



1 Thessalonians 1

The power of the gospel – Leader's version

For an hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

Read Acts 17 v 1-4

1. Paul, Timothy and Silas were travelling around sharing the gospel. Where did Paul go when he got to Thessalonica and what did he do there? (v1-2)

This event is set in 49/50AD. To the synagogue (the Jewish meeting place, where men studied Scripture (our OT) and worshipped God). Paul 'reasoned with them from the Scriptures' for 3 Sabbaths (Saturdays) in a row (i.e. they were there for at least 2 weeks).

*2. What did Paul teach the Jews in Thessalonica? (v3-4)

That the Christ (Messiah) had to suffer and rise from the dead. The concept of the suffering Christ was not one that the Jews had previously understood, although it was clearly taught in their Scriptures, e.g. Isaiah 53. He then explained that the man called Jesus, who had been crucified about 20 years earlier, was the Christ that the Scriptures pointed forward to.

*3. Where did Paul get his information from, to teach the Jews and does this surprise you? (v2)

From the Jewish Scripture – i.e. our Old Testament. Remember, Jesus used the OT to tell the men on the Emmaus road all about Himself – although the New Testament tells us about Jesus' life, there is enough information in the OT to explain who He is, why He came and what it means to follow Him.

*4. Explain to the group that the passage you are going to read is a prophecy about Jesus, the Christ.

Look up Isaiah 53 v 10-12. What does Isaiah's prophecy, from about 700 years before Jesus, say will happen to the Lord's servant? How would Paul have used a passage like this to tell the Jews about Jesus?

v10 – He would suffer, his life would be a guilt offering, he would see his (spiritual) offspring, God's will would prosper in his hand (be fulfilled)

v11 – his soul will suffer (he will die), but will see the light of life (rise) again, he will be righteous (sinless), he will justify many and bear their iniquities (make people right with God by bearing their sins)

v12 – He will be a king (12a) because he died and was counted with the sinners (both in his life, through the incarnation, and his death, although he never sinned).

Paul would have gone through this passage, and many others, to show the Jews what the prophecies about the Christ were, and then shown how they were all fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

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Have you read the Old Testament?

Do you look for Jesus as you read it?

*5. What happened, as a result of Paul's preaching? (Acts 17 v 4)

Some Jews believed him, and became followers of Jesus, seeing that the long wait of their people for the Christ had been fulfilled in Jesus. Also some God-fearing Greeks (Greeks had multiple gods, these particular Greeks had a knowledge of the God of the Jews and feared Him, and now understood that Jesus was the only way to get right with God) and some prominent women.

Thus, a church was formed – where one or two gather together... It sounds like everything is going very well for Paul's preaching tour.

*6. Read v5-9. What happened once other Jews found out about people trusting Jesus and why do you think they reacted this way?

The Jews used rent-a-mob to start a riot and searched Jason's house for Paul and Silas. They then dragged Jason and some others to the officials and made exaggerated claims about them which made the situation even more inflammatory. Jason and his friends were then bailed.

They reacted this way because, although they were Jews waiting for the Christ to come, they didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ, so they saw the gospel as a teaching that was very offensive, rather than as the fulfilment of their Scriptures. (NB the lesson to us is that we may know the Bible very well, but still not understand it).

Think for a minute about how frightening this would have been for Jason and his family and what it means to stand up for Jesus under persecution.

Questions 7-9 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

7. **SDL** Read v10-12. What did the Thessalonian Christians do after the riot and what was the result of this? Does this surprise you?

They sent Paul and Silas away by night, to Berea, where they did exactly the same thing – started to preach in the synagogue!! This should surprise us because it would seem they were asking for trouble, and hadn't learnt from their mistakes, but at the same time, it shouldn't surprise us, because their mission was to share the gospel, whatever the consequences. The Bereans accepted the gospel, once again including many Jews and several Greeks, with enthusiasm and they examined the Scriptures (OT) to check Paul and Silas had got it right.

8. **SDL** Then what happened? (v13-14)

The Thessalonians came to Berea to stir up trouble again. They really had it in for Paul (/ Jesus).

