

Sunday 11th October 2020

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-16 (No hidden agenda)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Hazel Willson

Hello, and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about how Paul preached the gospel with no hidden agenda. Our bible reading is from 1 Thessalonians ch2v1-16.

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can meet as your people and to take this time to focus on you. Help us to set aside all the business and worries of the week so we might listen to you and learn more about your love for us. Amen.

Now Hazel will lead us in our intercessions then I will read from the bible.

Prayers

Almighty and everlasting God – the Creator of all that is, and all that will be – yet closer to us than hands and feet; we come to you, in worship and wonder, in trembling and fear, in love and yearning, and we thank you that you hear our prayers and our unspoken thoughts.

We ask Father, for your forgiveness, when our actions, words and thoughts fall short of your standards of love, and we thank you for your amazing grace.

We come to pray for all peoples and situations that need your loving intervention – and confess Father God that sometimes we don't know where to start!

We pray for people and places that are broken. For countries where violence is the norm, too many to number, and for all those affected; for those who have lost loved ones, homes, jobs, land and freedom; those who are injured, frightened, or lost. Father, we know you are in those situations – will you raise up your people to speak peace, and bring harmony and healing in your name. Thank you for Christians and others of goodwill, who bring light and hope in places like refugee camps and makeshift hospitals, and all who seek to alleviate misery and bring your hope.

'Lord you are our hope - we put our trust in you'

We pray, loving Father, for all who suffer in any way from coronavirus – particularly in countries where the infrastructure, medical care and economy are poor; those caught in the inequality of food and medical provision. Give us your compassion Father – help us to give till it hurts, and thank you for all those nursing, caring, sharing, and working towards producing an effective vaccine.

'Lord you are our hope - we put our trust in you'

We pray, loving Father, for all who take your gospel, a gospel that knows no lockdown, to those who have never heard it, and have no hope; and those who love practically, because they know you love them. We lift to you our preaching team, our wardens and PCC, and other leaders – and we pray particularly for Rachel, Lin and Gareth and the CAP centre, as they celebrate 10 years of service here. Thank you for all who have become debt-free in that time, and for your faithfulness and provision. We pray Father that others may hear your call to volunteer to befriend clients. Thank you, Father, for all those who have led and served your people at St John's over the years, and we pray for the next person you will send. Give them we pray a passion for your kingdom, and a compassionate heart like yours.

'Lord you are our hope - we put our trust in you'

Loving Father, we pray for all affected by the Report on Child Abuse in the church, published this week – and pray that as a church we will be able to respond with humility and a shared determination to change. We use prayers written specially for this;

Holy God – teach us to thirst for righteousness and justice in your church.

Merciful God – we cry to you; we lament the safeguarding failings of your church.

Gracious God – help us to hear the voices of victims and survivors of abuse, and to make the profound changes needed in your church.

Compassionate God – help us to repair broken lives, so that those our church has harmed may no longer just survive... but thrive. Please forgive us Lord.

'Lord you are our hope - we put our trust in you'

Loving Father, we lift to you those known to us who are sick in body mind or spirit. We particularly pray for Yvette's sister, and for Alison's sister Julia; for Anthony in hospital; and for Val, Lorraine, and Tony. Help us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

'Lord you are our hope - we put our trust in you'

Keep us loving Father, in the mindset of wanting the best for others; a mindset that is blind to class, caste, status, race, wealth or rank – so focused on the well-being of others that there is no place for vain conceit or personal ambition – and no hidden agenda.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and in the power of your Spirit, the Comforter. Amen.

Reading

Now the bible reading - 1 Thessalonians ch2v1-16

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. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. 6 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. 7 Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. 9 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. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

13 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. 14 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 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them.

This is the word of the Lord.

Talk

This section of the letter is a defence by Paul of his conduct during of the events in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. You can read about these events in the book of Acts chapters 16 & 17. They show the success and opposition to his preaching the gospel and how some Jews followed him to cause trouble in each city.

In the opening four verses of chapter 2 Paul demonstrates the genuineness of his motives. He begins by asking them to recall that he spoke openly, not in secret, and that the visit was not without purpose because it brought the word of God. Paul, Timothy and Silas came armed with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the God given courage to preach openly and plainly knowing there would be opposition and risk. In Philippi they had been stripped, beaten and jailed, nevertheless, they were not going to give up but moved on. In Matt ch 10 v14 Jesus taught his disciples to do just this when he sent them out to preach "if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town".

