

Prayer

For every minute of this day when we have forgotten to live according to Your standards of mercy and love, O God, forgive us. And by Your grace, remind us through others when we fall short in our call to live according to the only standards of Christian discipleship; death to self and new life in Christ. We ask this through Him who has lived and died, and lives again in us forever; Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Travel

We all need to travel, for work, family or leisure purposes; but we can all choose how to travel. Pray today that people will realise the increasing cost to our world of travel.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the many opportunities we have to share our faith
- Pray for those who look after relatives with Alzheimer's disease
- Pray for young people who are deciding what to do with their lives

Meditation

Renew us, Lord Jesus. By Your Holy Spirit, renew us.
Restore our bodies through rest; and strengthen them with exercise;
Replenish our minds as we read Your Word, and fill them with truth;
Re-ignite the fire of Your love in our spirits, so they may shine for You;
Recover our zeal by challenging us to do Your will, all of our time;
Replace the tiredness of our hearts with the vigour of enthusiasm;
Rescue our feelings from the grip of the enemy and set them free;
Recharge the energy of our souls through worshipping You at all times;
Renew us, Lord Jesus. By Your Holy Spirit, renew us.

Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord when you welcomed the Word in the face of severe suffering with the joy of the Holy Spirit; ⁷ and in this way, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ As a result of this, the Lord's message has been broadcast not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known; so we have no need to speak about it! ⁹ They themselves report what kind of reception you gave us, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead; Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Review

Following the beginning of this letter with its introductions and greetings, Paul was clearly moved by his recollection of the young Christian fellowship at Thessalonica. In this passage, Paul spoke with pleasure about the consequences of his missionary work there. The word of God had been received in the face of severe persecution, yet with joy (1:6),

and this comment sets the scene of the rest of the passage. Clearly, what happened at Thessalonica had become known in the region and the good example of a few people had been amplified as others heard the story of what happened. All this is understandable of course, when we realise that Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia, or what we might today call northern Greece. What happens in a capital will often become known elsewhere, and Paul adds that the story of the young church had also become known in Achaia, which was the region we know as southern Greece, containing such cities as Athens and Corinth.

Jesus had said at the beginning of his ministry that his disciples would face persecution (Matthew 5:11,12), and the church in Jerusalem quickly learned after Pentecost that the coming of the Spirit did not mean that the growth of the church would be without cost (see Acts 3,4). Before Paul had been to Thessalonica, he knew all about persecution himself, having been stoned in Lystra, for example (Acts 14:19), on the first of his missionary journeys. Persecution happened for a number of reasons, one of which was the jealousy of Jews who did not like Paul using synagogues to preach his message. But it also took place more generally in towns and cities of the Roman world, where superstition was rife, and the preaching of Paul about the resurrection of the dead caused uproar in some cities, notably Philippi (Acts 16:19f.), and later on at Ephesus (Acts 19:23).

Our passage today reflects the continuing truth that when the Gospel is made plain, it confronts people with truth, and truth is not always easy because it requires people to make decisions. In his letter, Paul rejoiced in the small number from Thessalonica who made the choice to accept faith, because they were the ones whose decisions changed the world for the better. The religions, beliefs and concerns of those who opposed them have long since been forgotten within world history. Paul's words reflect how the Kingdom grows; the Word is received 'in the face of severe suffering with the joy of the Holy Spirit' (1:6).

We do not know the details of the stories that spread around the region, but we have an idea of them from the record of Acts 17:1-9. Paul and his companions were received at the local synagogue, and preached there for three Sundays in a row explaining that Jesus was the Messiah. Some Jews stirred up opposition to Paul, and attacked the house of a believer called Jason whom they dragged before the local authorities. Jason managed to pay bail and extract himself from the situation, but immediately the local believers urged Paul and Silas to leave and sent them on their way to Berea (Acts 17:10). Who knows what other acts of heroism and kindness were attached to this story? We wish that Paul had not said in the letter 'we have no need to speak about it!' because we would now love to know! Whatever was reported, Paul came across the stories in his travels in Athens and Corinth (1:8,9). It was a story of kindness and generosity to the evangelists, of turning to the Gospel and rejecting pagan gods, and enduring in the face of opposition (1:9); but as far as Paul was concerned, this was authentic 'Gospel'. It added up to an account of a true response to God and the growth of the Kingdom, and he rejoiced in it.

In the last verse, Paul described the faith of the Thessalonians as authentic, and as 'waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come' (1:10). In saying this, Paul was not just extending his appreciative comments, but indicating what was to come in the letter. There was indeed a reason for him to write to the Thessalonians, and it was not simply to commend them for their faith. They had some issues to do with what would happen when Christ came again in glory. They expected this to happen soon, and some were concerned it had not yet happened. Paul would have to speak to them about their concerns and guide them, but there was no doubt that he wanted them to know that he was delighted with their faith and their testimony. It was having a world wide impact!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways do we suffer to proclaim the Gospel today? Discuss in your group how to help Christians who face persecution.
2. How far has the news of the faith of your own church travelled? Who knows about it, if anyone, in the locality?
3. What idols have people turned from today in order to serve the living God, or is Paul's comment about idols irrelevant to today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Have you wondered what people say about you? It is in fact a sign of the success of the church when people begin to speak about what it does or what effect it has on its locality. Sometimes, people will gossip about what happens at a church for the wrong reasons, but it is far better for the church to be known than not known. There is no time left for us to be complacent in our world. The testimony of Christ needs to be 'out there' and not inside us, and what we do needs to be affecting the world around us. If it is not, we have become irrelevant! But because the Holy Spirit is never irrelevant to the world, it is us who have the problem, not Him!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Are you someone who is very private about your faith, or are you gregarious and willing to talk about it wherever you are? Pray about this, and ask the Lord to help you understand what you can do to be a witness within this world, either as an individual or as a member of your local church.*
- *Read through the stories in Acts 17 which surround the events we are talking about here in this passage of 1 Thessalonians. What do these scriptures teach us about the spiritual reality of witnessing to the Gospel?*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, in those difficult times when life feels numb and love seems far away, come gently, we pray. Bring a word, a touch, a sense of Your presence; and place within us the seeds of hope and renewal. Then, with every day that passes, may we increasingly know Your graciousness and care and rejoice in the transforming power of Your love. Thank You Lord Jesus; AMEN