9. **SDL** How would you feel about the Thessalonians if you were one of the Berean believers?

Let the group talk about anger, hurt, revenge etc., but end the conversation by bringing up the subject of forgiveness. We may be angry, hurt and wanting revenge when someone insults us or causes us trouble, but if we're following Jesus, then forgiveness is what we should offer, not retaliation.

10. Now read 1 Thessalonians 1 v 1- 2. Paul, Silas and Timothy are working together again, and Paul is writing to the baby church in Thessalonica. How does Paul feel about them?

Reading between the lines, he loves them and thanks God for them.

11. **SHOUT-OUT** Read v3. What has been happening in the lives of the people in the new church at Thessalonica? Fill in the table v

Characteristics	What it's come from	How these two are linked
Work	Produced by faith	Their faith in Jesus led them to do good work for him
Labour	Prompted by love	Their labour (work) for God was a result of their love for him – not in order to be loved by him
Endurance	Inspired by hope in Jesus	Despite all opposition, they carried on living for Jesus because of the hope they had of his return. They knew it was worth it.

*12. Read v4-5. What does Paul mean when he says that the gospel comes with power?

The gospel is good news that saves us from our sins. But it's not the words themselves that save and change us, it's the power behind the gospel that saves and changes! That power is from the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can open blind eyes and deaf ears, and soften hard hearts.

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Read 1 Thessalonians 1 v 5 again. Do you know the power of the gospel in your life?

Knowing the gospel as a fact is not the same as knowing the power of the gospel. Take the opportunity to gently challenge the group and see how much the gospel is changing their lives, how much they are allowing Jesus into their lives and living to honour and obey him, rather than simply being thankful that he's saved them from their sins.

*13. Read v6-10. How much has the gospel changed the lives of the Thessalonians?

They have suffered for their faith and they are changing to become more like Jesus (v6). They have welcomed the gospel with joy, because they have understood the power of it, despite the suffering that came with it (v6) and are sharing it with others (v8). They have turned away from their old idols to serve Jesus, and they are waiting for him to come back (v9-10). What has happened in Thessalonica has become known everywhere, and has itself become a witness to Jesus.

*14. What is different about God, compared to idols, v9, and why does this change everything?

God is true and living. Idols are false and dead. This changes everything once you become aware of it, because who would want to serve a false dead god?! Once you know the truth, you drop everything to follow it.

Idols may be 'superstitious' – man made images, which hold their followers in fear, or 'sophisticated' – God-substitutes, such as greed, power, lust, addiction. Whatever our idol, it is the power encounter with Jesus that blows it out of the water, as the power of the true and living God is demonstrated in the gospel (from Stott, 2009, p40).

If there are people in the group who are not currently followers of Jesus, take the opportunity to gently enquire about their understanding of God being 1. true and 2. living.

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Read 1 Thessalonians 1 v 9 again. What does it mean to 'serve Jesus' and why would we do this? In what areas of your life are you not serving Jesus at the moment and can you identify why this is the case?

The path of discipleship is hard, not least in prison. In John's gospel we read that Jesus said that 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching' (John 17 v 23). Believing in Jesus is not just about getting to heaven. If we have truly understood how bad our sin is and how powerful the gospel is, we will love Jesus, not just accept the gift of eternal life. Serving Jesus is the natural outcome of loving Him, and it involves obedience to Him and seeking to bring every area of our lives under His authority. This is not easy, but it's what disciples of Jesus are called to do.

*15. Read v10. Why are the Thessalonians waiting for Jesus to come from heaven?

They're not just expecting Him to come – they're waiting for Him! So it must be a big deal. They know that when Jesus comes, they will be with Him for ever and He will be judge of all (Acts 17 v 31). They have understood the power of the gospel and the depth of their sin – they know what they have been saved from and to, and they know that they are with Jesus for eternity.

(Don't go into the logistics of the second coming yet, you will cover it when you study at chapter 4).

16. What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus will rescue us from the coming wrath?

An opportunity to recap the gospel!

Check out – ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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The power of the gospel

What does the passage say and mean?

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