



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

REFLECTIONS ON THESSALONICA

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Let me remind you from the outset that your legislative agenda must not be your own nor for personal gain. It is your constituents that God providentially prompted to put you into servant leadership on this level. As a servant your objective is to serve the One who placed you into office. It is first and foremost God whom you serve, then others (your constituents), and finally yourself. Whenever you confuse this paradigm and mix the arrangement, you find yourself in the condition we are in today in the state of South Carolina—starving for leaders with character, an economy that can't take care of the poor and weak among us, and a thirst for righteousness lacking in modern day government.

Our state did not arrive in this state of affairs (delinquency) by placing others first! I've been ministering in South Carolina for 9 years now and I know the guise portrayed as serving others. It's a sham! Servant leadership always seeks the best interest of others above our own:

Philippians 2:3-4 reminds each of us to- "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*"

So as we begin the study of 1 Thessalonians, "Leadership During Difficult Days," let me remind each of you that being a leader is difficult because making decisions based on the best interest of others is not popular in this arena. Our state faces difficult economic conditions. A political machine focused on personal interests and special interest groups burlesquing businesses and its agenda will never seek the best interest of the citizens who put political leaders into office.

At the outset you must make a decision, are you going to be the leader God designed you to be or is your agenda something else? Being a leader is difficult and these are difficult days. Perilous times call for precipitous people with backbone to endure the sharpest knife, swiftest arrow and the shrewdest people.

May our study of 1 Thessalonians equip you to become all that God intends for you to be. Will you be number with the Disciples of Jesus Christ as men and women "who turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6)? Will you hear "well done good and faithful servant" from the lips of our Lord?

Let us remember that our Lord took 12 ordinary men after 3 1/2 years of mentoring and discipleship to bring about the spread of Christianity to where

we are today. Imagine what He could do with His servants and leaders to transform a nation?

As we begin our study of First Thessalonians we will examine during our introduction: 1) The City of Thessalonica; 2) The Church of Thessalonica; 3) The Citizens of Thessalonica.

THE CITY OF THESSALONICA:

Historically, Thessalonica was named "Thermaï" meaning "Hot Springs." Its strategic location on the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea made the city, founded in 315 B.C. by Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great who became king of Macedonia, an important city.

In 186 B.C. the Romans conquered Macedonia and divided it into 4 parts making Thessalonica the capital of its region. Possibly one of the greatest assets of Thessalonica was the Egnatian Way, a major east-west thoroughfare of the Roman Empire that allowed business to prosper because of its location and infrastructure to support a booming economy. It was deemed a "free city" ruled by its representative people under the government of the Roman Empire, thus a center of political activity.

William Barclay states,

It is impossible to overstress the importance of the arrival of Christianity in Thessalonica. If Christianity was settled there, it was bound to spread East along the Egnatian Road until all Asia [Minor] was conquered and West until it stormed even the city of Rome. The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was crucial in the making of it into a world religion.¹

In the providence of God, He raised up the Romans Empire to carry out the spread of the gospel and Christianity to the remotest part of the earth.

How will you be used of God to carry out the advancement of Christianity in the state of South Carolina? Will you become an instrument in the hand of the Master or will you become a by-gone name in the political scene of this state? My prayer is that you would become all that God has designed for you as His servant in the legislative arena.

THE CHURCH OF THESSALONICA:

The Church at Thessalonica most likely commenced on the day of Pentecost with "visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes" (Acts 2:10) with their

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return to the empire. When Paul and his missionary team, Silas and Timothy, arrived after traveling from Philippi through Amphipolis and Apollonia they arrived at the local synagogue on his second missionary journey. As was his custom, Paul went to the “synagogue of the Jews” and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures by explaining and giving evidence that in light of the death, burial, and resurrection that Jesus is the Christ the promised Messiah.

Then, as it stills does today, the message of Jesus Christ ignites heated passions. But the results remain the same—some believe others remain hardened in unbelief.

Those who believed at Thessalonica became believers joining Paul and the missionary team. Some God-fearing Greeks (proselytes) and prominent women came to faith in Jesus Christ through the faithful proclamation of the truth.

THOSE WHO WOULD INFLUENCE THE WORLD FOR CHRIST MUST RECOGNIZE THAT THEY CANNOT DO IT ALONE. DISCIPLING OTHERS, WHO IN TURN DISCIPLE STILL OTHERS (CF. 2 TIM. 2:2), CAUSES EXPONENTIAL GROWTH AND MAGNIFIES CHRISTIANITY'S IMPACT ON THE WORLD. SUCH SPIRITUAL REPRODUCTIVITY WAS A KEY ELEMENT IN PAUL'S MINISTRY. . .THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH WAS A SPIRITUALLY REPRODUCING CHURCH. TWO OF ITS MEMBERS, ARISTARCHUS AND SECUNDUS, JOINED PAUL IN HIS EVANGELISTIC WORK (ACTS 20:4). PAUL COMMENDED ALL THE CHURCH MEMBERS IN 1 THESSALONIANS 1:8, BECAUSE “THE WORD OF THE LORD [HAD] SOUNDED FORTH FROM [THEM], NOT ONLY IN MACEDONIA AND ACHAIA, BUT ALSO IN EVERY PLACE [THEIR] FAITH TOWARD GOD [HAD] GONE FORTH.” THE THESSALONIANS USED THEIR STRATEGIC LOCATION ON THE EGNATIAN WAY TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL FAR BEYOND THEIR OWN CITY.²

The question could be asked—Whom are you influencing for Christ? God has placed you in a “strategic location” as a legislator. Time and eternity will prove whom you influence. Let me remind you that you are placed in the South Carolina legislature for a far greater purpose than impacting the political process. You are first and foremost in this position of leadership to advance the Kingdom of God, and what is that? It is the advancement of

the gospel of Christ within your sphere of influence. Will you hear, well done good and faithful servant?

THE CITIZENS OF THESSALONICA:

The citizens of Thessalonica were the same in any city. Some were desirous to hear the gospel, while others were hostile to it. The ruckus that ensued because of the proclamation of Jesus Christ was no small insurrection for the mob followed them from Thessalonica to Berea.

These Jews hearing of the conversions taking place in their city, sought the local roughnecks to start a campaign to oust Paul, Timothy, and Silas by saying that these “men who have upset the world have come here also.” Their complaint to the Roman authority was that Paul and the missionary team were teaching there was another king other than Caesar.

To proclaim another king other than Caesar was an extremely repulsive act. Citizens and political leaders knew this was an affront to Rome, and if the leaders failed to do anything it would put into question their status as a free city. As Sir Ramsey concludes—

THE PEOPLE AND THE POLITARCHS KNEW ALL TOO WELL THAT THE VERY SUGGESTION OF TREASON AGAINST THE EMPERORS OFTEN PROVED FATAL TO THE ACCUSED; AND IT COMPELLED THE POLITARCHS TO TAKE STEPS, FOR, IF THEY FAILED TO DO SO, THEY BECAME EXPOSED TO A CHARGE OF TREASON, AS HAVING TAKEN TOO LITTLE CARE FOR THE HONOUR OF THE EMPEROR. MANY A MAN WAS RUINED BY SUCH A CHARGE UNDER THE EARLIER EMPERORS.³

What will the citizens of South Carolina conclude about you? Are you a people-pleaser or are you a God-pleaser? Will your decisions affect your political position? Are you going to count the cost no matter what?

¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, Rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster, 1975), 181.

² John MacArthur, Jr.: *MacArthur NT Commentary, Acts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 326.

³ William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*. (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 229–30.