

THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1-9
Acts 24
I Thess. 1:8

INTRODUCTION:

There are several things that we would like to consider about this church, at Thessalonica. First, synagogue services. Second, shameful situation. Third, significant sound. Fourth, secret of second coming.

By way of introducing this message, this is one of the few cities to retain its importance. During the World War it came into new prominence. It was situated at the head of the Aegean Sea - on a sloping hill. And it was the terminal of the railroad through the Balkans. And the Allies rightly estimated its superiority to any other base. If they were to send forces to Macedonia.

The original name of the place was Therma, derived from warm mineral springs. Like the hot springs at Arkansas - or other places throughout the world where hot springs are bubbling out of the earth.

315 years before Christ - just after Alexander the Great died, Cassander, one of his generals married Thessalonica. And made that hot springs a great city and named it after his wife, Thessalonica. She was the daughter of King Phillip of Macedon, and the sister of Alexander the Great. It became a very populated and important city. Though only 32 years of age, Hercules, the cup which Alexander the Great drank from brought death. He had established a world empire larger than that of Caesar, or Napoleon, or the Kaiser. And that empire was divided among his three generals. And one of these Cassandra married Alexander's sister, Thessalonica. So he named this to honor his wife. And the city became perhaps 200,000 people in population.

In A. D. 42 just after the great battle of Philippi between Caesar and Mark Anthony on the one side - and Brutus and Cassius on the other side. Thessalonica was made a free city. It is reported that just a few years ago it was still a city of about 100,000 people. The city was captured by Saracens or Mohammedans in A. D. 934. And held until the Crusaders recaptured it in A. D. 1185. The Crusaders held it until 1430 - not far from the time that Columbus discovered America. When the Turks captured it and have held it ever since.

✓ I. SYNAGOGUE SERVICES

Acts 17:1 - We want to see how Christianity reached Thessalonica. The first nine verses give the historical account of the establishment of the church in this city.

Rome conquered Macedonia, 116 B. C., and divided the country into four districts. With Thessalonica the capitol of one. In 42 B. C. Augustus made it a free city, governed by men of it's own selection.

As we come now to consider the activities surrounding the planting of Christianity and how it reached this city, we turn to the Book of Acts, Chapter 17.

V. 1 I think it is very appropriate, V. 1 - that we begin this historical account with the establishment of the church at Thessalonica by Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

They came to the city and then to the synagogue of the Jews. They always

liked to begin their preaching at a synagogue because they felt that they ought to first lead the Jews to Christ.

They came second, because they were grouped around the synagogue. There was always a large class of Gentiles who had been proselyted and there were quite a number here.

The Gospel was brought on the second missionary journey. Leaving Luke in Philippi - and he was accompanied by Silas. You remember it was his practice to plant churches in large cities. The centers of population and influence. To radiate from them through the surrounding country.

His custom, he went to the synagogue. This was an infallible rule. To the Jew first.

Jesus was sent to the lost sheep - to the house of Israel. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. He gave the Jews the first chance.

Of course, there were additional reasons for going to the synagogue. Leaving paganism and going to Judaism. Many people were sick of heathenism and the Gospel seed found fruitful soil. The missionaries would do well not to devote much time to the superstitious - but to seek to win the unbelievers who were dissatisfied with their old religions and were seeking for the truth.

Acts. 20:4 - For three weeks at least, Paul preached in the synagogue. I repeat, he began preaching here because he felt that he first ought to lead the Jew to Christ. And the Gospel was received more readily by these Jewish proselytes.

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Also the synagogue gave them a house in which to preach, as well as a congregation, until the lines were sharply drawn. And so for three Sabbath days, he reasoned here with them.

V. 3 - Now there were many gentle women who accepted the Gospel at Berea - prominent ladies believed the Gospel. And there are many women in our church who have given their love and loyalty to the church. We find that through the years, they have always been recognized as devoted to the church.

