

Introduction

We're in week two of our *Ready & Waiting* series this morning and we'll be looking at 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16. Make sure to open your bible or app so you can follow along and take notes. Just so you know, I'll be reading from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Like Brian said last week, the Thessalonian believers were swimming upstream, against the flow of their culture, as they sought to live Christ-centered, Jesus-honoring lives. Their environment did nothing to encourage them in their faith. Their city worshipped the Emperor and the numerous Greek and Roman gods. Declaring that there was only one true God angered a lot of people. So the fledgling Thessalonian church was pressed hard from the beginning. And Paul and his team were encouraged to hear how they had dug deep, continued to trust God and made it their priority to share the good news of Jesus, even with those who actively opposed them.

Today we're going to see Paul continue to encourage them as he reminds them that the Gospel they received wasn't just some man-made creative story but was truly the Word of God. And since the Thessalonian believers had trusted God to save them, they could also trust Him to empower them to keep walking faithfully even as they faced stiff opposition.

With that, let's take a look at the first four verses of 1 Thessalonians 2.

[READ]

"For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as

we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.”

Right Motive (v 1-4)

Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers that when he and his crew spent time with them that their time was fruitful: they gave their lives to Christ! Despite the Philippi fiasco where, without any sort of legal process, Paul and company were publicly stripped and beaten, then jailed for sharing the Gospel,¹ Paul and his team weren't thwarted. They moved on to Thessalonica, and were hit with more opposition. They were accused by irritated local Jewish leaders of 'turning the world upside down' with their message, encouraging people to follow another King named Jesus, instead of following Caesar.² You can imagine the pushback Paul and the guys experienced because of that. Regardless, they boldly shared the good news of love and forgiveness found in Jesus and it settled into the hearts and lives of many. The very fact that Paul was writing to their little church was overwhelming evidence that their time with them was absolutely worth it and God was honored.

Paul, Sylvanus (or Silas) and Timothy didn't come to them like all the hucksters that were so common. Unlike the swindlers of the day, where it was all about flash and cash, the message of Paul and his crew wasn't faulty, their motives weren't impure and their methods weren't questionable because their desire wasn't to please people but to please God. And God was their accountability. He called them to be witnesses to the unbelieving world and if they sought anything other than to proclaim the pure, untainted Gospel, they'd have to answer to God. They gladly endured all the hardship and suffering because they were doing precisely what God wanted and they got to see lives transformed when people experienced the love and forgiveness of God as they began to follow Jesus.

¹ Acts 16:19-39

² Acts 17:1-9

The Approach (v 5-8)

Take a look now at verses 5-8 and follow along with me while I read.

[READ]

“⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

Paul is continuing to describe how their motives were God-driven, not selfish. They weren't looking for favor or finances or fame—they were seeking to please God. Paul and company approached the Thessalonians with gentleness, care and love, like a tender mother with her baby.

Mamas

We've all seen moms with their tiny ones. They speak gently, touch gently, and nurture with tenderness. Nursing moms have only a couple things on their minds: how to best care for that child and how to get just a little more sleep. It's a 24/7 role for moms with little ones and while it's exhausting, every mom I know says it's totally worth it.

That's what Paul is saying to the little church: 'As apostles we could have come to you and, rightly, asked you to care for us but we didn't want you to think we were selling a product or telling cool stories for cash. We didn't want anything to get in the way of the truth and power of God's message for you. We weren't hiding anything. We didn't have ulterior motives. So, we flipped the script and we sought to take good care of *you*. We only wanted you to experience the fullness of the love and forgiveness of Jesus—so we were selfless in our devotion to you. Instead of making demands *of* you, we shared everything we had *with* you; not only the Good News of Jesus but our very lives. Everything we had we gladly shared with you because, as we served you, we grew to love you.'

And that's exactly how Jesus works: we're blessed when we love and serve others.

And here's an important reminder for all of us: people are not projects—they're dearly loved by God and He wants them close. As King of the Universe He wants to adopt us into His family and to bless us with all the rights and privileges that go with it. As children of God, saved by grace through faith in Jesus, we have been called to live and love and serve like Him. Jesus didn't come "...to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."³

So, like Paul and his colleagues, when we're telling people about the love and forgiveness of Jesus, we're not selling a product. We're not checking a box. We're not earning God's favor. We're not trying to get someone to sign on the dotted line. We're helping them get connected with the One who loves them best and most! That's what Paul was saying. In sharing the Gospel with them, Paul and his buddies grew to love them with deep affection, wanting only the best for them—like a loving mother for her children. Our love for Jesus motivates our service and as we serve we grow to love the ones we're serving. When your objective is to love and serve people like Jesus, it'll bless you, too.

