

# The Gospel in an Upside Down World

## 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5a

Today we start a new series in 1 Thessalonians. Even though it was written around 50AD it's just as relevant now as it was then.

In many ways Thessalonica was like Lausanne. It had a similar population, was the capital of its province, and people worshipped multiple idols. Yet within 20 years of Jesus resurrection there was a thriving church there, as a result of Paul preaching the gospel.

### **A New Community for an Upside Down World**

A riot occurred in Thessalonica against Paul and the Christians, who were accused of turning the world upside down. But it is the world that is upside down. God's answer to this brokenness is the church.

The word Paul uses for the church is *ekklesia*: the assembly of God's chosen people in the Old Testament. But here in Thessalonica there were Jews, gentiles, slaves, freemen, high and lowborn in this new community. It was a community where dividing walls were broken down in Christ.

Paul says the church is '*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*' It draws its life from God. It is his church. So this new community strikes at the root of our self-centredness that wants to have things 'my way'.

Paul calls them '*brothers loved by God.*' God's answer to the brokenness of society and families, is his family where all can know they are loved.

### **The Hallmarks of Community**

Despite all their imperfections, Paul thanks God for them. That is a better attitude than complaining! He thanks God for their faith, hope and love: the hallmarks of true Christianity. But he also thanks God for what flowed out of those three things: their '*work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope.*' Faith, love and hope always result in something tangible: the work of sharing our faith; the self-sacrificial service of love, the steadfastness of hope that endures suffering. This is true Christian community for an upside down world.

But how can you create that kind of a church, that kind of a community?

### **The Power Behind it All**

Paul thanks God that he has chosen them, because he knows the gospel came to them in power. Acts 17 tells us that Paul's message included the death and resurrection and reign of Jesus. When you know you are chosen by God, not because of anything you have done but because of his great love, it both humbles you and it lifts you up. You know you are no better than anyone else, so you welcome the broken. It gives you a great confidence, so you take risks of faith.

When you know Jesus went through the hard labour of the cross out of love for you, you will be filled with love for him and serve him and others.

When you know that he has risen from the dead and reigns as king, it will give you a deep security that means you can risk your earthly security. It gives you the steadfastness of hope.