

**WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY
THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES**

**COMMENTARY
ON MESSAGE #16**

May 27th, 2018

At this point in our study of I Thessalonians we are taking some time to explore what the Bible teaches about the future kingdom when Jesus Christ reigns on the earth. By way of reminder, the term “kingdom” does not appear in either of Paul’s letters to the church in Thessalonica. But he does have much to say about “the Day of the Lord”, and it is as the Day of the Lord reaches completion that Jesus will reign as King. All the nations of the world, while continuing to have their distinct national identities, will acknowledge the KING OF KINGS.

Q1: Can you think of what practical value there is for us today in knowing these things about the future?

I fear that sometimes Christians in America, who tend to be very pragmatic, clamor too much for practicality. Now don’t get me wrong; there is a huge need to understand how to apply what the Bible teaches in a practical manner so that we can be WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY. But interest in what is “practical” needs to stand upon a more substantial platform, and that platform is God’s eternal truth as revealed in scripture. And sometimes that truth should simply stand by itself and be admired for itself and not immediately be asked “how is this practical for me?” That being said, this installment of commentary will try to honor both the glorious truth that Jesus is King and also look for how this truth can have a practical (and positive!!) impact upon us each and every day.

In this week’s sermon which goes with this commentary (#16 in the series), we began to ask and answer six questions about the Kingdom. One of the passages that was referenced is Acts 4:23-31. Time did not permit us to explore this passage during the sermon but it is so valuable that it is worth digging into it with this commentary. Let’s begin with some background.

Q2: Please read Acts 4:1-22. What had Peter and John said and done that created conflict with the religious leaders?

Q3: According to 4:17, what were the religious leaders attempting to do?

In Acts 4:21 the religious leaders threatened the apostles. Considering their power (and their willingness to abuse their power as seen in their crucifixion of Jesus Christ) those threats carried the possibility of imprisonment and death.

Q4: Have you ever been faced with the possibility of suffering some kind of loss because of your faith in Jesus Christ?

Upon their release, Peter and John met with other believers and told them what had happened. The first thing this little band of Christians did was to start praying. Their prayer was one for the ages.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One.' Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 4:23-31

To read this prayer is to see a group of bold and confident Christians who refused to be bullied into silence. But be sure to notice that their confidence did not come from believing in their own strength. Their confidence was based upon the character of the Lord.

Christian, this is a good thing to remember when you face circumstances that threaten to overwhelm you.

In verse 24 they begin the prayer by considering the power and greatness of God. Notice the Name they use when speaking to God = "Sovereign Lord". This name is used only six times in the entire New Testament. The Greek word is DESPOTES from which we get the word despot. To modern Americans the word despot is very negative in tone, but it simply means an **absolute ruler who is above everyone**. An added meaning of Despotes is that He stands as master over the slaves that He owns. Again, we must be careful not to react to this concept from an American point of view. This master is involved with and concerned with the things that affect His slaves. A threat against them is a threat against Him! An attack against them is an attack against Him!

Q5: Why do you think they prayed to this Name on this particular occasion?

In praying to the **Despotes** they also acknowledged that everything that exists (and everyone) is totally dependent upon God for its existence. The Christians were acknowledging that God is **bigger, greater, more powerful** and the **absolute authority** over every circumstance and every person that oppose us as we seek TO WALK OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY.

Notice, also, that they actually prayed scripture as they called upon the Lord (4:25-26). The scripture they prayed comes from Psalm 2:1-2. You might recall from the sermon that Psalm 2 is a royal psalm. It pertains to the King. It was written by Israel's greatest King, David, and served as a song to be sung whenever there was the coronation of a new King. However, it is ultimately Jesus Christ who is in view in Psalm 2. In other words, Psalm 2 is, among other things, a prophecy about King Jesus.

*"Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?"*

During his lifetime David faced threats from many quarters. In David's day the Philistines were a particular nasty opponent, but they were not the only ones who viewed Israel as an enemy. While David was a brave and gifted warrior, Israel as a whole was not particularly strong militarily. But Israel was the chosen people of God, the Sovereign Lord and Ruler of the entire universe which He spoke into existence.

Notice that Peter, John, and the other Christians that were praying with them connected Psalm 2 to their own challenges. In Acts 4:27 they saw how Herod and Pontius Pilate were no different than any other king, political authority or religious leader that opposed God.

Q6: Although it is not recorded in the prayer of Acts 4, what does Psalm 2:4-12 say about the threat posed by those who stand against God's people and God's plan?

The prayer of Acts 4 teaches us to focus on the character of God, especially when we feel threatened by circumstances or feel powerless to face them. A powerful lesson about God's character awaits us as we study about who Jesus is as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Q7: Are you currently facing something in your life that scares, intimidates or discourages you? How should you pray about these things?

Now take a look at what Peter, John, and the other Christians specifically asked God to do in Acts 4:29. They wanted God to enable them to speak with boldness. I don't know about you, but I would definitely have been praying, "Lord, remove the threat!" There is an important truth here that we need to incorporate into our approach to living life for the glory of God. There are many times when God does remove the threat or change our circumstances. But He never promised to always do this. He actually promised us something far greater. He promised that He will always be with us and that no matter what we face and no matter how weak and inadequate we might feel, His grace will be sufficient for us and His strength will be magnified in our weakness (see II Corinthians 12:7-10 ... a very significant truth).

We would never actually pray this way, but isn't the following prayer close to how we often think:

"King Jesus, please don't make me go into battle for you.
Please let me just stay at a safe distance and watch others
stand for you and battle for truth."

The attitude behind this prayer will always get in the way and interfere with the glorious calling of WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY. Still, where His children are concerned, God is kind, He is gentle and He is merciful. He understands how fear attacks us. Remember the words of our King in John 14:1, 27. Do not let fear overpower you. Your Savior is the KING OF KINGS and someday all the nations will be His footstool (Psalm 110:1). Whatever opposition we face in the here and now can only exist because God gives His permission for it to exist to accomplish His purposes. Let what God has revealed about the future guide you and guard your heart today.