

## Sharing God's Word with Right Motives and Methods

22<sup>nd</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 10/25/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8, [Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, tells the Christians in Thessalonica,] **“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.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ I was shocked earlier this week to find that, after 30 years of preaching the various texts in the appointed readings of the Church Year, there was still one of those texts that I have not preached on yet. Granted, this is one of those texts that often gets subverted by the Reformation or All Saints Day readings, but I was still surprised.

➔ But then, after a quick reading of the text, I could see why a younger me, might have hesitated to select this text. I can see how two immediate questions might come to mind. #1, “Is Paul still holding a grudge and complaining about the way that he was treated at Philippi? Or #2, “Doesn’t it sound a bit like Paul is bragging about being “approved by God” (v.4) and how they “worked night and day” (v.9) to “proclaim the gospel” with these Christians in Thessalonica?”

✘ But, once a person leaves his own baggage or pre-conceived notions out of it, a closer less hurried look at Paul’s words here reveals that Paul is instead opening himself up in a very vulnerable and loving way, like a loving mother and a committed father would open up to their dearly beloved children, to show these people how much; how deeply he has cared for them, and is still committed to them with every ounce of his being.

➔ In essence then, this text is the beginning of what we might call “a love letter” from Paul (and Silas and Timothy) to the people whom God sent them, to “share...the (saving) gospel of God” and to bond intimately with them in sharing their “own selves” in mutual care, admonition, consolation, and genuine love for each other; and to do it all through the many ups and downs; the joys and sufferings and everything in between that we face in this earthly life.

### **I. Sharing Involves Suffering**

✘ And so Paul begins in verse one, not by complaining, but by acknowledging that sharing the saving truth about Jesus in this earthly life does not come without suffering.

➔ In fact, Paul ended up in Thessalonica, in large part, because of what he calls in verse two, the way that he and Silas had “been shamefully treated in Philippi.” That story is recorded in Acts 16. Things started out great, when they shared Jesus with a woman named Lydia; she received the Good News with eagerness and she and her entire household were baptized.

➔ But then when Paul exorcised a demon from a young slave girl, although she was entirely changed and converted to Christ, things went bad because her unbelieving owners had now lost all of the money that they were bringing in as people paid to see her demon-possessed antics. You see, these owners, along with their fellow Romans, beat Paul and Silas and threw them into the inner-dungeon, bound with stocks and chains.

➔ That night though, while singing hymns, God miraculously shook the prison; loosened their chains; opened the prison door; and had them lead the jailer and his family to faith, including their baptism before He then influenced the city leaders to let them leave town.

✘ This is how they came to Thessalonica. And initially there, they shared the Gospel to receptive ears so that Acts 17:4 says, “a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women” came to faith in Jesus. But trouble and conflict followed them from Philippi, so that the

Jews became jealous, and a rebellious mob attacked the house where they were staying, and once again, they had to flee; this time to Berea, for their own safety.

➔ This is the “conflict” that Paul is talking about in verse two and the suffering through which God gave them “boldness...to declare to [these people] the gospel of God.”

- ✘ Still, Paul’s love for these people cannot be denied, even though he had to leave Thessalonica sooner than they had hoped. That’s why he sends them this “love letter,” because his mission; his calling to these dear people is not yet complete.

## II. Sharing with Right Motives

- ✘ But, you know, some things never change, even after 2000 years. Just as you and I see it today, whenever someone wants to share something with us, we seem compelled to question their motives, don’t we?

➔ And, why is that? Well, because we’ve all been burned before; some of us more than once. How do we know that the politicians on any of the commercials we see right now, are telling the truth; are being sincere? How do we know that the furniture or car or appliance salesman isn’t just feeding us a bunch of lies to try and get a commission or meet a quota? How do we know that our teacher isn’t trying to push her agenda or that your pastor isn’t just trying to scratch your itching ears to stroke his own ego or make you feel good about your latest pet sin or self-promoting opinion?

- ✘ The people in Paul’s day faced all of these same questions, because false teachers and swindlers abounded then, just as they do today.

➔ So, instead of bragging, Paul seeks to open himself bare to address his motives in verses 3-6. He assures the people that he, Silas and Timothy are not writing to them with any false intentions. “Our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,” he says (v.3).

➔ Instead, Paul assures them that he is writing to them with full apostolic authority: “we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (v.4). Remember, Paul was converted, taught, and sent out directly by the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9, Gal. 1).

