

Greenways Benefice Weekly Devotional (No 25)

Sunday 6th September 2020

Acts 17 : 1 – 9, 1 Thessalonians 1 : 1 – 7

Authentic Christianity - Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Hello, I hope you are all well. I have a question for you. What is meant by authentic Christianity? The dictionary says authentic means something genuine, real, not counterfeit. So I suggest an authentic Christian must be one who has a genuine desire to be a Jesus follower, one who allows Him to bring life changes that reflect His character. In other words an authentic Christian is someone whose life reflects the reality of God in everyday living.

One person who was changed beyond all recognition is the apostle Paul. After he met with Jesus he was changed from being a persecutor of Christians to one who was passionate about reaching others for Him.

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians which he wrote while he was staying in Corinth.

He had stayed only a brief time in Thessalonica but persecution of Christians at that time was rife and we read in Acts that the Jews stirred up an ugly riot against the Christians so after only about three weeks it was impossible for Paul to work there and he quickly left and travelled to Berea, then south to Athens and on to Corinth.

Looking at the apostle Paul, we may think of him as a 'Super Hero' type of Christian but in fact he was an ordinary guy, just like one of us. But he had an amazing God who used him in amazing ways in those early days of Christianity.

Acts 17 reveals that Paul didn't have an easy time (God has never promised that we will have). In fact, from the time he became a follower of Jesus, life was often difficult and dangerous. We often think of Paul as the most successful missionary ever, but there are not many people who could endure such a sequence of hard experiences. He experienced opposition wherever he went. But God was with him.

It was during his second missionary journey in around AD 49 that he arrived in Thessalonica. He had been trying to evangelize first in Asia and then in Bithynia, but each time it seemed the Holy Spirit prevented him from going to those regions.

While he was at Troas (ancient Troy) Paul had a dream - in it a man beckoned him to come over to Macedonia to help the people there. So he and his missionary team, Silas and Timothy, crossed the Aegean sea reaching the port of Neapolis and so arrived at Thessalonica. As I said earlier - Paul had changed radically from being a persecutor of Christians to a man with a passion for reaching others with the love of Christ. He wanted to introduce the people of Thessalonica to Jesus.

At that time Thessalonica was a key port at the top of the Aegean Sea.

It was the largest city in Macedonia, on the Ignatian Way, the main Roman road from Rome to Asia, and its port was the terminus of some major north-south trade routes. So it was an important financial centre and was ideal as a location for business.

And Paul saw that it could be of strategic importance for spreading the Gospel.

The city had a large and mixed population, including a number of Jewish traders. Archaeology has shed considerable light on the Thessalonica of Paul's day. Excavations have revealed a Roman forum, a sports hippodrome, a Greek market and a Samaritan synagogue.

It had a diverse ethnicity and preoccupation with business, finance and entertainment. In many ways it was very similar to the culture of our day.

And Paul was faced with the challenge of presenting the Gospel in that very secular setting.

In Thessalonica, as was his custom, Paul preached to the Jews in their synagogue. He had a desire to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel, but also felt a responsibility to the Jews. And it was the group of people on the fringe, who were not Jews and had not been circumcised, who responded to his message. They were known as 'God-fearers' because they recognised that the God of the Jews was the true God.

So when the Jews made it impossible for Paul to stay in Thessalonica, he went, leaving behind a solid church, among whom were probably some Jews, but which was predominantly Gentile in membership.

He must have worried about these young Christians, he had left so soon, as he travelled, spreading the Gospel, in Berea, Athens and then Corinth. He had a hard time, receiving a mixed reception wherever he went, so imagine how Paul must have felt when Timothy and Silas caught up with him at Corinth and brought the news that the Church in Thessalonica was generally doing well.

It lifted Paul's spirits and he decided to write a letter to the Church to encourage them in their trials and give some instructions on Christian living.

These new Thessalonian believers were hungry to follow God and their lives were transformed. They were seen across the region as authentic Christians whose faith and Godly lives became widely known (1 Thess 1 : 7,8).

So how does all of this connect with us living today in Wiltshire. We follow the same God who is able to change lives and transform a mundane 'Christian' into an authentic believer with the power and peace of God in evidence wherever we go.

The believers in Thessalonica discovered this and were blessed.

We also can experience the reality of knowing God for ourselves and discover the difference it makes in all that we are and do.

Let's pray together -

Lord, our Saviour, so transform our lives, as you did those Thessalonian believers, that we might reflect you all that we are and do. So change us that others can see our faith in you is real and reflects the love and grace of Christ in everything. Amen.

God bless
Veronica