

# Authentic Ministry

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[0:00] to real churches, to real people, in real places. Letters that reflect normal, everyday life in those places.

! It was a big city for those days. Population was probably about 200,000. I suspect some of this is being repeated because I bet everybody who comes thinks they have to do an overview of Thessalonica.

But don't worry, there won't be too much of it. About 200,000 people, that's a big city for those days. Bigger than Brighton is today. Brighton on its own anyway.

It was a big place. It was on a major trade route between Rome and what we now call Turkey. And there were all sorts of people there. There were Jews. Obviously there were Greeks and people from Macedonia, from that area.

And a lot of merchant traders. It was a typical ancient city. And a church had been planted there. We read about it in Acts.

[1:24] As a result of Paul's preaching. And it had quite a dramatic start, didn't it? Paul's preaching, in effect, started a riot. Paul preached the gospel as he did everywhere he went.

And quite a lot of people believed. Back in Acts chapter 17, we read, Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

I've read that and thought, I wonder why he mentioned that particularly. I have no idea, but you might like to think about that. But lots of people believed.

And it caused a stir. And the very religious Jewish leaders were upset. Why? Because Judaism was working rather well for them.

They had lots of power. And so, they got some dodgy characters, the local thugs, to start a riot. And they couldn't find Paul, so they got this chap, Jason.

[2:35] But eventually, Paul and Silas are effectively kicked out of the city. They were smuggled out by their fellow believers at night.

So, Paul had left these people. Well, most of the places Paul went, he moved on and left them. But Paul clearly, from what we read in the letter to the Thessalonians, had a very great heart for these people.

He desperately wanted to get back to them. He cared about them. He said, I would love to get back to see you.

But if we looked at the end of chapter 2, verses we are not particularly looking at this morning, but verse 17 says, Brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time, in person, not in thought, he's still thinking about them, out of our intense longing, we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you. Certainly, I, Paul, did again and again. But Satan stopped us. And we're not told how Satan stopped.

[3:50] But for one reason or another, Paul couldn't get back to Thessalonica to see these people. An interesting thought is this.

Maybe if Paul had been able to get back, we wouldn't have had these two letters to the Thessalonians. If you follow that logic on a bit, you see that God uses even the wiles of Satan. Satan likes to put his spanner in the works and to stop things happening. But because Satan stopped Paul from going back, Paul wrote these letters, which were encouraging to the Thessalonians.

They were instructions for them, but they're an encouragement for us. Because we've got things to learn from them as well. So because he couldn't get back, Paul sent Timothy, his young apprentice,

as it were, back to see these people.

Now, I've no idea why Paul couldn't get back, but Timothy could. But he could, and he went back, and he brought a very encouraging report to Paul. We have that at the end of chapter 3.

[5:03] No, in the middle of chapter 3. Chapter 3, verse 6. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.

He's told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you because of your faith.

So Paul asked Timothy to go and see them. Timothy comes back to Paul and says, they're doing great. It's going on really well.

And so Paul writes this letter to them, for their good and for our good also. And as we go on through Thessalonians, my fellows from Haywards Heath and myself, as we go on, you'll find that a big theme of Thessalonians is the Lord Jesus Christ coming back again.

But that isn't specifically mentioned in these verses and that isn't our particular theme this morning. So we're going to come to these 12 verses and just have three very simple headings.

[6:21] Just before we do, I'm going to read the verses to you again. From not a translation of the Bible, but what I think of as someone's commentary from the Living Bible.

But it just gives us a flavor of the passage again. You might get something that you didn't get as we were reading it before. Let's listen to those 12 verses again. You yourselves know, dear brothers, how worthwhile that visit was.

You know how badly we'd been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet God gave us the courage to boldly repeat the same message to you, even though we were surrounded by enemies.

So you can see that we were not preaching with any false motives or evil purposes in mind. We were perfectly straightforward and sincere. For we speak as messengers from God, trusted by him to tell the truth.

We change his message not one bit to suit the taste of those who hear it. For we serve God alone who examines our hearts' deepest thoughts.

[7:36] Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you very well know. And God knows we were not just pretending to be your friends. So that you would give us money. As for praise, we've never asked for it from you or anyone else.

Although as apostles of Christ, we certainly had a right to some honor from you. But we were as gentle among you as a mother feeding and caring for her own children.

We loved you dearly. So dearly that we gave you not only God's message, but our own lives too. Don't you remember, dear brothers, how hard we worked among you?

Night and day we toiled and sweated to earn enough to live on so that our expenses would not be a burden to anyone there as we preached God's good news among you.

You yourselves are our witnesses, as is God, that we have been pure and honest and faultless toward every one of you. We talked to you as a father to his own children.

[8:42] Don't you remember? Pleading with you, encouraging you, and even demanding that your daily lives should not embarrass God, but bring joy to him who invited you into his kingdom to share his glory.

I'll put that aside and all the references now will be back to the new international version. If you'll excuse me, I'm just going to take a sip of water.

So we have three headings.

Divided it up into three. First of all, in the first three verses, we have a memory shared by Paul. Paul's preaching visit to Thessalonica had been successful.

