

**Introduction:** God is The Master of working behind the scenes. It takes the miracle of God's grace for anyone to truly see the wonders of God in everyday life. \*\*\* I can illustrate this by using my experience as a sophomore at WPI. I love math, but I knew there were very few job opportunities for mathematicians. On the other hand, electrical engineers often got to choose from two or three job offers. So, I took the three required electrical engineering courses for sophomores. There were two 'textbook' courses in the first semester and a laboratory course after students returned from the January break. In the fall I became friends with Marty, a young man made to be an electrical engineer. When I returned to the dorm in late January, Marty was the first person I saw. He requested that I be his lab partner, even though he knew that I would quit the major after the lab course. But I did learn one important thing in the first semester: current always takes the path of least resistance. \*\*\* I have told this story to about a half-dozen of you all. The full story is good, and I will be glad to tell it to anyone next week at the fellowship time. We were doing our only 'power' lab, and one item in the circuit was a huge variable resistor. The math was difficult and we were not sure of the exact resistance needed, but we set the initial resistance in the ballpark and decided to get the answer by trial and error. In my last minute scan of our set-up, I was sure I detected a short circuit. I tried to show it to Marty, but he was convinced our circuit was good, so I told him to flip the switch. He began to have doubts and asked me to flip it. So I did. The metal of the connection switch started to melt as the circuit breaker tried to disconnect. With sparks flying, it finally disconnected as the professor came running out of his observation booth to our table! Reflecting on this, fifty years later, as a follower of Jesus, I realize: Just like current in a circuit, people always take the path of least resistance. Since God's way is always the hard way, this leaves all people open to demonic influence. \*\*\* The early experience of the church in Thessalonica is a good example of the power of The Gospel and the power of The Holy Spirit working together to give people the necessary grace to resist the tendency of people to take the path of least resistance. \*\*\* God's grace allows people to serve with joy as they testify to Messiah Jesus, even when suffering tribulation.

**I. The church in Thessalonica was founded when Paul reasoned from Scripture about Messiah, and God persuaded people; but, jealous Jews produced an uproar, accusing believers of unsettling people with a king opposing Caesar. (Acts 17:1-9)**

- A. After Paul reasoned from Scripture for three Sabbaths about Messiah, God persuaded a cross-section of people in Thessalonica to join with him. (*Verses 1-4*)
1. Having passed through Amphipolis (city surrounded by sea) and Apollonia (belonging to Apollo), they came into Thessalonica (victory of falsity) where synagogue of Jews was being. (*Verse 1*)  
**Crossing a sea:** From Troas in modern day Turkey to Neapolis, the first port in Macedonia, was 190 miles, by the Aegean Sea, in two legs.  
**Five cities:** The five cities in Macedonia were: Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia and Thessalonica. The cumulative land distance was 105 miles with the respective legs being fifteen, fifteen, twenty and fifty five miles.
  2. According to (his) custom, Paul went to the synagogues three Sabbath-days, and he reasoned with them from the Scriptures: opening and proving that it was being necessary The Messiah to have suffered and to rise again from the dead. (*Verses 2-3a*)  
**Sabbath custom:** Paul always went to synagogue every Sabbath-day.  
**Reason from Scripture:** He reasoned with his fellow Jews from their shared Scripture to prove what happened to Jesus at The Cross and at The Empty Tomb had all been foretold by Scripture.
  3. (He concluded:) This is being The Messiah: Jesus whom I (indeed I) am preaching unto you all. (*Verse 3b*)  
**Preach Messiah:** What he later communicated to believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), he here uses to prove Messiah had to suffer death for sinners' forgiveness, and rise to give new life to believers.
  4. Some of them were made to believe, and were joined to Paul and Silas: both of devout Greeks many people, and of leading women – not a few. (*Verse 4*)  
**God persuades:** Those who were 'made to believe' (passive voice) were actually persuaded by God, who often 'hides' behind passive verbs.
- B. Jealous Jews gathered unwise men and created an uproar, accusing Jason and some brothers of unsettling people to follow Jesus as king; after taking security from Jason, the others were released. (*Verses 5-9*)
1. Having jealously, the Jews, having gathered together loafers and certain evil men, and having gathered a crowd, they were setting in an uproar the city; and, having come upon the house of Jason (he will heal), they were seeking to bring (Paul and Silas) out to the assembled people. (*Verse 5*)  
**Jealous Jews:** The jealous Jews were gathering sluggards and immoral people, the 'un-wise' people (according to the book of Proverbs).  
**Uproar:** This immoral coalition made a lot of noise as they approached Jason's house, seeking to bring out Paul and Silas.
  2. Not having found (Paul and Silas), they were dragging away Jason and certain brothers to the city officials, crying: these, the inhabited earth having unsettled, here, they are coming. (*Verse 6*)  
**Drag away:** They dragged away Jason, and some people recently persuaded by God through Paul and Silas about Messiah, to city officials.  
**Accusation:** The accusation was Paul and Silas were foreign agitators trying to unsettle Thessalonica!
  3. Jason received them; and, they all are practicing contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying to be another king: Jesus. (*Verse 7*)  
**Oppose Caesar:** They say Paul and Silas incite people to act contrary to the legal code of the Roman Empire originating with King Caesar.  
**Saying another king:** They are advocating another King, namely Jesus,
  4. They troubled the people and the rulers of the city, (who are) hearing these things; and, after having taken security from Jason, they released the certain brothers. (*Verses 8-9*)  
**People troubled:** The people of the city were agitated by the accusations of the jealous Jews.  
**Jason posts bond:** Jason posted a bond for everyone, and they were released. All this in three weeks!