➔ Then Paul gives us a very helpful list of four criteria that we must all make sure are not present within ourselves or anyone else who is sharing or seeking to guide us in gospel matters: 1) they are not just seeking to please man, but are only seeking to please God; 2) not coming with “words of flattery” (trying to influence us by making us feel good about ourselves); 3) not motivated by greed (looking only for personal gain); and 4) not seeking glory (recognition) from other people.

- ✘ This is important, friends, that you and I both look in the mirror when we are sharing the gospel with others, and that we take stock of those we are drawn toward or tempted to pay attention to for our own learning and growth, because, sadly, sin still clings to us all. Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, a prominent theologian in the late 1900s said, “There is no adequate preparation for the virulence of sheer nastiness that so often erupts in the life of the Christian community.”

➔ Martin Luther saw this up close and personal at the time of the Reformation, as the very church that he was raised in and loved so much that he became a Roman Catholic priest as a young man, broke every one of Paul’s four criteria there and became utterly corrupt to the core. The Pope even labeled Luther a criminal because he had the nerve to call the church back to the Words of Scripture Alone; because he had the boldness to say that man is saved only by grace, through faith in Jesus and not by our sinful and corrupt works, or by following the Pope or the tradition of the church.

- ✘ This is why it is imperative, my friends, that everyone of us examine our own motives every day and then open our hearts and minds in transparent repentance and humility to the nurture and guidance and care of those like Paul whom God sends to us with His Gospel truth.

### III. Sharing with Right Methods

- ✘ It's incredible, when you consider the "shameful" (v.2) manner that Paul was treated by many of the Thessalonians that he still writes to them in this letter as he does in verse eight; that "being affectionately desirous of you, we were (and I think it's still safe to say, 'we are') ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

➔ What an expression of love. Paul is opening himself up fully; he is displaying full vulnerability in his eagerness to share the fullness of God's love in Jesus as well as the depth of his own love for these people who previously had him run out of town.

- ✘ And Paul's "method" is to express both a "motherly" and a "fatherly" love for these folks. In verse seven he reminds them that, in spite of their initial refusal to receive them, "we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children."

➔ And what is a "nursing" mother doing to care for her children? She's feeding them the very nutrition God has given her to strengthen; to grow; and even protect her children with antibodies that will fight against illness and disease. As Paul teaches the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:2-3), he first came to them with spiritual milk; that is the basics of the Gospel. But then he nurtured them into feeding on solid food; that is, the deeper truths of God's Word so that they could stand up against the temptations of this world and the deceptions of Satan that love to prey on the weakness of our flesh.

- ✘ Not only did Paul love them like a mother, but in verses 11-12 he says, "For you know how, like a father with his children, 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."

➔ That's right, there is a difference between motherly love and the way that a father loves his children. One is not better than the other: both are equally important for the proper upbringing of a child of God.

➔ So, how does Paul describe a father's love with his children? First, he "exhorts." The Greek word is παρακαλέω (parakaleō), which is to "come along side" someone to actively support, teach, guide, and direct a person so that they follow and learn the things of life rightly. Second, Paul says he "encouraged" them; that is to loving comfort and console someone who might be discouraged or feeling inadequate for the task at hand. Think of here of mentoring someone in the Christian faith.

➔ And third, Paul says that he "charged" them to "walk in a manner worthy of God." This is Paul, now more directly, telling them, and you and me today, that he desires the same dedication; the same commitment to God that he and Silas and Timothy and all Christians throughout the ages are "called" to have now, because in Christ, we have been made new since our adoption into God's family; into His "kingdom and glory."

### Conclusion

- ✘ Paul's love and devotion expressed in this letter, isn't something Paul just conjured up on his own. No, what He's expressing here, my friends, is God's love and God's devotion; God's call to you and me here today, isn't he?

➔ Incredibly, even though you and I have treated God shamefully every day in our selfish and sin-centered lives, He still refuses to be God without us. He has come in His inexplicable love to share Himself with you and me in His Son, Jesus.

➔ Yes, Jesus, came with the purest of motives; using the most perfect of methods to feed us with Himself as the Living water and life-giving bread from heaven; to sacrifice His entire self on the cross so that we might be saved from the condemnation that we all deserved; to come along side us and to strengthen us every moment of every day with the Spirit He gave to us in baptism; and to guide us with Himself as the very “Word of God, which is at work in us” daily as He called, redeemed and sanctified believers.

✕ Yes, now in Jesus, you and I have the joy; we have the privilege to share the gospel and our entire selves with those who “have become dear to us” (v.8). Why? because of the way that God has shared His life with us first – for our salvation. In His name. Amen.