And not only had the church there started well, a lot of people had believed, but they'd continued in the faith. Timothy's report back was good.

[9:47] You see, it would have been easy, wouldn't it, after the riots and the opposition of the Jewish leaders, and Paul and Silas have gone, it would have been easy for the people who'd said, Oh yes, this is good, to

slip back into their own way, old ways.

But no, Timothy said they've gone on. And news of their faithfulness had spread far and wide. If you look back into chapter 1 and verse 6, Paul says there, You became imitators of us and of the Lord. In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. So that's them believing in the first place. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia. Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.

You see, they'd gone on. They'd believed, they'd carried on trusting in the Lord, so much so that they were sharing their faith with the areas around them. And Paul says in verse 3, Look, I didn't have any ulterior motive.

[11:10] You know I didn't come to you to win anything for myself, to get anything great, he says. In verse 3, We appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

Things often went wrong for Paul. Not only was he involved in the riot there, but he refers back in verse 2 to that he'd been to Philippi.

Immediately before going to Thessalonica. And in Philippi, things had been even worse. He'd got beaten up there. He probably arrived at Thessalonica with some of the cuts and bruises that he'd suffered.

Things were never easy. But Paul knew that he was doing what God had called him to do, to preach the gospel.

And there's a little lesson for us there, isn't there? We can expect opposition and difficulty.

[12:18] We can expect the Goliaths that we were hearing about before. When we're doing what God wants us to do. What he's called us to do, whatever that may be.

And it may well not be as groundbreaking as Paul's calling. Going all over the area of the Mediterranean, preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever God has called you to do, it may well not be easy. It wasn't for Paul. It wasn't for Jesus in his ministry on earth.

But we shouldn't be put off by opposition and difficulty. These people in Thessalonica weren't. And indeed, it may be, may just be proof that you are doing what God wants you to do.

And Paul is a great example to us in that respect. So Paul had no hidden agenda, no ulterior motive, no money to be made out of his preaching.

[13:29] Just a pure motivation. So that he could look back to his visit with a clear conscience and have no regrets. Another thing concerning us, and Paul would have had to guard against this, sometimes we can do the right things for the wrong reasons, aren't we?

Or because we might get something out of it. But not Paul. Because he was secure in his belief in the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He had love in his heart for the people to whom he believed God had sent him. So he looks back and remembers his visit with joy, with happiness.

And so that's the memory shared. Paul remembering what had happened. A visit that was fruitful and encouraging. And in his letter he tried to convey that to the Thessalonians.

For there it continued encouragement. And it should be encouraging for us as well. So then from verse 4 to 6 we have reference to a message shared.

[14:53] Paul shared the memory of his visit with them. He shared a message with them. That was the whole purpose of his visit.

Paul says in verse 4 here, We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. When he came to them, he came at the end of that verse, We are not trying to please men, but God.

He had a message to share with them. And what was that message? And we're going to spend a little while thinking of the message that Paul brought to the Thessalonians.

Now at this point, sometimes we think to ourselves, Well I know the message. Yes, I know the Bible. I can go through it. But I want to say to you and to me, We need to keep going over and over

the gospel message.

Preaching it to ourselves so that we rejoice in it every day. It wasn't just true the moment we believed.

[16:10] It's true now. Every single day of our lives. So what is the message? And we're breaking away from the verses here And taking a little time to look back more widely at the Bible's and Paul's teaching of the message.

And this is a message that Paul preached many times to people in all sorts of places. To groups of ordinary people. But also to high priests and governors and kings.

Because you'll remember the various trials that he went through in the book of Acts. And Paul was able to lay out the facts of the gospel. Firstly that there is a God.

Not lots of gods. There is a God. A God in heaven. You know the underlying idea in the world around us at the moment is that there is no God.

In fact it's probably that we're all individual little gods and we decide what happens. We choose what's best. And that's fine for everybody. It doesn't work of course because everybody's best is different.

[17:22] And that's why we have lots and lots of clashes don't we? Of philosophies. But Paul's starting point is there is a God.

He created the world. And at the apex. Right at the peak of his creation. He created human beings. To have fellowship with him. To live in this world and to steward it. That's where Paul starts with his beliefs. With his message.

For Adam and Eve. Those first human beings. Chose disobedience. And on that day. The entire human race.

Walked out on God. However good we are. Or think we are. Every day. We sin. We fail to meet God's standard.

[18:24] We break God's law. And the result is that the entire human race. Is under God's judgment. This is the message that Paul preached. God created the world.

He created man. But man has sinned. And through those first. That first man and woman. Each of us. Is under judgment.

Paul says in Romans chapter 1 and verse 18. The wrath of God. Is being revealed from heaven. Against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.

Who suppress the truth by their wickedness. In case you think. Well I'm not amongst the. The godless and wicked. He goes on to say in verse 21.

For although they knew God. They neither glorified him as God. Nor gave thanks to him. And that's true. Of every single one of us.

[19:22] Isn't it? But their thinking became futile. And their foolish hearts. Were darkened. So here we have a human race. That's walked out on God.

