

479 Saviour, Always Thine!

In the light of the war in Ukraine, last week we concentrated on our need as God's Christ-redeemed people to put "first things first" whatever our circumstances may be, by our trusting steadily in the Lord and playing our part within that trust as Christ's faithful disciples.

Thessalonica, as with Ephesus which we came across last time, was also a city of immorality and idolatry. In Acts Chapter 17, we read how Paul, "as his manner was, went in unto them, (that is, to the Jews in their synagogue), and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures", concerning Jesus' suffering, resurrection, and Messiahship (from 17.2-3, KJV). As frequently happened in such situations, some Jews believed, as well as "of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (17.4). Then "the Jews which believed not ... set all the city in an uproar" (from verse 5). As a result, "the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea", and where did the two of them then go? ... "into the synagogue of the Jews"! (from verse 10). What a picture we gain from these verses in Acts Chapter 17 as to Paul's character, ministry and methods. He doggedly put "first things first", namely the Lord Himself, and then, ever consciously under Him, the crucial ministry which the Lord had entrusted to Paul (Acts 9.15-16).

So by the Holy Spirit-empowered preaching of Paul, a Christian community was formed in this great city of Thessalonica. Its members consisted of some Jews who were well-versed in the Scriptures (now for us the Old Testament), but the majority were Gentiles. Some of these Gentiles were "devout" already with some spiritual understanding (Acts 17.4), but as the community grew, others joined who were literally "fresh off the streets", with little clue about anything other than a simple faith in "Jesus Christ is Lord" (eg., Romans 10.8-13) - whatever that truth might involve in daily life.

As we read Acts and the Epistles we keep in mind the tensions existing within these early Christian churches: tensions between those of Jewish and Gentile heritage, whose only common ground was a shared faith in Christ; tensions between them all over what living a Christian life was actually to mean in practice; and tensions between these new young Christians and the worldly culture in which they were placed. Because of these various tensions, those of us coming along much later on are so blessed by the epistles which were written by the Holy Spirit, through the various human writers, into the tricky situations our Christian forebears

were faced with. A few verses drawn from I Thessalonians Chapter 5 serve as good examples.

Firstly, as “children of light”, rather than of night or darkness (I Thessalonians 5.5), we are not to “sleep”, as others do, but to “watch and be sober”. In practice, for both those times and these times today, we thus remain alert as to what is going on in the world around us, in the light of God’s Word and promises. As far as we can see, which people, events, situations and trends are dominating the news headlines and subsequent discussion programmes?

A surprisingly useful aid to our “watching with soberness” exists before our very eyes, in the television adverts. These skilled adverts seek to present in the brief timespan available the product for sale being set neatly within a quickly-drawn image of contemporary society – often these days meaning a society that is cool, trendy, fun-loving, ethnically-mixed, hectic, success-driven, caring, and so on. No doubt the adverts successfully sell products, but by their constant repetition into millions of homes, they also accelerate into greater reality the very image of society which they choose to portray; inadvertently, people may well gradually adopt what they are always being shown. Little wonder then that by observing a few 5-minute sessions of TV adverts with notepad, pencil and Bible to hand, we can learn a great deal of value about contemporary assumptions and priorities.

Secondly, remembering that we are the footsoldiers in a fierce spiritual war, we are to put on the spiritual armour of faith and love, and “the hope of salvation” (from vv.6 and 8 / Ephesians 6.10-18). We don this armour and consciously rely on it, knowing that in Christ we are delivered from the judgments of God’s wrath “to live together with him” (that is, Christ) - a source of great comfort and blessing in these troubling times (from vv.9-11).

Finally for this time, we mention from Chapter 5.16-22 eight further, key instructions to keep us on the right path in our Christian lives: rejoicing, praying and thanking; quenching not the Spirit, despising not prophesyings, and proving all things; holding fast to the good, and abstaining from all appearance of evil.

As the grand old hymn “Who is on the Lord’s side?” puts it at the end, “Master, Thou wilt keep us By thy grace divine, Always on the Lord’s side, Saviour, always Thine!”