A Mrs. Herdon, for example, in Fredericksburg, Va. recognize the Baptists as the New Testament people. Her husband bitterly opposed her baptism. She agreed to be immersed in a large tub provided in the home. While it was being administered, he paced the floor upstairs. Shortly afterwards, he visited the Baptist ministers and found them. He said they were ignorant uncultured men. From the New Testament, they reasoned with him about the Kingdom of God and they convinced him. When he returned home, he explained to his wife, "they've got me." The conversion of that one woman, was the first of those large and honorable families who are today a source of pride to Baptist families in Virginia. Herdons, Fifes, Willises, etc.

In Richmond, Virginia, there is a highly respected man and his wife - Mr. & Mrs. Archibald Thomas, both members of the established church. She became convinced that she wanted to join the New Testament Church. Despite her husband's opposition, she united with the Baptist Church. He declared that he would not see her baptized. She stuck to her conviction. And when the carriage drove to the front of the gate for the lady, she left the house alone. Entered the carriage, and was surprised to find her husband. Why, I did not think you were going, she remarked. Well, I know if you are determined to be immersed, I will go along and see it. And see that it is well done.

She was baptized by Dr. John Kurr in the James River, while her husband looked on. The spirit of God touched his heart. And the ordinance of baptism preached its message. Just as Dr. Kurr lifted his hand to pronounce the benediction, Thomas interrupted him. Kurr, is it possible to make a profession of faith and be baptized forth-with. It is not only permissible but Scriptural. So the husband, whose heart had been softened, was buried with Christ in baptism and returned home in wet clothes. Thus, because of a gentle woman.

V. 3 - We see what Paul talked about. How Christ suffered. He showed that the Old Testament book showed that the Messiah must die as prophesied in the 53rd Chapter of Isaiah. It was a hard thing to convince a Jew, that when the Messiah came, he must die. When Paul had put this proposition before them - he said this Jesus whom I proclaim unto you, is the Messiah. And the logic of Paul saying, I will come to your house. I will come to your day of worship. I will take your own book and let that be my textbook. And prove from these Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah set forth was to die and rise again on the third day. Then I will prove to you that Jesus was of Nazareth - of whom I preach. And he is that Messiah.

V. 4 - That lasted 3 Sabbath days.

The results were that these women had been persuaded, not a few of them, as he had reached Lydia in the prayer meeting back at Philippi - where they did not have a synagogue. And here they listened to it.

In V. 5 - The Jews moved with jealousy. And certain vile fellows of the rabble - the riff raff, or the tough folk - the kind of crowd to raise a mob against these preachers. And the success of Paul aroused this jealousy.

And they incited the rascals and idle fellows to mob violence. There were many lude men of the base sort - loafing in the streets of the city. They readily joined in the cry against the missionaries. And they filled the whole city with an uproar.

Now I have known similar things to be done. And gather in a crowd - they set the whole city in an uproar. They assaulted the house of Jason. And they sought to bring some of these people forth. When they found them not, they dragged Jason and certain of the brethren before the rulers of the city.

V. 6 - These have turned the world up-side-down.

V. 7 - They were guilty of treason against Caesar. They set up Jesus as a King. This was the same charge brought against Jesus - treason and sedition.

V. 8 - They troubled the multitude and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things - they could not easily push them aside.

V. 9 - They took security. That is, every man had to put up a bond. Now this custom goes a long way back into history. Men had to put up a bond that they would show up in the court.

Now Jason's house, a Jew, gave hospitality to the converts. When they failed to find the missionaries, the rascals dragged Jason. The malice of the Jews. You remember that Pilate was willing to release Jesus. But the cruel Jews were unrelenting. Charges like these against the Christians sedition - they had raised a turmoil through the empire. They set Caesar's authority aside. And they are getting ready to put another emperor in and they call him Jesus. And Jason was put under bond. And Paul and Silas were

sent forth 45 miles to Berea. Then Paul went on to Athens and Corinth. From which place he wrote two letters back.

II. SHAMEFUL SITUATION

If I Thess 3:10

Now this truly was a sad situation. The church had been born in a revival. Paul had been successful in preaching. The Word of the Lord ran and was glorified. Men received the word of the Lord - not as of men, but as the truth of God. And they were laboring day and night - preaching the Gospel. And they were working hard to get the church under way. I think the same principle is told in foreign mission work today. To make it necessary to endure hardships.

