

Lucian, *Amor.* 32), or as *πόθος* and *πνεῦμα* among the Phœnicians, but in the assertion that this spirit is the spirit of *God*, not confused or mingled with, but before and above and altogether distinct from the matter on which He operates with sovereign freedom.

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(*To be continued.*)

### *THE GOSPEL OF PAUL AT THESSALONICA.*

IN this paper we shall endeavour briefly to answer the question, *What was the gospel brought to Thessalonica?* Can we give to ourselves any precise account of the "good news" which "Paul and Silas and Timotheus" announced in this city, and which produced so powerful and enduring an effect? Further, was there anything special to the place and the occasion in the form which the Apostle's message assumed, and which will serve to explain the peculiar tone of Christian feeling, the style of thought and cast of doctrine, that distinguished the faith of this great Macedonian Church in its first beginnings? To these inquiries the indications of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, compared with the story of the Acts, enable us to give a tolerable answer.

1. The foundation of St Paul's teaching was laid in the *proof of the Messiahship of Jesus*, drawn from the prophecies of Scripture, compared with the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of the Saviour. The method of this proof, briefly indicated in Acts xvii. 3, is set forth at length in the report of his discourse at the Pisidian Antioch, given by St Luke in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts.

2. *The purpose of Christ's death and its bearing on human salvation* must have been amply explained by the Apostles. So we infer, not only from the central position

of this subject in the Apostle's later Epistles, and from the prominence given to it in Acts xiii. 38, 39 (where the announcement of *forgiveness of sins* and *justification by faith* forms the climax of St Paul's whole sermon), but the words of 1 Thessalonians v. 8-10 leave us in no doubt that the same "word of the cross" was proclaimed at Thessalonica which St Paul preached everywhere. Here "salvation" comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us"—a salvation from "the anger of God," a salvation in part received already, in part matter of "hope," and which belongs to those who "have put on the breast-plate of *faith* and love." This salvation was the great need of the Gentile world, which "knew not God," and was enslaved to idolatry and shameful lusts (1 Thess. i. 9, iv. 5; 2 Thess. i. 8).

Now we can understand all this in the light of Romans i. 16-25, iii. 23-26, v. 1-11, and as touching Him "whom God set forth in His blood a propitiation through faith"; but without such knowledge the Apostle's language would have been equally unintelligible to the Thessalonians and to ourselves. Still it must be admitted, and it is remarkable, that very little is said in these two letters on the subject of the atonement and salvation by faith. Evidently on these fundamental doctrines there was no dispute at Thessalonica. They were so fully accepted and understood in this Church, that it was unnecessary to dilate upon them; and the Apostle has other matters just now to deal with.

3. The Church at Thessalonica being chiefly of heathen origin, St Paul and St Silas had said much of *the falsity and wickedness of idolatry*; they had completed the lessons which many of their disciples had already received in the synagogue. Their faith was emphatically a "*faith toward God*—the living and true God," to whom they had "turned from their idols" (this seems to imply that many Thessalonian Christians had been converted directly from

paganism), and whom they knew in "His Son" (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). And this living and true God, the Father of the Lord Jesus, they had come to know and to approach as "our Father" (1 Thess. i. 3, iii. 11, 13; 2 Thess. ii. 16), who was to them "the God of peace" (1 Thess. i. 1, v. 23; 2 Thess. i. 2), who had "loved them and given them eternal comfort and good hope in grace," had "chosen" them and "called them to enter His kingdom and glory," who "would count them worthy of their calling and accomplish in them all the desire of goodness and the work of faith," who had "given them His Holy Spirit," whose "will" was their "sanctification," whose "word" was ever "working in" them, who would "comfort and strengthen their hearts" in every needful way and reward them with "rest" from their afflictions in due time, whose care for His beloved was not limited by death, for He was pledged at Christ's coming to restore those whom death had snatched away (1 Thess. 1. 4, ii. 12, 13, iv. 3, 7, 8, 14, v. 18; 2 Thess. i. 5, 7, 11, ii. 13, 16, 17). Such a God it must be their one aim to love and to please; St Paul's one desire for them is, that they may "walk worthily" of Him (1 Thess. ii. 12, iv. 1; 2 Thess. iii. 5). The good news the Apostle brought he speaks of repeatedly as "the gospel of *God*,"—while it is "the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 8), since He is its great subject and centre. Compare Romans i. 1, 3, "the gospel of God concerning His Son."

It is important to note the prominence of *God* in these Epistles, and the manifold ways in which the Divine character and relationship to believing men had been set forth to the Thessalonian Church. For such teaching would be necessary, and helpful in the highest degree, to men who had just emerged from heathen darkness and superstition; and these letters afford the best example left to us of St Paul's *earliest* instructions to Gentile converts. The next report we have of his preaching to the heathen comes

from Athens (Acts xvii. 22-31), where his discourse bore principally on two subjects—*the nature of the true God*, and *the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world*.

