

1st Thessalonians 2: 1-8; “To be Entrusted with the Gospel” Sermon # 7 in the series – “A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 2nd, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The Apostle Paul in Chapter 1 of this letter has been telling the Thessalonians how much he gives thanks to God for the way that they responded to the gospel. They became examples of what young believers should be doing. They were those who, because the power of God’s Holy Spirit was at work in them, worked at their faith; they labored in their love, and they were patient in their hope that God would be glorified through them both in word and deed. What God had done for them through the Lord Jesus Christ was sounded forth from them to the whole world of that day. Paul loved to recount this in his own mind, and he didn’t mind mentioning it to them. He didn’t do this to make them proud of themselves. He was glorying in the power of God’s grace which was working in them that which was pleasing in His sight. That was very exciting to Paul that he could see this grace at work in them. He is telling them that that he glories in what God has done through them, and he is bold to tell them about it so that they will continue to persevere through the many trials that they were going through. Now, in Chapter 2, he is going to be bold to set before them the example that he and Silvanus and Timothy had set for them. And the reason that he does this is so that they would continue to grow in their faith; that they would grow up into greater Christ-likeness by learning from those who had been a longer time in the faith than they had been.

The Thessalonians were little children in the faith at that time that he wrote this. But Paul would have them to grow up to be fathers in the faith. He is going to show them how Christ’s grace had built certain strengths and qualities into his and Silas and Timothy’s lives; graces which had allowed them to have confidence to persevere in their faith, even when they were persecuted; to grow even stronger in their ability to impart not only the gospel, but also their lives to these believers. This is the thing that I think will be important for us to consider this afternoon. How can we make progress in this way? How can you and I become stronger in not only imparting the gospel, but also in giving our lives to each other? That is the question which is answered in these verses. So what I want to show you this afternoon is what it means to be approved by God so that we might be entrusted with greater efforts and greater results for Christ’s kingdom. Paul had firsthand experience of this, and he would pass it on to them. If we will listen carefully, we can become stronger in imparting the gospel and our lives to one another if we will remember 3 truths related to our life and witness.

The 1st one of these truths is - To remember that boldness in speaking the gospel comes from having a clear conscience. (Verses 1-3)

Paul reminds them of the way that he and Silas suffered for the sake of the gospel when they came to Philippi. They had been accused, falsely, of being trouble-makers. They were stripped and beaten with rods and thrown into prison. But even after all this had happened they were singing to God at midnight, and the prisoners were listening, and God suddenly brought an earthquake which loosed every man’s chains. This led to an opportunity for Paul to speak to the jailer about his soul and the man was saved and baptized, and he took them to his own house that night. It was shortly after this that Paul and Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica. They went into a synagogue of the Jews, and they reasoned with them from the Scriptures, and some of them were persuaded. It says in Acts 17: 4 that, “a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” This was the background for what he tells them in this letter. He tells them that even though they had suffered before and had been spitefully treated that they were still bold in God to speak to them the gospel of God in that great conflict.

And then he uses the word “For” at the beginning of verse 3. “For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.” The word “For” here, links what follows with what has gone before. In other words, what he is saying is that the reason that they had this boldness to speak the gospel was because they had a serious and sincere concern for the salvation of God’s Elect in the places where they preached. And the trouble that came to them did not come to them because they were insincere or dishonest in their character, or promoting some error or heresy in the things that they preached. They had boldness in speaking the gospel because their conscience was clear in regard to all of these things. He says first, that their exhortation did not come from error. The word, “exhortation”, in the Greek is παρακλεις (paraclesis) and it means "appeal", but it can also be translated “encouragement” or “consolation”. So it should be understood in this way I think. Our appeal, the exhortation to believe in Jesus Christ; this exhortation to believe, is meant to bring to the sinner who is seeking forgiveness from God for his sins, peace. To the sinner who looking to find everlasting comfort and peace; this exhortation is not an error. It is altogether true. And it brings substantial and eternal comfort and good hope to the soul that believes in it. Peace and confidence reigns in the heart of the preacher who brings the gospel knowing that it is a pure gospel and that it had produced pure results in them, the preachers. And this pure confidence produced a holy boldness in them. They did not come to Thessalonica bringing something untrue. They did not come to take advantage of the people in some subtle or perverse way. They did not come there to trick them or take their money. They came there sincerely, from a clear conscience, that what they brought would do every man good; everyone who would believe in Jesus Christ. They were made so confident and bold in a holy way, that they were willing to suffer in bringing the gospel to the places that they went.