And this church had secured the oversight of pastors - I Thess. 5:12-13 - but we beseech you brethren to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them exceedingly high in love for their own work sake. In other words, he was giving them a word to the Pastors, the elders, in the New Testament. The church enjoyed these leaders. And they were appointed by the Holy Spirit and they were serving for God. And there were laymen who worked.

Within the church, there was a trinity of graces. He says, I remember without ceasing your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope. We'll come back to this a little later on.

The fellowship in the church was marred by certain spiritual idlers. And even in the book of Thess. it talks about those who were busy-bodies. This is a person who has no employment. They can find ample opportunity to run other-people's business. Gossiping is a trade of those who has no trade.

There is a poem that goes -

Have you ever heard of gossip town
On the shores of falsehood bay
Where old dame rumor with rustling gown
Is going the live long day.

It isn't far to gossip town
For people who want to go
The idleness train will take you down
In just an hour or so.

The thoughtless road is a popular route
And most folks start that way
But it is steep down grade if you don't watch out
You land in falsehood bay.

You glide through the valley of vicious town
And into the tunnel of hate
Then cross the "add-to" bridge you walk
Right into the city gate.

The principle street is called they say, and
I've heard, is the public well
And the breezes that blow from falsehood bay
Are laden with, "don't you tell".

In the midst of the town is tell-tale park
You're never quite safe while there

For it's owner is madam suspicious remark
Who lives on the street "don't care".

Just back of the park is slander road
T'was there that good name died
Pierced by a dart from jealousies bow
Is the hands of envious pride.

From gossip town, peace long since fled
But envy, strife, and woe
And sorrow and care you'll find instead
If ever you chance to go.

Paul says we command and exhort in Jesus Christ. That with quietness they work and eat their own bread. This is the Gospel of honest toil. Idleness was the cause for non-fellowship. And church charity is not for lazy members. Paul says, if he will not work - neither let him eat. Jesus Christ dignified labor. He was the son of a carpenter, earned his own living, helped support his mother and his younger brothers and sisters. And Paul, the follower of our Lord, also advocated that a man must work. Even the son of a millionaire, if his allowance was discontinued, because he married the maid in a dairy - in an interview said, I have always wanted to earn my own living. The time has arrived when I am obliged to do so. It makes one utilize what brains he possesses. The one great draw back to wealth, I believe, that it is apt to make one neglect his own ability.

Paul says the man who hangs around in rags and begs is not entitled to respect. He ought not to be allowed to eat. It was not on account that he, himself, worked day and night to support himself. He wanted to uphold the dignity, honesty, and the honor of good hard work. And we ought not to have any respect for a religion that makes idlers now.

III. SIGNIFICANT SOUND

Now I. Thess. 1:8. We are considering now the activity of this church. Paul says from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord. And it constitutes a revelation, in that particular church. And this is a great picture. A mission church. He describes them that in their service, and in their relation to him.

V. 3 - He thanks God for three things, that have sounded forth. One, the work of faith, Two, their labor of love, Three, their patient hope. In that they had turned unto God from idols and serving the true God.

In their work of faith, they thereby became Christian men. When men ask our Lord upon one occasion, what must we do that we may work the works of God. The answer was, this is the work of God - that you believe on him whom he hath sent. It is a work of faith. Ye turned unto God from idols.

V. 9 - It was a labor of love - they had over come. Which was necessary to follow - to serve a living and a true God.

V. 10 - The patience of hope was explained by the final word - to wait for his son from Heaven. Now in my closing point, I'll touch more upon this part.

V. 8 - From you, that is from the people of faith. Those who had turned to God from idols. And served the true and living God - you are waiting for the Son from Heaven - for you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord. That is inevitable. That is the pattern. Sounded forth as a clear trumpet note. Sounded forth - is it not that it went everywhere. It became an instrument - not just as echo. But from them, the word of the Lord, reverberated. It went through the valleys and over the mountains. It was like Moody preaching in New Castle, England. It was felt from the southern coast up to the Northern coast. The word of God reverberated.

Dr. Charles Finley says that the expression, the word of the Lord, is the designation of God's revealed will, in the history of the Old Testament.

