

Reformation

Sermon October 25, 2020

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 2 & 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Golden verse: *“You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen.”* Ezekiel 2:7

Last Sunday, as we studied the first chapter of the first letter to Thessalonians, we saw that Paul spent just a short period of time in Thessalonica. He had just a few chances to talk to some random strangers about his unshakable faith. But the Holy Spirit was working through Paul, and a few people gave their hearts to Jesus.

We saw how these newborn Christian Thessalonians connected to the living God: as they embraced the message of Christ delivered by Paul, they embraced the only living, loving and caring God, who sent to us His son Jesus Christ. We saw how they connected to other Christians: they became role models for other Christians and people imitated their actions. And we saw how they connected to non-Christians: because they took seriously what they heard, their lives started to shine. They became light in the darkness and salt of the earth.

Last Sunday, we learned that we have an unnegotiable order from Christ: “Make disciples of all the nations” and we learned a few practical things which help us to share our faith and our certain hope with others.

Today we will see:

- what Paul did to share the Gospel,
- what the newborn Christians did in Thessalonica, and what you and I have to do to spread the Gospel of Christ.

All these three topics will empower us today in the 21st century to fulfill Christ’s commandment and will help us to live a joyful and fruitful Christian life, knowing that our life is not in vain.

1. Let’s see first **what Paul did to share the Gospel**, and how this can empower us today.

In the first verse, he says: “You know, brothers and sisters, that our **visit** to you was **not without results.**” (1 Thessalonians 2:1)

One of our problems is that, when we share our faith experiences, we would like to see the result right away. We right away are expecting the confirmation that the Gospel, shared by **us**, touched **their** hearts, and in that very moment they want to make changes in their lives. It seems that we sow the seeds and, in a few moments, we are expecting to see that the seeds are rising into apple trees.

I have to say that we will never or very rarely receive a confirmation right after sharing our faith experiences. The person who is listening to the Gospel will need quality time to digest what they heard for the first time. The seed has to be sowed first, then showered by God’s Spirit to grow

roots. The Gospel, shared by you, has to grow under the ground first, then will show visible signs of growing.

Let's be totally honest considering this: if we would see right away the result of our sowing, we would start to boast, thinking that the other person's growing faith is the result of our good work. However, faith is always the result of God's grace. We are the sowers, but ONLY GOD is able to give growth to the seeds.

Our responsibility is to sow the seeds, to spread the Gospel, to talk about God's grace, to tell others that God is good, and blessed are those who put their trust in them. Then, we have to leave the rest to God.

You, who are witnessing for Christ, talking about your faith experiences to our loved ones, have to know that your work will not be without result. If you will sow, God will care about the seed, and will bless the seeds to grow. But if there aren't seeds sowed in people's hearts, what can grow out from them? It is our responsibility to talk about Jesus openly, knowing that by sharing light and life, we will save lives.

Paul, with Silas, experienced so many obstacles and difficulties in his mission. Before he arrived to Thessalonica, he started decent conversations with some people in Philippi. Some Jews from their Synagogue became mad at them. They got arrested and locked down in jail. After that painful experience, Paul and Silas had all kinds of reasons to say that they would not continue with their mission. They do not deserve to be treated like that. Also, they could have complained against Christ, saying: "Lord, we did our work, and you did not save us. You allowed us to be arrested and beaten up, and suffer physically and psychologically so much. God should care more about His servants. God should save His people from dangers, especially when they witness for Him. Christians should not suffer just because they share the Gospel of Christ Jesus."

Dear beloved, we have to know that we are not the only ones working. The devil is working as well to destroy what we do. Do you know why the devil's eyes are red? Because he never sleeps. He will do his very best to harm you and to stop you from continuing to witness for Christ. Personally, I experienced many times how our biggest enemy, the devil, wants to stop me and to get disappointed doing the Lord's mission. This is the devil's mission: to stop you and me, and to convince us that our mission will not have any result. Therefore, there is no reason to witness for Christ. And I have to tell you that the devil does a good job.