This, by the way, is how you and I ought to view the blessed Gospel that we preach and share with others. There ought to be an eagerness to bring this truth to our loved ones and to convey it to others. If our conscience is clear concerning the purity and power of the message that we bring, then why should we worry so much about suffering for it. We do not want to cast our pearls before swine, but we do sincerely want to see Christ glorified in the salvation of souls for which He died. Is this your desire? Do you see how God led Paul and Silas and Timothy into this situation? They had been “entrusted by God” with the gospel. God knew of their willingness and how they had responded to the grace that He had given them and the gifts that He had given them. He knew that even though the Devil would oppose and rile up the multitudes to persecute them and oppose them, that still they would continue to preach and to share the truth. They knew that God was with them, God was for them, God was their helper, guide, and strength in these matters and so they would continue. Let me ask you this afternoon if you are growing in this same way? Are you growing more bold or less bold in sharing the gospel with those whom you love and even with those who you don't know well? This is the place where God leads the one who trusting in him. You will grow more bold if you have a clear conscience in relation to the message that you preach and the results that God’s grace, working through it, has produced in you.

2ndly, If we would become stronger at imparting the gospel to others we should remember that God tests our hearts. (Verses 4-6)

“But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” How did God test Paul’s heart in relation to the preaching of the gospel? God looked to see if he was going to try to build his ministry by trying to please men. You know there are many ministries today which do that very thing. They are man-centered, man-pleasing ministries. The minister tries to build the people up and make them strong by telling them that the gospel is purely positive, never negative, and he flatters the people into thinking that they are better and stronger spiritually than they really are. It is not as

though Paul was not a man who could not commend the believers that he was teaching and leading. He did do this on many occasions. It was not as though he could not encourage them on by telling them of the good things that God's grace was producing in their lives. He has just done that in Chapter 1. But there is a great deal of difference between this and flattery. In Jude verse 16, when Jude is describing ungodly people and false teachers he says this of them. "These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage." This is the kind of thing that Paul is talking about. He and Silas did not use these sinful techniques. You and I must ask ourselves if we are willing to compromise in this way. If we see these things in our hearts and in our actions, we must repent of them immediately, and find that God has a much better way. Even if we are mightily opposed by others whom we speak to and preach to, it is always for our good to do the right, even if we have to suffer for it. This is not easy, I grant you. But this is the place where God leads his dear people to. He doesn't do this to discourage them, but to prove to them the power of His all-sufficient grace.

Sometimes I think that when we experience opposition and persecution we say to ourselves, "What have I done to deserve this?" "Why has this awful calamity come upon me?" "I thought that the kingdom of God was righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." "But now I am suffering." Beloved, what Paul is trying to say to you is that righteousness, peace, and joy do not disappear when opposition and persecution come because you are speaking and living the truth, and have not compromised with evil in your heart or in your actions. They become more real and more precious to the one trusting in the Lord Jesus. God is testing your heart. He wants to prove to you the power and strength of Christ's grace. If He is not powerful and strong to convey these mercies and these blessings in their greatest and most magnificent form in the times of suffering; then they are not real at all, and we have fooled ourselves. But we have not fooled ourselves if we are trusting in Christ. I think that many of us are like Jeremiah when it comes to persecution. Jeremiah was called to preach to a people who greatly opposed the Word of the Lord which he spoke to them. And he wanted to give up preaching and sharing the truth.