Removing the Hurdles (v 9-12)

Paul continues his description of how they were different than the roaming teachers of the day. Check out verses 9-12. [READ]

"⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory."

³ Matthew 28:20, Mark 10:45

To avoid confusion and prevent accusation of a hidden agenda, Paul and the boys worked long hours at a separate job (probably tentmaking or at least doing leather work), so no burden would be on the Thessalonians. That way, they could just receive—for free—the message of God’s love for them. They would know that what Paul shared with them was given purely out of love for God and for them! No strings attached. Paul was committed to making sure that nothing got in the way of the message God had for them. Around here we talk about removing as many hurdles as we can so people can hear about the love of God in Jesus without distraction or confusion.

That’s why we do our best to use plain language instead of ‘Christian-ese’ when we’re talking about God and His Word. It’s why we offer top notch childcare, kids’ and student ministries—so parents feel good about where their kids are. When parents aren’t worried about their kids, they can better relax and hear what God has for *them*. We want to make it as easy as possible for you, your family, friends, neighbors and our community to get connected with Jesus and grow to love and serve Him. We’re committed to loving and serving well and we don’t want anything to hinder that. And here’s the beautiful part: this is what Jesus has called all of His followers to—lives committed to loving and caring for others, whether they’re Christ-followers or not! Today’s text is about how Paul and his crew loved and served the Thessalonians even before they knew Jesus. This is the call: walk worthy. You know Jesus...live like it.

We know Paul and company ministered in at least one home⁴, but the long hours that Paul and the guys put in (v 9) is probably referring to the fact that they were teaching and preaching *while they worked* a separate job. Very likely, the people would gather around while Paul worked and he would share with them as he stitched. Paul didn’t want to be lumped in with all the itinerant teachers and charlatans that traveled the region. They didn’t want to put any burden on the people or be accused of

⁴ Jason’s home from Acts 17.

taking money to deliver their message like others would. So they worked and as they worked they shared the Good News of Jesus.

There's a key takeaway for us in this: share the gospel where you are. Inviting people to a church event or Sunday morning is great! But you're at work or school way more than you're at church. And the time you spend at practice or rehearsal or just being in your neighborhood far exceeds the amount of time you spend here. As you go about your life, share the good news of Jesus. The nice part about ministering to people at work, school or on the team is that you have the chance to really know them, to better understand how you can care for them, pray for them, serve them...again, they're not projects: they're people Jesus loves. They're people He died for so that they could become the people God designed them to be for His glory. And we have the privilege of sharing that incredible news.

In verse 10 Paul makes a point of highlighting how they treated the Thessalonians with the utmost of integrity and propriety. Paul and his team were the same guys whether making tents, eating a meal, walking through town or hanging out at someone's house. The words that came out of their mouths matched how they lived, loved and served. Their talk and their walk were aligned.

Integrity today...

Today, I think we've grown accustomed to people saying one thing and doing or living another. Politicians are notorious for this. But when the messenger doesn't have integrity, they're not trusted. And if the messenger isn't trusted, neither is the message. Most people today don't have a problem with Jesus. They have a problem with people who profess Jesus and live like they don't know Him. I'm not talking about living flawlessly—it's not about perfection, but direction. I'm talking about an integrated life, where what's on the outside and what's on the inside match.

How we live in private matters just as much as how we live in public. Your thoughts, your self-talk, habits and attitudes, that internal stuff will eventually leak out and become part of your external life. Think about how much easier life would be if your external and internal matched up and they both pointed to a life worthy of the Kingdom and glory of God! That's integrity. Now, I realize that we're still in process. I know the Holy Spirit is still working in us, transforming us and shaping us into people that look more and more like Jesus. But, if there's a 'Sunday' you and a 'rest of the week' you, if there's 'bible study' you and a 'work' you, then something needs to change. Let me encourage you to lean into the Lord and ask Him to help you be the same person at home, work, church, at school, on the team and behind the wheel. Invite Him to have His will in you every moment and to help you become increasingly the person that He built you to be for His glory; a person whose words and walk help others want to know Jesus. Walk worthy.

Paul and his friends' integrity flowed out of their deep love for Jesus and their daily surrender to His leadership in their lives. And that love for Jesus overflowed onto the Thessalonians and how they treated them. Paul already highlighted how gentle, caring and loving they were (v 7), but he took it a step further and reminded them of how, like a father, they urged, encouraged and challenged the new believers to live lives worthy of the One who calls them His own. Since you belong to Jesus, live like it! Paul was basically saying, 'Remember how we lived, loved and served when we were with you? Live like *that* as you follow Jesus and serve to those in your community.' When Jesus comes back, I promise you, it'll be more than worth it when you finally experience the fullness of His glory and Kingdom. But, until then, there's going to be all kinds of challenges. Take a look at verses 13-16. [READ]

"¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from

your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!”

