

SERMON THEME: LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

SERMON TOPIC: JASON OF THESSALONICA

SERMON TEXT: ACTS 17:1-9

¹Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." ⁴And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." ⁸And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. ⁹And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

PROLOGUE

- New series on the reading of Paul's epistles will start with an introductory passage in the book of Acts, to the book of Thessalonians.
- We will go through today:
 - Cultural background and identity of Jason and Thessalonica.
 - Jason's conversion and the start of the Thessalonica church.
 - Development of Thessalonica church.
 - Expectations of and living out the Christian life.

A. CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND IDENTITY OF JASON AND THESSALONICA

- Who is Jason? He was:
 - A Jew who lived in Thessalonica and was well to do.
 - A trader in the ports and market and had earned a handsome fortune over the years.
 - One of the founding members of the church in Thessalonica together with Paul.
 - Regarded as a kinsmen to Paul (Rom 16:21 ESV).
- Background of Thessalonica
 - Founded in 315 BC by a Macedonian king, King Cassander, who named the place after his wife Thessalonike.
 - The Roman favoured the place so much, they nominated it as the provincial capital in the region of Macedonia.
 - Today, it is known as Thessaloniki, and is the second largest city in Greece.
 - It's strategic location at the crossroad of trade and commerce with a natural sheltered harbour, renders it an important seaport and a common stop along the trade routes through the years.



- Geographically located along one of the main roads, it connects the eastern part of the Roman empire Byzantium (today known as Istanbul) to the western part in Rome.
- It was a melting pot of culture, people, mix of languages, travellers, and traders.
- Rome designated Thessalonica as a free/autonomous city.
 - The freedom meant that different religions could exist side-by-side.
 - The Greek culture of pagan worship, idols and temples thrived.
 - The Roman empire brought in their religion – worship of their emperor – and a temple for Augustus was built.
 - The Jews had their synagogues and could freely live out their beliefs.
 - The city thrived so well, that the Romans even went on to build Roman baths, palaces, and a hippodrome – all done to put a good branding on the city for the world to see the importance and beauty of this city.
 - As a flourishing cosmopolitan city with a melting pot of culture, there was bound to be a fair share of worldliness – drinking, gambling, sex trades, infidelities, homosexuality, class divisions, greed, bribery, and corruption.

B. JASON'S CONVERSION AND THE START OF THE THESSALONICA CHURCH

- Around 50 A.D., Paul received a vision to go to Thessalonica (Acts 16:8-10 ESV).
 - He came with the news that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, had already come, died and resurrected.
 - Jesus was born as a man, and died on the cross for the sins of the world, all because of His love for us.
 - As long as we believe in Him, we will be saved and will see Him in His Second Coming.
 - The message of Jesus was fresh for Jason and the listeners at that time – we will never be good enough, yet we are saved; not because of what we did or what we have, but because of His love for us.
- The Jewish leaders seemed to hate Paul, but Jason felt the love of Jesus and was moved to accept Christ as his Saviour and Lord.
- For three weeks, Paul preached in the synagogue, after which the Jewish leaders conspired to kick him out and were supported by much of the congregation.
- Jason was convicted by God that all the fortunes that he had amassed over the years, were for this moment of blessing, he invited Paul into his house.
- This was the birth and start of the church in Thessalonica – in Jason's house.
 - This church was a product of God's miraculous vision to Paul, planted by God Himself.
 - The Gospel of Jesus does not discriminate.
 - Every week, people of all walks of life were worshiping together in Jason's house – Jew, Gentile, men, women, slave, or free man.
 - People were shocked at Jason's entertainment of peasants and gentiles in his house.
 - Eventually, the Jews in the synagogue were jealous with Paul's preaching and they formed a mob to go to Jason's house.
 - Jason tried to protect Paul, Timothy, Silas and Luke.
 - He and a few brothers were dragged out instead and brought before the city authorities.

- He was accused of causing trouble for Caesar and the Roman empire.
- Yet Jason was not scared as he knew that Jesus is with him.
- It is an honour to suffer for the gospel, as Jesus Christ had suffered.
- The gospel is meant to:
 - Turn the world and turn our lives around.
 - Make us uncomfortable.
 - Make us desire for something that is not found in this world and for the things of God.
 - Make us love our enemy.
 - Grant us a peace that is not found in this world.