Now this is an argument for the Lordship of Christ. The supreme word of the resurrection of Christ. The word of the Lord is an argument that proves him Lord. And these disciples, who were born with this hope were instruments as the fellowship of men and women that turned to serve and to wait, in hope, love, and patience.

V. 1 - Paul writes unto the church about grace and peace. And he talks about love which is a strong bond. And Christ was the instrument of that love. And the word was made flesh. And pitched his tent on the same campus with us. Pitched his tent among us. By the side of man - as man. Being the body, the church, the word of the Lord will reverberate in the thunders of music over all nations.

This is inclusive and the complete work of the church. To proclaim the word of the Lord.

Mr. Gladstone once said, the severest problem threatening anyone was the loss of it's sense of sin. I think every preacher knows that to be true. And perhaps it is because we have not put sufficient emphasis on preaching Jesus as Lord. We have assumed his Lordship. But we have not preached his Lordship. I believe there are thousands of young people in our land today who will never tremble when you preach the Ten Commandments. I do not think you will find men or women of intelligence - if you can but bring them into the actual presence of the Lord Christ. But that they will say, if that be the meaning of life, then O God, how have I failed. When I measure my life by his life and listen to the words that pass from his lips, and see the central inspiration of his life, I only can but say that I am unclean. The proclamation of his Lordship is needed in Chesapeake. Men think they know it - but we are afraid to preach it in simplicity. We imagine that men know about it. But the word of the Lord is not only to be proclaimed as a theory, it will never reverberate - it must be vindicated in the church. The church must witness to the truth of the Gospel. The church preaches.

This is the power of the church, for work, the Christian Church. And this is the power that the spirit bestows. The one power working through the church. The church becomes the medium. But not only the medium, but in her very life, is the operative power. She is the resident within.

How shall we know whether we have that power or not. The church is constituted by the spirit. And by the fullness of the spirit and life, that man comes into the church. The church is governed by Christ. The church is living in that spirit. And it matters not about mathematics in Heaven. For one shall chase a thousand. And two shall put 10,000 to flight. But you take a little company of men and women who have seen the living Lord, and exercise

faith in him, and receive that spirit and live in the inspiration of that life obeying it's impulses. Now there is God's instrument. And from that church - it will sound forth the word of God. The power itself is that of the spiritual life of the church. How does this power of the spirit operate for the sounding forth of the word of the Lord. In obedience, in service, perfect confidence, in patience, and in hope.

✓ The great hindrances to the churches progress has been her ceaseless attempts to devise some new methods for doing God's work.

One of the greatest things we hear today is - we are always trying by our own wit and wisdom to find some new method.

Let us be done with it. What shall we do. Yield ourselves to the inspiration and the interpretation of the spirit of God. To the energies of the Spirit and let God have his way. Now that is where we fail. The spirit will give us light. It will indicate what God's will is. And will help that degraded man or woman who we see on the highway. It is not by finding new methods of helping God. If we will only let the spirit have his way with us. If we will walk where he indicates, do what he says, we shall be on the highway of God's great enterprises.

We need to get somewhere away from human eyes and get under the eyes of the Lord. An eye of this church - have I been born anew from the above. Do I know the life of God for my own soul. By the touch of the Holy Spirit. Now you may be on the border. But you may not be in. You may say that I have had clean water sprinkled over my brow. Or I have been plunged beneath some water. I have had hands placed on my head. I have had my name passed by some solemn church meeting. But I am still not of the church. I am not

faith in him, and receive that spirit and live in the inspiration of that life obeying it's impulses. Now there is God's instrument. And from that church - it will sound forth the word of God. The power itself is that of the spiritual life of the church. How does this power of the spirit operate for the sounding forth of the word of the Lord. In obedience, in service, perfect confidence, in patience, and in hope.

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of Christ.

Am I under the Lordship of Christ?

I must ask you this question - a man is bound to go back at times and search why he does not have greater success. Have I been eager to discipline a man with a mote in his eye while there is a beam in mine. No. God help me.

Am I an instrument so ready to the Lord - that from me the word of God, is not simply heard, sounding brass, tinkling cymbals, clang or clash.