Unmistakably Changed (v 13-16)

Paul was pumped as he remembered how fully the beloved Thessalonians embraced the Good News of Jesus for it really was: God’s word. And he knew they belonged to Jesus because, when their countrymen who worshipped Caesar and Roman and Greek gods persecuted them, they continued to live boldly for Christ. Paul and his team thanked God constantly for what they saw in the lives of those new believers. Clearly the Spirit of God was moving in their lives. And as it turned out, the church in Thessalonica ended up being hugely influential throughout Macedonia.

Just like the first churches in the region of Judea suffered persecution at the hands of those who opposed the Gospel (in this case a bunch of Paul’s own people, the Jews), so the Thessalonians suffered persecution from their own people. Those first churches in Judea, the mother churches, sent missionaries all around the world. And, just like those mother churches, the daughter churches suffered persecution. Paul noted that many of his own people, from the beginning, didn’t want the things of God, didn’t want to hear correctives from the prophets of God and refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, God’s Anointed One who would rescue and restore God’s people. Despite that, the first Christians were Jews. The first missionaries were Jews.

Paul’s point is that following Jesus comes at a cost—like isolation from your community and hostility from your family. But for the Thessalonian believers, the all-consuming love of Jesus and hope of His return made it all worth it.

Persecution for your faith is a reality. It's happened since the first church gathered. There's always been push-back from those opposed to the Gospel. We have a very real enemy who doesn't want people to be saved. God, however, doesn't want any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.⁵ So we continue to serve and love those around us, living out our faith in Christ, and pointing people to Him wherever we find ourselves.

Right now, in Nigeria, Christians are dying for their faith. Since 2019, more than 19,000 Nigerian believers have been killed by Islamists. In the past 12 months, more than 200,000 Africans have been severely persecuted (raped, killed, displaced or abused).⁶ In North Korea there are an estimated 400,000 Christians but if they're discovered they're either executed or spend the rest of their lives in labor camps. Only the ruling Kim family is to be worshipped in North Korea.⁷ Globally, 1 in 7 Christians faces high levels of persecution.

We may not yet see that here in the U.S., but it's coming. Christianity seems to be the only faith that is not tolerated. Despite that, college campuses are seeing surges of students giving their lives to Christ. The stories are incredible! Schools in Central Florida, Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina and others are seeing students give their lives to Jesus and get baptized in huge numbers.

Here's the point: the Thessalonian Christians were experiencing persecution for their faith and they were in good company. Everywhere the Gospel goes, believers are persecuted. But that doesn't shut the believers down—it only fuels the spread of the Gospel because those who belong to Jesus long for people to experience the love and forgiveness of the God who made them. As Christ followers, we are called to make

⁵ 2 Peter 3:9

⁶ <https://joynews.co.za/a-year-of-suffering-200000-african-christians-killed-displaced-or-abused/>

⁷ <https://globalchristianrelief.org/stories/christian-persecution-statistics/>

Jesus known; to share the Good News of what Jesus has done so that others can be right with God.

Wrap

As Christ followers, it's our love for Jesus that motivates us to live our lives in alignment with Him. The things that are important to Him are becoming increasingly important to us. So each day, with the strength the Holy Spirit gives you, walk out your faith by selflessly loving others enough to show them the love of Jesus. Your motive is pure and your approach gentle and caring. You're not selling a product or checking a box. You've just been changed by Jesus and you don't want anyone to miss out. Because you're being continually transformed to be more like Him, there's a growing consistency between your external and internal self. And that's crucial because you don't want anything to get in the way of someone being able to trust the message you bring. You'll hit opposition. You may suffer deep persecution. But once you've been undeniably changed by Jesus, you'll do whatever you can to get others connected with Him.

That's how Paul and his companions were toward the Thessalonians. Paul's reminder of how their lives were changed was his encouragement to continue to live their lives fully surrendered to Jesus. As they actively and expectantly awaited the day when Jesus would return and they would enjoy the fullness of God and His Kingdom, he's urging them to walk worthy of their calling in Christ. To continue to walk in alignment with Jesus. To keep walking in ways that clearly reveal who they belong to and who they serve. To walk in ways that make it easier for people to hear the Good News of Jesus and gladly receive it.

And that's our encouragement today as well, friends: walk worthy.

Pray

For hearts fully surrendered to Jesus. That His priorities would be ours. That our lives would accurately reflect His leadership and power. That we would be loving in our relationships and bold in our witness. Have Your

will and way in our lives, Lord Jesus. Bless these friends as they go from this place and walk with you in their homes, schools, workplaces and neighborhoods.

Bless & Go

If you've come prepared to worship through giving, the black boxes are in the back by the doors.

Need prayer? We're here.