4. So we come to that which was the most conspicuous and impressive topic of the Thessalonian gospel, so far as we can gather it from the echoes audible in the Epistles; viz. *the coming of the Lord Jesus in His heavenly kingdom*. These letters compel us to remember, what we are apt to forget, that the second advent of Christ is an important part of the Christian gospel, the good tidings that God has sent to the world concerning His Son. In 1 Thessalonians i. 9, 10, the religion of Thessalonian believers is summed up in these two things—"serving a God living and true, and waiting for His Son from the heavens." It was in the light of Christ's second coming that they had learned to look for that "kingdom and glory of God" to which they were "called," and "for which" they were now "suffering" (1 Thess. ii. 12; 2 Thess. i. 5, 10-12). "The coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" was an object of intense desire and fervent anticipation to the Apostle himself; and he had impressed the same feelings on his disciples at Thessalonica to an uncommon degree. His appeals and warnings throughout these Epistles rest on the "hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" as their strongest support. It was, moreover, upon this subject that the misunderstandings arose which the Apostle is at so much pains to correct—the first appearing in 1 Thessalonians iv. 13, touching the share of departed Christians in the return of the Lord Jesus; and the second in 2 Thessalonians ii. 1, 2, concerning the immediacy of the event itself.

What may have been the train of thought and feeling in the Apostle's mind that led him to dwell upon this theme with such especial emphasis at this particular period, we cannot tell. But there were two conditions belonging to his early ministry in Europe which naturally might suggest this

line of preaching. In the *first* place, the Christian doctrine of final judgment was one well calculated to rouse the Greek people from its levity and moral indifference; and it had impressive analogies in their own primitive religion. It was for this practical purpose that St Paul advanced the doctrine at Athens. "Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands men that all everywhere should repent; *because He has appointed a day* in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He ordained." To the busy traders of Corinth and Thessalonica, just as amongst the philosophers and dilettanti of Athens, the Apostle made the same severe and alarming proclamation. The message of judgment was an essential part of St Paul's good tidings. "God shall judge the secrets of men *according to my gospel*, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. ii. 16). But the declaration of Christ's coming in judgment involves the whole doctrine of the second advent. On this matter St Paul intimates that he had abundantly enlarged in the Thessalonian Church (1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 6).

In the *second* place, it should be observed that the Apostle in entering Europe by the Via Egnatia was brought more directly under the shadow of the Roman empire than at any time before. Philippi, a Roman colony, and a memorial of the victory by which the empire was established; Thessalonica, a great provincial capital of European aspect and character; the splendid military road by which the missionaries travelled, and along which troops of soldiers, officers of State with their brilliant retinues, foreign envoys and tributaries were going and coming—all this gave a powerful impression of the "kingdom and glory" of the great world-ruling city, to which a mind like St Paul's could not but be sensitive. He was himself, it must be remembered, a citizen of Rome, and by no means indifferent to his rights in this capacity; and he held a high estimate

of the prerogatives and functions of the civil power (Rom. xiii. 1-7).

But what he saw of the great kingdom of this world prompted in his mind larger thoughts of that mightier and diviner kingdom whose herald and ambassador he was. He could not fail to discern under the majestic sway of Rome signs of moral degeneracy and seeds of ruin. He remembered well that it was by the sentence of Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. vi. 13) that his Master was crucified; and in his own outrageous treatment by the Roman officials at Philippi and the sufferings of the Christian flock at Thessalonica he may well have seen tokens of the inevitable conflict between the tyranny of secular rule and the authority of Christ. If such thoughts as these coloured the speech of Paul and Silas at Thessalonica, we can understand the charge made against them in this city: "These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, even Jesus." It was in principle the charge alleged against Jesus Himself before Pilate, compelling the Roman governor to pronounce his fatal sentence. "If thou let this man go, thou art *not Cæsar's friend*: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh *against Cæsar*." So "the Jews cried out"; and at the bottom, the accusation was true; their sharp-sighted enmity rightly discerned that the rule of Jesus was fatal to Cæsarism. If the Apostle preached, as he could do without any denunciation of the powers that be, a universal, righteous, and equal judgment of mankind approaching, in which Jesus (crucified by the Roman State) would be judge and king; if he taught that "the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. vii. 31), and that an atheistic, world-wide despotism would one day culminate in some huge disaster, to be itself "consumed by the breath of the Lord and the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. ii. 3-11), there were grounds plausible enough for accusing him of treasonable doctrine,

even though no express political offence had been committed. That such a judgment was impending was "good news" indeed; but it was of deadly import to the imperial tyranny of Caligulas and Neros, and to the social and political fabric of the pagan world. In this consequence lies the most significant and distinctive, though not perhaps the most obvious, feature of the "gospel" of Thessalonica.

It may be further added, that the hope of Christ's return in glory was the consolation best suited to sustain the Church, as it sustained the Apostle himself, in the great fight of affliction through which they were passing.

5. *The moral issues* of the gospel inculcated by St Paul at Thessalonica, the new duties and affections belonging to the new life of believers in Christ, are touched upon at many different points, but not developed with the fullness and systematic method of subsequent Epistles. Most prominent here are the obligation to *chastity*, as belonging to the sanctity of the body and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. iv. 1-8); and the claims of *brotherly love*, with the good order, the peace, and mutual helpfulness that flow from it (1 Thess. iv. 9, 10, v. 12-15; 2 Thess. iii. 14, 15). What is singular in these Epistles is the repeated and strong injunctions they contain on the subject of *diligence* in labour and attention to the ordinary duties of life (1 Thess. iv. 10-12; 2 Thess. iii. 6-15).

A striking moral feature of the gospel proclaimed at Thessalonica is manifest in the conduct of the missionaries of Christ themselves,—their incessant labour, their unbounded self-denial, the purity and devoutness of their spirit, and their fearless courage (1 Thess. i. 6, 7, ii. 1-12; 2 Thess. iii. 8, 9).

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