

**2** You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. **2** We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.

*[Map of Paul's Second Missionary Journey.]*

We learn the visit to Thessalonica was not without results! **Acts 17:<sup>2</sup> As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. <sup>4</sup> Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.**

The proclamation of the gospel was with sincerity – and the missionaries had been approved by God to share the gospel. It's quite possible that the Jews in Thessalonica were trying to downplay the ministry of these three missionaries – accusing that they had ulterior motives in sharing the gospel. Look at verse 3. **<sup>3</sup> For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup> On the contrary, Paul says, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.**

No way! say Paul and his companions. We are accountable to God. These three missionaries state that they are entrusted with the gospel. Do you feel that the gospel is a precious gift of God that you are entrusted with? The letter says we aim to please God, not people. Sharing the gospel should not be about gaining approval but about staying true to this principle. We should share the message of repentance and faith in Christ, asking God to guide us as we assess our readiness. Ultimately, our aim should be to bring glory to Him. One of the biggest hindrances to the spread of the gospel is our fear of what other people may think of us. We often seek friendship by being agreeable, but this may prevent us from honestly sharing the gospel.

There is no simple method to encourage non-believers to attend church, Bible studies, or related events. The gospel focuses on Jesus and invites people to reflect on what he taught, as well as his death, resurrection, and expected return as a judge in glory. In verse 5 our missionary forebears state: **<sup>5</sup> You know we never used flattery,** that is, to make people sit up and listen to the gospel. In this context, flattery denotes praise that is not genuine and is offered with the intent of obtaining influence or a strategic benefit. Evidently, in Thessalonica, there were accusations directed at the apostles, suggesting that they employed flattery to persuade individuals to accept their teachings and subsequently follow Christ. They may also have been accused of seeking personal gain from preaching the gospel, for the thought was ‘why else would these men bother’ when they were face-to-face with opposition, indeed persecution?

Again, look at verse 5: **<sup>5</sup> nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.** They call on God as a witness to their integrity and transparency toward the Thessalonians in fulfilling their responsibility to share the gospel entrusted to them. Look at verse 6. Paul, Timothy and Silas tell the readers in the church of the Thessalonians: **<sup>6</sup> We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.**

Paul's authority came from God's direct call on his life on the Damascus road, for we read in **Acts 9:<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.** Paul was given authority, by the church in Antioch, and later Jerusalem, to reach out to those who weren't Jews - Gentiles. **Acts 13 <sup>1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been**

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brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

When Paul shares the gospel with the Thessalonians, he expresses genuine pastoral care. He notes that although he was chosen by God, he did not always show concern for followers of Jesus. His appointment as an apostle was regarded as a remarkable event. **Initially, he had been commissioned by the Jewish authorities** to apprehend individuals identified as Christians and to ensure they were penalised for adhering to The Way, which involved believing in and following Jesus. Galatians 1:1 tells us of the change in his life, Paul said he was now sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. We have more than one image of Paul the missionary in our passage today. Paul compares himself and his companions to young children, sharing themselves openly with the Thessalonians instead of being forceful in delivering their message. <sup>7</sup> Instead, we were like young children among you. The three men posed no danger to the Thessalonians; however, the Jewish religious leaders perceived them as a threat to themselves.

Having described themselves as children, the next image is that of a breastfeeding woman. In Liberia when I lived there years ago, breastfeeding a child for three to four years was considered ideal for child nutrition. Paul compares his care for the Thessalonians to that of a nurturing and loving mother bonding with her child. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup> so we cared for you. This was not merely an expression of love, but a nurturing relationship shared with the Thessalonians. Note that the apostles **shared both their lives and the gospel** in this relationship. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

A point arrives when a child must be weaned, and Paul, Silas and Timothy noted that this also applies to genuine followers of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:<sup>2</sup> Paul tells those he is writing to that **I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it**. Paul uses the analogy of children needing milk to describe new or immature believers who are not ready for "solid food" meaning they were unable to grasp the deeper spiritual teachings at that stage of their Christian growth. He continued to nurture new Christians, having a genuine care to encourage growth in understanding faith. This encourages each of us to develop a deeper level of spiritual insight, preparing ourselves not only for personal growth but also to share God's teachings with others. This involves regularly studying God's word on your own, absorbing its messages so you can understand them fully and share what you learn with others. If it is not your habit at the moment, consider setting aside time for regular Bible reading and prayer to deepen your understanding and faith.