Turn to Jeremiah Chapter 20, verse 7. Here it says, "O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed." "I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me." "For when I spoke, I cried out, I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!'" "Because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily." "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.'" "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones." "I was weary of holding it back, but I could not." You see, God's grace was working so powerfully in Jeremiah that the Holy Spirit was leading him to a place where he did not want to go, in order that God would be glorified. Jeremiah wanted to quit preaching; his flesh was weary and tired, and he did not like to think of trying to continue when such great opposition to God's Word existed. But he did continue to preach. It was only by God's grace. But look at how God's grace triumphed in him. Verse 11 says, "But the Lord is with me a mighty, awesome One." "Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail." "They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper." "Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten." "But, O Lord of hosts, You who test the righteous, and see the mind and heart, let me see Your vengeance on them; for I have pleaded my cause before You." "Sing to the Lord!" "Praise the Lord!" "For He has delivered the life of the poor from the hand of evildoers."

Truly, this was a mighty triumph of God's grace. But still Jeremiah faltered in his faith at this time, and sometimes we will too. He says right after this, "Cursed be the day in which I was born!" "Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me!" His faith and grace had not come as far as Paul's did when he said, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Where are you my friend? Where are you in this process of sanctification and being conformed to the image of Christ. Do you know the reality of the presence and power of Christ sustaining you when you are misunderstood, when you are spoken against, when you are opposed, when you are persecuted? What will sustain you during such trying times? It will be your faith in the living Christ. "Blessed are you when you are persecuted".

3rdly - If we would become stronger at imparting the gospel to others we should remember Gentleness and Affection are very important. (Verses 7 and 8)

Verse 7 says, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." "So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us." You know, you would think that if Paul and Silas experienced such opposition and persecution that they would become harder men toward others around them. If they were walking in the flesh, they would try to talk tough to the brethren and harden them up for the persecution that they would most certainly have to endure. But it was not the case. We have seen here this afternoon that God's grace produced in them the very opposite effect. I am quite sure that Paul may have been a harsh man before his conversion. But afterward, the Lord taught him to be gentle. He taught Paul many things by his grace; about how he could speak and how he could act, in such a gentle way, that the truth went straight into their hearts with less resistance because of the way that he conveyed it. He learned the reality of the truth of Proverbs 15: 1. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness." Have you learned this my dear friends? "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life," it says 3 verses later, "but perverseness in it breaks the spirit". It breaks the spirit of the person you use it on. This we really do not want to if we love Christ and love the people that we minister to.

But Proverbs 25: 15 says, "By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone." You want to see certain things accomplished in the church or with people that you work with, and are around every day, patience and gentleness is the best way. This is especially true in a pastor. "The Lord's bondservant must be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged; with gentleness correcting those in opposition, if perhaps the Lord will grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 2: 24) Have you learned this truth dear Christian, for it is not simply for those who are pastors. Paul became as a nursing mother with these babes in Christ at Thessalonica. He cherished these young believers as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. He was affectionate to them. He longed for them when he was not with them. He longed not only to impart gospel truth to them, but also his own soul, for that is what the word life means there in verse 8. The word is "psukas" in the Greek, which means "soul". Paul wanted to impart not only gospel truth, but his soul's very life to them. He wanted to do this because the believers at Thessalonica had become very dear him. Surely this is one of the most precious of realities in living the Christian life; to know that you are loved, and have become very dear to those who preach to you the gospel. Affectionate longing and concern like this are very important to the forward progress of Christ's kingdom and the gospel. Let us pray that because of Christ's grace that we will realize more of it in our own hearts first. And then we should pray to see more of it shown towards others in the church around us who have come to know Christ. We want them to grow more and more in their affections toward other believers, by the working of Christ's grace, in relation to the truth that we impart to them. Oh how this will bring glory to God, and it will strengthen the holy boldness of the witness of God's people to everyone around them.