IV. SECRET OF THE SECOND COMING

Now the Thessalonians believed about the second coming of Jesus. And the Bible may be divided into three periods - Christ will come, has come, and he will come again. In the fullness of time - the 3 1/2 years the message was - he has come. John the Baptist sounded it from the banks of Jordan. Behold, the lamb of God. Jesus declared it - I am he.

Now the letters to the Thessalonians containing more information about the second coming than any other source in the New Testament. The church here received at least nine distinct references. I Thess. 1:10. And to wait for his son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead.

I Thess. 2:19 - For what is our hope for joy, crown, or rejoicing. Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the coming.

I Thess. 3:13 - To the end he may establish your heart, unblameable in holiness before God, even our father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

I Thess. 4:14 - If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them that sleep with Jesus will God bring with him.

I Thess. 5:2 - For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

I Thess. 5:23 - Your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Thess. 1:7 - And unto you who are troubled, rest with us. And the Lord Jesus shall be revealed in Heaven with his mighty angels.

II. Thess. 2:1 - Now we beseech you brethren by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And by our gathering together with him.

II Thess. 2:8 - Then shall that wicked be revealed, and the Lord will consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Paul in speaking to this church - taught the second coming in a clear way.

He would come - and they had thought that he would come in their day. We have a living God in truth and wait for his Son from Heaven. It was a subject of intense desire, and expectations.

Converts are to be the preacher's jewels. Those that have been won to Christ in the meetings.

The believing dead are now with Christ and will return with him. The Bible teaches that the Spirit goes immediately to its final resting place and then shall the body return to the dust as it was. And the spirit unto God that gave it. Ecc. 12:7. Paul taught to die is gain and is to be present with the Lord.

You remember three times in the New Testament we have the word Paradise. Paul was caught up in the third Heaven unto Paradise. 2 Cor. 12:2-4. The Jews taught that the air where the birds fly was a first Heaven. The firmament where the stars are as the second. Heaven as the highest place for Jehovah, God, is enthroned is the third heaven. And Paul identifies Paradise as the third Heaven. To him that over comes - to him I will give to eat at the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

These living Christians have no advantage over the dead. What will become of the dead Christians in the second coming. Paul tells that their spirits are with Jesus and will come with him. And their bodies will be raised before the living are translated. And they have no advantage over the living Christians. The departed and living Christians are waiting.

The event means reunion - not separation, for the dead and the living saints.

The time of his coming is unknown. The times and the dates are unnecessary. Paul says you know perfectly well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Jesus even said the day was unknown to him, and to the

angels in Heaven. The time tables that have been fixed have done much harm. His coming will be unexpected. And Paul talks about as a thief - as in the days of Noah.

His coming will be sudden. While they were saying peace and safety - in a moment destruction falls upon them. The converted will be safe - the unconverted will be frightened. Women will be grinding at the mill - one will be taken, the other left.

Certain events will precede his coming. Paul says suddenly - to mean immediately. Paul wrote the second letter for the purpose of correcting wrong interpretations. Before Christ's coming, he said, there will be supreme manifestation of evil. This development will be two-fold.

First, apostasy within the church. Let no one in any way deceive you. For that day cannot come without the apostasy first. 2 Thess. 2:3.

Second, the manifestation of the man of sin. 2 Thess. 2:4. And the appearing of the man of sin. Who set himself against, and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship and goes the length of taking his seat in the very temple of God - giving it out that he himself is God.

Now this is a most obscure passage - if not in the whole Bible. There have been a number of anti-Christ. The book of Daniel, Zechariah, Isaiah, Revelation - all refer to anti-Christ. But after reading many many pages on this subject, the satisfactory opinion formed - as to who the man of sin is, he has had types in history where his appearing is in the future. He is the lawless one. He must come before the second advent. His appearing will be attended by various miracles that will deceive. And by every kind of wicked

When all human helpers fail, and comforts flee, where do we turn,
Where are our believing dead. What is there state. Shall we see them
again. These are the questions we search for.

If there's a natural body, there is a spiritual body.

This is very practical for these Christians. Paul talked about the
resurrection. In knowing that their labor was not in vain in the Lord.
The hope of Christ's coming is the incentive for service. It is the
promise of reward. It is also a pledge of triumph.