In verse 9 the Thessalonian believers are called to cast their minds back to the weeks that Paul, Silas and Timothy were with them. He reiterates that **their sole reason for visiting was to share the gospel of God and the message of salvation through Jesus Christ**. Look at verse 9: <sup>9</sup> Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

These men sum up their daily lives as filled with toil and hardship. William Barclay quotes the Didache, a document from about 100 AD, which was said to be the teaching of the Apostles. This quote says: "If a prophet ... that cometh is a passer-by, succour him as far as you can. But he shall not abide with you longer than two or three days unless there be necessity. But if he be minded to settle among you and be a craftsman, let him work and eat. But if he has no trade, according to your understanding, provide that he shall not live idle among you, being a Christian.

Paul was a tentmaker who worked with leather – that was his trade. Silas and Timothy's work is not detailed, but they likely joined Paul as tentmakers and learned the trade from him. Other prominent

Christians, such as Priscilla and Aquilla, were also tentmakers. Acts 18:<sup>2</sup> There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,<sup>3</sup> and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. <sup>4</sup> Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Consider the hard work involved in tentmaking: Sourcing the hides and then scraping of the flesh remaining on the skin, after which the hides were soaked, then dehaired by scraping. The tentmaker soaked the hides in a tanning solution for several days or weeks, then stretched them to make the leather pliable. The hides were cut, shaped, measured, punched with holes, and stitched together using leather thongs. The tents were waterproofed using animal fat, beeswax, or oil.

Paul asks the Thessalonians who made these accusations to reflect on how the three missionaries behaved during their short stay in the city. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.

Look now at verses 11 and 12 where the image of a father is introduced. <sup>11</sup> For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, <sup>12</sup> encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Paul, Silas and Timothy set out the role of a father in the context of reaching people with the gospel, and a blueprint for how a Christian should live. As Christians we should strive to emulate a nurturing father by offering encouragement, comfort, and guidance, just as one would with a child. We should encourage and support those around us in any situation, especially to live in a way that honours God. To do so is to worship – a word which comes from the Old English “worth-ship”. In other words, showing reverence and honour to God by the way we live is to worship our Lord.

The Thessalonian Christians followed Paul’s example, who was following the example of Christ. The Thessalonian Christians accepted the missionaries' message as God's word, not a human idea, and as a result, faced persecution for their faith (see verses 13-14). <sup>13</sup> And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. <sup>14</sup> For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews

Verse 15 shows how people respond when they do not accept Jesus as Christ, Messiah, and personal Saviour. Our missionaries list five actions of were those who opposed to the gospel in Thessalonica.

1. They killed Jesus
2. They killed the prophets
3. They drove us out
4. They displeased God
5. They are hostile to everyone

<sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone

And why were the religious leaders acting like this? Jesus himself spoke of such people. Matthew 23 records Jesus saying <sup>13</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

<sup>15</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Encouraging the Thessalonian people to value loving and obeying God over religious rituals challenged the authorities, just as Jesus did. Verse 16 tells us that the traditional Jewish leaders did not want those who were not Jews to follow Jesus. <sup>16</sup> in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

The religious leaders did not want those who were not Jews to enter into God’s kingdom. They were misreading the teachings in the Old Testament which talk about the Jewish nation being a blessing to all other nations, i.e. the Gentiles. Paul, Timothy and Silas could see that in verse 16: In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

As a patriotic Jewish person himself, Paul loved his fellow Jews. He was willing to forego his own salvation if only the Jewish race would become believers. His heart was breaking at the same time as making these statements. In Romans 9 we hear Paul expressing his concern for his fellow Israelites and their lack of belief. <sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, <sup>4</sup> the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. <sup>5</sup> Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen.

You can sense his concern for his people! The three missionaries were simply stating the truth that the sinfulness of people can blind them to the truth of the saving power of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, that a person’s heart can be hardened when challenged about sin in their life.

This is a challenge to all of us today – are our hearts torn when we see friends and family and people in the community not wanting to have a relationship with a loving but wrathful God? Are we nurturing those who are new Christians? Are we encouraging, comforting and urging others into a deeper relationship with Jesus?

1 Thessalonians 2 is a record of Paul and his companions in ministry, Silas and Timothy, defending their own conduct by describing how they preached with boldness despite persecution, worked hard not to be a burden, and treated the Thessalonians with gentle, nurturing, parental love and care. They stressed that their main intention was to honour God rather than satisfy religious leaders and felt encouraged to see the Thessalonians genuinely accept the gospel as God's message.

May you and I hold a high respect toward God’s word. Paul, in his letter to the Romans Christians stated <sup>1:16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Our challenge from 1 Thessalonians 2 is to accept the power of the gospel into our own lives and faithfully reach out with God’s truths so that others would hear the story of salvation in Christ, and to persevere in doing so. As with John the Baptist (in our lectionary reading today) our task is to give people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God. Luke 1:77-78.