



## “Thankful for the Gospel”

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

**Idea:** The gospel is the power of God for salvation.

**Intro:** Charlotte Elliott was a beautiful and extremely talented young lady who lived in Brighton, England in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She had an enormous talent as a singer, songwriter, and musician. People came from all over England to see her in concert. One particular evening, she was starring in a musical play. The show was a sell-out. There happened to be a Swiss Evangelist named Cesar Malan in Brighton that day who really wanted to see Ms. Elliott perform. He was in England preaching at several churches throughout the country.

That evening Elliott’s beauty, talent, and giftedness as a musician blessed Malan. So afterward, he stood in line with everyone else to have an opportunity to meet and speak with her. Now, Charlotte Elliott had been raised in a Christian home, so when Malan finally gets up to where she is greeting her fans he says, “Have you ever considered using your talent for Jesus Christ?” She just stared at him with no response. Then he follows that statement up by saying, “Have you ever trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior?” And you know what she does? Elliott gets offended. She’s obviously offended by evidence of her body language. In fact she even tells him that she is offended. And Cesar Malan, this great Swiss evangelist, says, “Well, I didn’t mean to upset you, but I just wanted to share with you the love of Jesus Christ for your life.” Then he leaves.

Then for a number of days, Charlotte Elliott stewes over Malan’s words. She doesn’t know what to do with them. And then she begins to come under some real conviction about how she had responded to him. She said, “You know, I was really ugly to Mr. Malan. Maybe I should find him and apologize.” It was not hard to find where Malan was preaching. So she went to him and said, “I am sorry for reacting the way I did. I really would like to come to Christ, but I can’t. My life is such a mess. I need to clean my life up before I come to Jesus. Then Cesar Malan looked at her with the love of Jesus in his eyes and simply said, “Come to Him just as you are.” But she refused.

Elliott left Malan and went home. But that night sleep evaded her. She kept wrestling over the words Malan had said. So at two in the morning, Elliott finally crawled out of bed, got on her knees, and cried out to the Lord in confession and repentance. She gave her life to Jesus. The songwriter that she was, Elliott walked over to a desk and began to write these words:

Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Charlotte Elliott was forever and eternally changed by the power of the gospel that night. She became a champion for Christ, writing around 150 hymns that have greatly blessed the church. She never got over what Jesus did for her. She was forever thankful for the gospel.

During this month, on the three Sundays leading up to Thanksgiving, we are addressing the subject of gratitude or thankfulness, but we are doing it a little different than normal. We are examining the grateful words of Paul in First Thessalonians chapter one and discovering three gifts the Lord has given us: the church, the gospel, and the mission.

**Inquiry:** The apostle knew the Thessalonian believers. It was Paul, Timothy, and Silas who had introduced them to the gospel and established the church there (Acts 17:1-9). He had seen the mighty transformation that had taken place in their lives through the redemptive work of Christ. In this letter, Paul, most likely writing from Corinth, sought to encourage and equip these believers in their faith. As he began the letter, he couldn't help but express his gratitude for the work of God that was so evident in their lives.

Last Sunday we looked at his thankfulness for the church. We learned that the active faith, love, and hope demonstrated by the church were incredible examples that motivated other believers to greater sanctification. We also learned that they were a strong rebuke that brought correction to those walking at a guilty distance. Today, we are looking at why we should be thankful for the gospel.

Read First Thessalonians 1:4-5.

Paul thanked God for the Thessalonian believers because he was sure of their election by God. How could he be sure? What was the evidence? Paul had seen evidence in their lives that they were part of the called people of God. He had seen and heard about their working faith, laboring love, and enduring hope (1:3). There had been a mighty change in them. Life transformation had taken place. They were not the people they used to be. Jesus had made a difference.

How did Jesus make a difference in the Thessalonians' lives? It was through the power of the gospel (1:5). What is the gospel? The gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) literally means "good news." This good news centers on Jesus and what He came to do for men, women, boys, and girls. It is the message that Jesus preached when He said, "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10). It is the message Paul had received from God and the message he gave his life to proclaiming. He preached that Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and God raised Him from the dead (1 Cor 15:1-4). He declared to the Romans: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*" (Rom 1:16). This is the message the disciples had also received from God. Peter and John declared: "*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

The gospel is the good news that broken people like us can be in relationship with the one and only righteous, perfect, holy, and just God. How can that be? I think we all realize that we are not perfect, and I think we all have an understanding that God is good and better than we are. So how then does a

less than perfect person come into relationship and be welcomed by perfect and holy God? This is the good news of the gospel.

The Bible teaches that every person was designed and created by God. He has a design for every area of our lives—our families, marriages, money, sex life, work life, and just plain life. God designed us to be in relationship with Him, but we have all departed from that design. The Bible calls this sin. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God's command in the garden, they brought God's curse upon them and passed it on to us (Gen 3). We are now born with a sinful nature, so sin comes naturally to us. There is no one who gets it right all of the time. We all sin and fall short of God's perfect design (Rom. 3:23). This sin leaves us in brokenness.

Brokenness is easy for most of us to understand. It feels like broken relationships, addiction, depression, discouragement, guilt and shame. We all want out of brokenness, so we try to fix it. We medicate it with drugs or numb it with alcohol. We strive to be better people, hoping that somehow, someday, our good will outweigh our bad. We look for ways to alleviate our pain. When we do that, we just get more and more broken. This feels like a bad thing, but in many ways brokenness is a good thing because it's the way God gets our attention. When we feel broken on the inside and everything's all messed up, we know something needs to change.