**II. Six months later Paul wrote to encourage the church in Thessalonica by prayer, reminding them the power of The Holy Spirit made them model believers to joyfully serve the living God in persecution. (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)**

- A. Paul gives thanks to God for the church in Thessalonica, for the fruit of their faith, and the patient hope and assurance they have as God's chosen. (*Verses 1-5*)

**Six months:** Paul wrote this letter to the troubled church in Thessalonica six months after its founding.

1. Paul (little) and Silvanus (Silas – woody) and Timotheos (honoring God) to the church of the Thessalonians in God Father and Lord Jesus Christ: grace unto you all and peace. (*Verse 1*)

**Typical greeting:** The letterhead of first century letters began with the names of the writers, followed by the identity of the recipients, and a brief word of blessing.

2. We are giving thanks to The God always concerning all of you all, remembrance making with the prayers of us without ceasing. (*Verse 2*)

**Thanksgiving:** Paul wants them to know he is thanking God for these new members of the church of The Messiah, and remembering them constantly.

**Verbal insight:** The verb ‘making’ is neither active nor passive, but both (middle voice), indicating the action is neither fully by the subject (Paul), nor fully from the object (God); but, is a two-way interaction by both the person praying and by God to whom the prayers are addressed. This is exactly what true prayer, communication with God, is all about!

3. Remembering of you all: the work of the faith, and the labor of the love, and the patience of the hope of The Lord of us, Jesus Christ, before God The Father of us. (*Verse 3*)

**Fruit of faith:** The only truly faithful One is Jesus. By grace, He gives His faithfulness to those who surrender to Him in faith. So, those who receive Messiah’s faith are able to do hard labor for Him with patient endurance and the hope that is from, and in, Him.

4. Knowing brothers, being loved by means of The God choosing you all, that The Gospel came not to be made to you all in Word only, but also in: power, and in Holy Spirit, and in much full assurance. (*Verses 4-5b*)

**Chosen:** Those who were persuaded by Paul’s initial Scripture reasoning were ultimately chosen by God to receive the faith of His Son: The Savior-King.

**Word and Spirit’s power:** This assuring faith came by both The Word of God and the power of The Holy Spirit who inspired The Word.

**Application:** Let us commit ourselves together before God to reason with unbelieving family and neighbors BOTH from The Word of God AND in the power of The Holy Spirit.

5. As you all had known what kind (of men) we were made to be among you all for the sake of you all. (*Verse 5c*)

**God’s work in people:** Paul is acknowledging that it was God who empowered him to persuade them that Jesus is Messiah, and they should follow Him in the full assurance of His faithfulness.

- B. Then, Paul tells them how they were made to be examples to all believers because of their joy in The Holy Spirit in tribulation, and how their turning to God to serve Him influenced many. (*Verses 6-10*)

1. You all imitators of us were made to be, and of The Lord; having received The Word in much tribulation with joy of The Holy Spirit. (*Verse 6*)

**God works in tribulation:** This is a great paradox of The Faith of Jesus: those receiving The Word of Him will become imitators of Him, down to experiencing His sorrows in tribulation, yet being given joy through The Holy Spirit, knowing that no suffering is in vain in The Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58), and ultimately experiencing His joy after The Cross (Hebrews 12:1-3).

2. So you all to be pattern to all those believing in Macedonia (extended land) and Achaia (trouble). (*Verse 7*)

**Role models:** Those faithfully following The Faithful Messiah become role models to many others.

3. For, from you all had made to sound out The Word of The Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia; but also in every place the faith of you all to God had spread. (*Verses 8a-b*)

**Testify to Word:** Despite troubles at this church founding, and despite to current tribulation, the word of the faith they were exercising had gone out to every place where Messiah Jesus was being proclaimed!

**Application:** Let us receive God’s grace and power to serve Him by testifying to Jesus through whatever suffering and persecution we may be called to experience. This is what God seeks from His people.

#### ***The Holy Spirit gives persecuted Christians the right response***

4. So we have not need to speak anything; for, concerning us, they themselves are showing what manner of reception we had with you all; and, how you all turned to God from the image-idols to serve God: living and true. (*Verses 8c-9*)

**No need to speak more:** Paul tells the church in Thessalonica they don’t need any more teaching from him. Everyone can see how they are serving the ever-living and true God, serving as Messiah served (Mark 8:35), by following the hard way of The Cross with right and pleasing actions (Mark 8:34-38).

#### ***The Holy Spirit gives persecuted Christians the right response***

5. And to wait expectantly (for) The Son of Him from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead; Jesus, The One delivering us from the wrath coming. (*Verse 10*)

**Wait in expectation of resurrection:** They are patiently enduring everything as good role models for Jesus, hoping for the ultimate sure fulfillment of His promise to return for them to take them to the place He has prepared (John 14:1-3, 23).

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**Deliverance from wrath:** Those who have suffered with Christ, and for Christ, will finally somehow, someday share in His eternal resurrection (Philippians 3:10-11).

**Application:** Let us all be encouraged to endure the resistance of those not knowing Jesus in these present days and to faithfully testify to Jesus for the promise of being delivered from God’s wrath at His return.

#### ***Servants of God testify for Jesus as they suffer for Him***

**Conclusion:** The church in Thessalonica started when Paul reasoned from Scripture that Messiah must first suffer before rising to rightfully rule. This resulted in a cross-section of people being persuaded to join in following Jesus, but jealous Jews turned up the heat and accused them of treason. When they were released after posting bond, they became role models for believers in all Greece. Their faith produced the fruit of joy in tribulation for all turning from idols to worship God, willing to take the hard way of The Cross.

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