The devil will not give up on you. The devil will continue to discourage us in many ways. He will tell me that: witnessing for Christ is not for me: I am not smart enough to talk about Christ; I don't know the Bible well enough; I am too anxious to talk to others. The devil will try everything to stop you from doing what Christ is expecting from all of us: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:18-20) The devil wants to stop you, so that the Gospel would not spread from YOU.

Our Heavenly father is asking you now to be careful, and not allow the devil to stop you in your mission.

Paul did not give up either. In Philippi, we know only three people who embraced the Gospel, and in Thessalonica, a few, but from these few people the Gospel was spread everywhere.

Paul was asking God to continue to give him courage to spread the Gospel. As a result, he said: *“We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.”* (1 Thessalonians 2:2)

We have to know that when we talk with others about Jesus, the Holy Spirit will open their hearts for the Gospel.

Will there be any people in heaven, who will tell the Lord that YOU were that special person, who shared with them the Gospel of Christ and this is how they were saved?

Our responsibility is to **nourish** our children, friends and neighbours, as a mother would nourish her children. We have to nourish constantly. No matter how old they are, they are still our children, and good parents will do their very best in nourishing them. We have to find out what they need and, as good parents, then we have to provide.

2. Now let us see what the newborn Christians did in Thessalonica, and what you and I have to do to spread the Gospel of Christ.

The Thessalonians understood that Paul was preaching the message he received from God.

This is how WE have to read the Bible and this is how we have to listen to the sermons. We have to know that the minister is only forwarding to us the message. It is not the minister’s production, but it is the word of God. It is not the minister’s teaching. The minister talks as a representative of God, and is sent by God to preach. We have to listen to the sermon knowing that, through the preacher, God talks to us. Every time when we have a chance to listen to a sermon, we have to realize that God loves us so much that He sent somebody to us to share with us His message. Then, we have to take it seriously and we have to act accordingly. We have to notice also, that the minister is preaching for us because he wants to help us to come closer to Christ.

Please listen now to what the Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 1, is teaching us about this. This confession, including the Heidelberg Catechism, are adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

“THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE WORD OF GOD. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.

Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written "And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor..., for they shall all know me" (Jer. 31:34), And "Neither he who plants nor he that waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (I Cor. 3:7). For although "No one can come to Christ unless he be drawn by the Father" (John 6:44), And unless the Holy Spirit inwardly illumines him, yet we know that it is surely the will of God that his Word should be preached outwardly also. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, "He shall tell you what you ought to do."

INWARD ILLUMINATION DOES NOT ELIMINATE EXTERNAL PREACHING. For he that illuminates inwardly by giving men the Holy Spirit, the same one, by way of commandment, said unto his disciples, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). And so in Philippi, Paul preached the word outwardly to Lydia, a seller of purple goods; but the Lord inwardly opened the woman's heart (Acts 16:14). And the same Paul, after a beautiful development of his thought, in Romans 10:17 at length comes to the conclusion, "So faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God by the preaching of Christ." (THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER I.)

If we accept God's words and will incorporate His message, His word will WORK in us. Paul is using a Greek word *energetai* which means that the Word of God will give us ENERGY: will re-create us and will give us constant energy.

Let's think about this. Do you allow God's words to work in you?

- If God is asking something from you, are you listening to Him?
- If God wants to make changes in you, do you allow Him to help you to make those vital changes?

There are people who are just listening to the sermon, and although they are rejoicing about the message, their hearts will not move and they will not allow God to make any changes in them.

There are other people, who are listening to the Gospel, and they allow God to lead and guide their lives, but the Word will not spread out from their lives because they will NOT witness for Christ.

God is asking us to listen, to make changes, and to share the Gospel with others. This is how we will experience Reformation: renewal in us and in our surrounding area. Amen.