It is a call to transparency, integrity with no hypocrisy. Paul was willing to suffer for the gospel which shows how much he believed and demonstrates that he is sincere and genuine. He knows that the truth of the gospel about Jesus Christ will condemn sinners, challenging their thoughts, actions and desires. This is why there is both acceptance, apathy and opposition to the gospel.

Paul continues to say that his motives are true and pure. The gospel is true so he is not teaching error only explaining what God has done and revealed through Jesus Christ. However, we must always be careful when presenting the story of Jesus Christ, for it is right to change the words or how you explain it, to make it understandable to whoever you speak. It is wrong to change the facts or only tell half the story.

Paul says his motives were pure for he spoke without tricks or guile, there was no financial gain or sexual immorality, no special favours given or blessings promised. They heard the full gospel not just the nice bits for nothing is hidden and because of this Paul is stating that he has a clear conscience in all he said and did.

The idea of being approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel is about being tested. Such as a coin being found genuine or a person being deemed fit for public office however the test was by God, not men and women. God sees our hearts now and ongoing which is scary for God knows all but it is also liberating because God is more impartial and merciful than any human judge. It is because of this that Paul saw it as a privilege to be trusted with the gospel. He served God not man indeed he said in Rom 6v22 "now we have been set free from sin and become slaves to God". Do we feel privileged to be part of God's family? Do we feel privileged to share the gospel?

Paul continues to show that there was nothing hidden in his work. No flattery was used to gain influence, no greed for selfish ends or seeking honour and compliments for all of these are about building up the self rather than honestly serving others. Working hard day and night to provide for himself so as not to be a burden. He didn't demand payment nor give instruction that he wouldn't follow himself. In v5-8 he likens himself to a mother showing tenderness and care, giving of himself in a sacrificial way to the Thessalonian church.

Then in v9-12 he likens himself to a father by encouraging them, comforting and urging them to live godly lives. He taught them and loved them and counted it a privilege to pray for them. This example of Paul should build us up, we should desire to honour, serve and please God so as to be worthy of him who has given so much for us. Do we feel it a privilege to bring people to God in prayer?

This idea of acting like a father and mother is forward thinking. Whilst culturally the roles may be separate, even strictly divided, Paul sees them as overlapping even combined if necessary, taking whatever role is required to help people find Jesus.

The word Paul preached was the truth of God and he did so faithfully, and this is borne out by the sequence Paul writes in v13-14. He thanks God. Why? Because the Thessalonians listened to the word of God, recognised it was true and then acted on it. This is God at work changing lives through the power of God's word and the Holy Spirit.

Man's words fail and are often false or foolish. We should receive God's word and allow it to change us for it brings truth, wisdom, goodness and holiness. This is what the Thessalonians had done, and it had made a church of believers who could stand up for their faith like the churches in Judea. To stay faithful under persecution even from their own citizens. Paul commends them because he knows that all Christian churches throughout the world should show the same characteristics because they are following the same God and the same gospel and have the same saviour Jesus Christ.

Finally, v15&16 Paul, not wanting to hide anything, expresses some harsh words about the Jews. It is good to remember the context of these words for they spring from his recent experience in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea where he was persecuted by the Jews.

Paul's usual practice wherever he went was to go to the synagogue first and speak to the Jews in that place. Some believed and some did not yet some actively tried to stop the gospel and

persecuted Paul threatening his life and pursuing him to other cities. It is this later group to whom these verses are addressed. It is the opposition to the gospel and the hindering of people turning to God which is the root cause of Paul's comments made about the Jews and they equally apply to the Greeks, Romans or Londoners in 2020 who act in the same way. We have to remember that elsewhere and particularly in Rom ch 9-11 Paul writes passionately about God's covenant and salvation for the nation of Israel. Paul is definitely not anti-Jew but he is definitely anti anyone who blocks the gospel being proclaimed.

We see here that Paul is urging us to speak about Jesus Christ in an open and honest way knowing that when we speak, we do so for God. I am mindful of the witness oath in court - *"I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."* The evidence of our lives both action and words should show we have nothing to hide no hidden agenda. It also means it is ok to say "I don't know" or "I don't understand that" or to say "I will ask someone at church" because that is honest. So as we seek to live out the truth of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit remember that we do not do so alone for we are part of God's family at St John's and that Jesus promised never to leave us. Amen.

A closing prayer from Hebrews 13v20-21

May the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Thank you for listening and may God bless you this coming week.