can be sure that all things are working together for the good of God's saints--it is according God's eternal purpose.

Romans 8: 29: For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren 30: Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. 31: What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? 32: He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33: Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. 34: Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

At Thessalonica, their work of faith in believing the gospel, rejoicing in it and giving themselves to further it; their labor of love towards Paul and the other brethren in assembling and exhorted one another; and their patience of hope as they persevered waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, was all the result and evidence that they were indeed the elect of God. Paul said, KNOWING your election of God.

The mark of God's elect is not manifest in those who merely know the doctrine of election, but by God effectual working within those he has chosen to save.

1. Those in whom the power of God works know that sinners are saved by God alone.

I Thessalonians 1: 5: For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

2. Those born of the Spirit of God in power are made willing to part with their prior company and follow those who will teach them the truth of Christ. The reason they do so is because they have forsaken all else to follow the Lord.

I Thessalonians 1: 6: And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord,

3. Though there is affliction, the elect of God joy in Christ alone.

I Thessalonians 1: 6: And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

The gospel brings affliction because it goes against our own flesh. It is contrary to the gospel this world loves. Because the gospel declares:

There is none good but one, that is, God.

None righteous, no, not one.

None that understandeth

None that seeketh after God

Not only is there none good, but there is none that "doeth good", no not one.

The law of Moses is: this do and live. The gospel is: I will and they shall. The carnal man loves to try to do and live. The gospel declares what Christ has done, is doing and shall yet do. This is the gospel by which

the Lord of heaven and earth effectually accomplishes obedience in the believer at conversion and throughout the life of faith.

The power of Christ is so effectual that he sanctifies us from all that would bring us harm. But this always involves affliction. The Lord Jesus Christ said emphatically that his Power works peace in his saints. But because his gospel does nothing in those whom he has not called, the gospel draws the line and severs even the closet family ties.

Matthew 10: 34: Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35: For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36: And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household.

But if the gospel did not separate us from even our most cherished ties, how we would ever be separated from the sin we so dearly love by nature? We would perish with the world.

4. Yet, in the Thessalonians we see an example that the power of God is able to save. The gospel came to the Thessalonians contrary to what they had been taught all their lives in the synagogue and in their idolatry—YET THEY RECEIVED IT WITH JOY—because it was given OF THE HOLY GHOST. They are examples of the power of God working in sinners. Nothing can stop God in power from making the sinner renounce his former self and turn to Christ alone—nothing.

I Thessalonians 1: 7: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8: For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. 9: For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; 10: And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come....

Paul comes back to this again in the next chapter:

I Thessalonians 2: 13: For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. 14: For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews: 15: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: 16: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Oh, we have to go to bed so early the night before so we can get up so early just to get there! Oh, it's so hard to sit there in those uncomfortable chairs! Oh, it's so hard to come home in the middle of the week after working such a long day and drive all the way to service! Oh, there's a church close to where I live! A little unkind word, a little opposition, a little disagreement and excuses prevail.

The Thessalonians had members of their families killed for trusting Christ! They were beaten, reviled, had their names ran through the mud! They were told they were forbidden to say a word about Christ Jesus or die!

Yet, the Thessalonians trusted God, preached, assembled, gave all time and resources to further the name of Christ and provide for his people, in spite of all persecution. This fact stands to illustrate for us in no uncertain terms that nothing can stop the power of God from effectually bringing his saints to joy in him and forsake all else. Pretenders can make all the excuses they want to make. But God saves in sovereign grace.

This is what pressed Paul in the spirit. The Lord used his work in these saints at Thessalonica to remind Paul that Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God. It caused Paul to remember how he and Timothy and Silas first came into Thessalonica and preached Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2: 1: For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: 2: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. 3: For our exhortation *was* not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: 4: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

As Paul was so dejected at Corinth, as he wrote this had had to be writing to himself as much as to them, when he said:

I Thessalonians 3: 3: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4: For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. 5: For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

Through the news of these Thessalonian brethren, through the writing of this epistle, the Lord renewed Paul in spirit and what did Paul do?

III. THE EFFECTUAL RESULT OF GOD'S POWER

1. God's power makes his witnesses proclaim, Jesus Christ.

Acts 18: 5: And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews, Jesus Christ.

2. God's power strengthens his witness to ignore the faces of men and obey the Lord.

Acts 18: 6: And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook *his* raiment, and said unto them, Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

This is exactly what the Lord Jesus told his disciples to do. Don't get discouraged when men will not hear you. Shake off the dust of your feet and move on.

3. Through God's power he saves sinners and gives us fresh reasons for rejoicing in Christ the Power and Wisdom of God.

Acts 18: 7: And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus, *one* that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8: And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

HERE IS WHAT PAUL LEARNED.

Acts 18: 9: Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

The Master told his disciples that if they called him Beelzebub, they will call them of his household the same. But listen to his words:

Matthew 10: 26: Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27: What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the housetops. 28: And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29: Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30: But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31: Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Now, here is our Wisdom, our Power and our Assurance: **Acts 18: 10:**

1) For I am with thee,--

Who was the only one who could arrest Paul on the road to Damascus?

Who was the only one who could send him forth with the gospel of salvation?

Who was the only one who could renew him when he was cast down?

Who was the only one who could affect obedience in Paul so that he knew what to say and what to do?

THE I AM! I AM IS WITH THEE.

2) and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee (v10)

Who is the only one who conquered your sin and put it away?

Who is the only one who conquered Satan and all your enemies, including your obstinate rebellion?

Who is the only one who fulfilled the law for you?

Who is the only one who gave you the victory over death?

I AM! I AM IS WITH THEE!

3) for I have much people in this city.

What is the reason he has left you in this city?

What is the reason he gives you this great assurance?

What is the reason he renews you in spirit and in truth?

I AM HAS PEOPLE IN THIS CITY!

QUESTION: Now what will you do? Seeing that this one who has done all so that his elect are more than conquerors in him, seeing that the one purpose for his children being in this city is because he has much people here. Will you live for the world, for your pleasure? Will you heap treasures up for yourselves? Will you laze around watching tv like you did yesterday, the day before and every day since you can remember? Will you wallow in self-pity? Will go on making lame excuses to cover your sin?

IF I AM IS WITH THEE THIS IS WHAT YOU SHALL DO

Acts 18: 11: And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Read 1 Corinthians 1 & 2 to see how Paul preached to those at Corinth and why)

I Corinthians 2: 1: And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2: For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3: And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4: And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

As Paul was made to know the weakness of his own flesh did it cause Paul to speak less of Christ Jesus? No, it caused him to speak more AND ONLY of Christ Jesus. May he do the same for us here...Amen!