The Bible has a word for the change we all need...the gospel. The good news the Bible declares is that God has done for you and me what we could not do for ourselves. He made a way where there was no way. God the Father sent God the Son to this world. His name was Jesus. He was fully God and fully man. Jesus lived a perfect life, keeping and fulfilling the Law. Therefore, He was able to offer His life as a sacrifice on the cross to atone or pay the penalty for our sin. The Bible says Jesus' blood was shed for our forgiveness as He died on the cross. He was buried in a tomb for three days before rising from the dead and ascending back to the Father in heaven. Jesus did this so that far from God people could experience God's design for their lives.

In order to experience God's solution for our brokenness, the Bible declares that we must repent and believe the gospel.

The change we really need comes only from Jesus. When we repent, we choose to turn away from our sin and ourselves and turn to Jesus. Instead of trusting in our ability to earn our way to heaven and a better life, we believe in Jesus' provision through the cross. We believe that His sacrifice and resurrection are sufficient. When we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior and put our trust in His death and resurrection, the Bible says we will be saved from our sins (Romans 10:9-10).

We are now able to pursue and recover God's design for our lives. Jesus' work on the cross, made it possible to have a relationship with the God who created us for Himself. Our dead spirits are resurrected to new life in Christ, so we can now pursue the relationship we were created for. As a result we can recover God's great design for our lives. In doing so, Jesus sends us right back out into a broken world to tell others how to find their way out of brokenness.

Paul thanked God for the gospel that had so radically transformed the lives of those in the church of Thessalonica. He rejoiced in its proclamation because He understood its power.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek – Romans 1:16*

He also rejoiced because of what the gospel reveals about God. The gospel reveals:

## 1. The Love of God (vs. 4)

The God of the Bible is a God of love (1 John 4:8). John 3:16 clearly declares God's love.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*

How did God give His Son? The Bible declares that the Son was sacrificed on a cross to atone for man's sin.

*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8*

Do you see the love of God in the cross? Do you see the love of God flowing in the blood of the cross? Do you see the love of God in the kindness of the cross (Rom 2:4)? God didn't have to provide an atonement for our sin. He could have rejected us and judged our sin. Instead in His love for you and me, He has chosen us to be children of God through the power of the gospel. The gospel reveals the love of God.

## 2. The pursuit of God (vs. 5)

The gospel came to the Thessalonians. God was the initiator. The Bible teaches that human beings cannot and will not pursue God (Rom 3:9-18). We are broken. God's design is broken in us. But God, the Bible teaches, pursues men, women, boys, and girls.

God came to Abraham in Haran. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush in Midian. God called to Samuel in Eli's home. Jesus found James and John on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And He confronted Saul on the road to Damascus. God is the great pursuer! He will hunt you down. When He is on your trail, there is nowhere you can hide. He pursues you because He loves you.

The gospel came to the Thessalonians, and they believed and were changed. Today, the gospel comes to you. Will you believe and be changed? The gospel reveals the pursuit of God.

## 3. The earnestness of God (vs. 5)

I love the word *earnest*. It is not a word that is used very often today. It speaks of a sincere or intense conviction. This is the picture we see in how the gospel came to the Thessalonians. The gospel came to them in word, but it also came in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.

First, the Word of God was preached. This is how faith comes to people...through the preaching, teaching, and reading of God's Word (Rom 10:17). But God didn't leave it there. He coupled the preaching of the Word with power and with the Holy Spirit. Miracles took place in the lives of the people, which validated the good news. The Holy Spirit was active throughout the process, drawing people to faith, guiding people to truth, and granting assurance to the messengers. Leon Morris speaks to this point. He points out that Paul, Silas, and Timothy "had the assurance in their own hearts that, as they were preaching, the power of God was at work."

The gospel reveals the earnestness of God. He longs to be in relationship with men, women, boys, and girls. He longs for them to know Him, and for Him to know them. That is why He will go to great lengths to get the gospel to a person. He'll send a Bible. He'll send a witness. And He will bind Himself to the process in order to ensure that the lost sheep is found.

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

– 2 Peter 3:9

**Conclusion:** Repentance and faith are the requirements for salvation (Acts 2:38). It seems so simple. In fact, it is that simple (Rom 10:9). So why don't more people experience this salvation? It is because we all tend to react to the gospel like Charlotte Elliott did. She was offended by the thought of having to confess her sin. She obviously knew there were some parts of her life that were broken, but in no way did she want to disclose them to others, including Jesus. She wanted to fix them herself. She wanted to clean her life up and then come to Jesus. In many ways, she thought this was the only way for her to be accepted by the Lord.

The good news of the gospel is that you cannot clean yourself up. A polluted well cannot of itself produce clean water. The well needs an outside force to come and clean it from the inside out. Jesus is that for you and me. He has paid the penalty for our sin upon the cross. Every sin you have committed and will commit was laid upon Him and nailed to the cross (Col 2:14). The debt has been paid. The legal demands have been met. It is finished. Jesus has done for you what you could not do.

The good news of the gospel is that now you can receive the forgiveness of sin, which Jesus has purchased for you. It comes through repentance and faith. Jesus doesn't require you to clean up before coming to Him. In fact that disqualifies you. He says, "Come" (Matt 11:28). Come to Him in your sin. Come to Him in your shame. Come to Him in your brokenness. Come to Him with your doubts, your fears, and your mess. Come to Him with your addiction. Come to Jesus just as you are, and you will find rest.

Don't be offended by the gospel. Instead, see the love of God in the gospel. See the pursuit of God in the gospel. And see the earnestness of God in the gospel. God loves you and me. We know this is true because of the gospel. Therefore, what would keep you from responding to it with repentance and faith today? Like Charlotte Elliott, will you come just as you are?