C. DEVELOPMENT OF THESSALONICA CHURCH.

- After Paul left Thessalonica, the weekly gathering to worship continued in Jason's house.
 - Without the presence of an anchor preacher/leading pastor, the lay leaders stepped up to lead the growing congregation.
 - In the early days, the church faced oppression and accusations from the Jews and Gentiles
 - The church was discouraged with the adversity they faced.
 - While Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica personally, he sent Timothy back to visit and encourage the Thessalonian church in 51 A.D.
 - Paul also wrote letters to encourage the young Thessalonian church.
 - 1 Thessalonians was written, when Timothy returned to Corinth where Paul was at, reporting to Paul that the Thessalonian church was doing well. This letter was then delivered by Timothy when he returned for a second visit.
 - Paul then wrote a second letter (2 Thessalonian) teaching them important lessons about the second coming of Jesus Christ, and again, sends Timothy to deliver the letter on a 3rd visit.

D. EXPECTATIONS OF AND LIVING OUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

- For us, living the Christian Life, we can expect persecution and pressure from this world.
- In the face of such adversity, we must stand firm in the Gospel.
 - Christianity is counter cultural; it is supposed to challenge your way of life vs the way of life of the world.
 - The society is changing, and we face different pressures:
 - Repeal of 377a in the penal code.
 - Increasing in acceptance in abortion and divorce in society.
 - Push for the acceptance of transgender ideologies.
 - It is getting challenging to take a stand that is consistent with the teachings of the Bible.
 - More and more we see Christians are being accused of being narrow-minded and bigoted if we do not subscribe to the changes in our culture.
- Persecution and pressure changes with each generation, and every generation must have its own way to stand up for the gospel.
- Three ways in which we can stand firm for the Gospel, and live out the Christian Life.
 1. Look at the encouragement of the past

- We can be encouraged as we look back in our lives and the history of our church, and how God has shaped us through miracles, visions and church pioneers.
- Our church and our personal faith are not the product of just one or two individuals.
 - It is a combination of many faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who:
 - Walked alongside us in prayer,
 - Interacting with us, and
 - Building communities with us.
 - Our church and our faith may have been started/planted by God, but God continues to bring the community of faith to rally around us, nurturing/watering us as we go through life.
- Think back on your history and the history of AMC:
 - Who were the Godly men or women who were instrumental in your life?
 - What did they do that was so significant for you?
 - What did you do about it?
 - How have you grown since that time?
- *If we don't take time to remember where we are and how we got here, all these can be easily forgotten in the fast pace of life.*
- The letters from the New Testaments were written not just for the Christians at that time, God has preserved them for all of us to read today.
 - They are as important to us today, as it was to the Christians then.
 - They remind us that all Christians have a past, and Jesus Christ has been writing our history since the beginning of time.
- If we are unable to see and be encouraged by our history in our faith walk, there are other ways for us to be connected to and be encouraged by, as we walk in our faith.
 - Form relationships and community(ies) with our Christian brothers and sisters.
 - Share and explore the Christian faith together and encourage one another.
 - It could be in a cell group, a Christian brother or sister that we meet with frequently to keep each other accountable, or a fellowship group that we serve in.
 - We must take time out of service to connect with, get to know, pray for and grow each other.
 - Whether we are serving in church or are involved in a church committee, don't let our service and relationship be defined by only work.
 - When God call us to serve, He has called us to live life together, and nurture each other's spiritual life.
- When we face persecution and pressure, we should not walk alone – the community is there for us to lean on.

2. Look at the encouragement of the future

- When Paul went to teach and plant the church in Thessalonica, he carried with him the message of hope.
- In his letters to the Thessalonian church, Paul also wrote about hope for the future because Jesus is:
 - Coming again.
 - Our Saviour.
 - Coming to make all things new.
- With this encouragement of the future, Jason could:
 - Keep up with the demands of growing the Thessalonica church.

- Face the persecution from the world.
 - Accept all the brothers and sisters that Jesus has brought into his life.
 - As Paul taught: our light and momentary affliction cannot compare to the glory that will be revealed when Jesus Christ comes again.
 - While we face persecution in our lives, we can be rest assured that the story and the end has been written – Jesus has the final victory.
3. *Between the past and the future, we live in the in-between and encourage people as you have been encouraged*
- We are encouraged by focusing not on our own circumstances but encouraging others with the hope and encouragement that we had received.
 - Think of the people who had encouraged you in the past.
 - Can we use the same words to encourage others?
 - Where are these people who had encouraged you in the past, where are they now?
 - Can we use the same words to encourage them if they need encouragement?
 - Paul wrote letters to encourage the churches.
 - We may not be in the habit of writing letters now, but we can easily send someone a message over WhatsApp or Telegram.
 - Share our personal experiences to encourage people around us.
 - The many epistles that were written in the past had one important purpose – To encourage the Christian communities to stand firm in their faith and in the Gospel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel any persecution or pressure from being a Christian?
2. If not, are Christians supposed to feel persecution or pressure when they profess their faith?
3. If so, how does the message encourage you to stand firm in the Gospel and continue to profess your faith?
4. How can you encourage fellow Christians who feel persecution or pressure because of their profession of faith?