And is under God's judgment. Evil abounds in the world around us. And all that evil. Preaches a message to us.

It speaks to us. Saying something's not right. Something's gone seriously wrong. God's wrath is being revealed. And that ultimately ends in death.

For every one of us. And facing God's judgment. And what will we say then? Now this sounds. Like a bad message. A message of doom. That Paul's bringing. But no. His. Was a message. Of hope.

[20:23] Of good news. We can't escape the problem. It's all around us. Whether we believe it or not. And no amount of religion.

Can solve the problem. But Paul's message. Of hope. His good news. Is this. The very same God. Whose judgment. We're under. Has come. To us. In the person. Of Jesus. We don't worship. A God. Who is aloof.

Who's up in the heavens. And expects us. Somehow. To claw. Our way back to him. To be as good as we can. So that we might. Somehow. Achieve. Some level.

That's not our God. Our God. Came. To us. All other religions. Want you to get to God. Our God.

[21:20] Came to us. He stepped down. Into human history. In the person. Of Jesus. Jesus. Who was. Fully God.

And fully man. And God. In Jesus. Has participated. In. The normalities. Of our life. In the stuff. That we do. Every day. Working. Forming. Relationships. With people. He lived.

A life. Just like us. But. He then. Took. God's. Ultimate.

Judgment. God's. Wrath. On himself. By going. Through death. Dying.

[22:14] In our place. This is the message. That Paul. Preaches. He went. Through death. He bore. Our sins. So that.

Simply. By believing. In him. Just. Believing. In the Lord. Jesus Christ. By God's grace. We can be. Every one of us.

Can be a hundred percent. Forgiven. We can have. Our relationship. With God. Restored. And have. An amazing. Hope. Of a new.

Creation. A new. World. As this world. Should have been. No more suffering. No more pain. No more sinning.

We can live with God. Forever. In peace. And happiness. That. Is good news. And that's. Paul's.

[23:08] Message. I think. We often. Lose sight. Of. How good.

The news is. We know. We believe. We know. In our hearts. We believe. We trust. How good. Is the news. We'll spend.

Eternity. With our God. And the Lord. Jesus Christ. And praise. And worship him. And that's the message.

That Paul preached. That the Thessalonians. Believed. And the question is. Is it the message. That you believe. Not you.

As a group of people. But you. Individually. Is that the message. That you believe. In the creator God. Who came down to earth.

[24:05] To put us right. And if it is. If you are a Christian. Do you still. Preach it. To yourself. Day by day.

Go over it. Read. In the Bible. To fill out. The message. Preach it to yourself. Every day.

And thank God. For giving himself. To us. In this way. So Paul. Shared with them. A message. He shared the memories. Of being with them.

He shared a message. But. And. Our last point. Is this. In verses. In verses. Seven to twelve. In some. Quite vivid pictures. He shared.

His life. With them. He didn't just. Share a message. You see. He didn't just. Pass on the good news. He participated.

[25:03] With them. In the everyday things. Of life. The gospel. The good news. Isn't just. A set of facts.

Oh I believe this. And you'll be okay. That's it. Done and dusted. But it's to have an effect. On what we think. What we do.

Every day. Paul worked. Verse nine. Surely you remember brothers. Our toil and hardship. We work night and day. In order not to be a burden to you.

He worked. He did what they did. He saw them on a day to day basis. He got to know them. And. Do we do that?

Do each of you. Do that? Get to know people. Get alongside people. It's pretty easy. Isn't it? To come to church. For a diet of hymns. And prayers. And bible teaching.

[26:02] And to enjoy it. And then go home. And forget about the other people. In the fellowship. For whom Christ died.

It's easy to do that. And I'm tempted to do that. We want to be on our own. Sometimes. To be a spiritual hermit. But Paul. By and large. Didn't do that.

And he didn't demand his rights. He was happy to work hard. As well as engaging in gospel ministry. He was willing to be inconvenienced. For their sakes. Are we?

Is it easier to. Stay in. To stay at home. Than come to a prayer meeting. Or a bible study group. We all have to deal with our own circumstances.

But. We are a body. Of people. We're a community. We need each other. No man is an island. Said a writer. Hundreds of years ago.

[27:02] And in these verses. We have two. Very striking illustrations. Of Paul's. Interaction.

The way he. Mixed. Amongst. The people. Firstly. There in verse seven. But. We were. Gentle. Among you.

Like a mother. Caring. For her little children. A mother. Feeds her children. She clothes them. She comforts them. When they're upset.

Or worried. Or hurt. Paul was gentle. With these young Christians. He cared for them. As a mother. Would care. For her children.

That's part of Paul's ministry. Not just imparting to them. The facts. The message. Of the gospel. But living with them.

[27:56] And caring for them. Wanting their very best. And the second. Illustration. Almost a. A contrast. In verse eleven. Is.

For you know. That we dealt with each of you. As a father deals with his children. Now this is a firmer approach. How does a father deal with his children. Encouraging.

Comforting. And urging you to live lives. As God wants you to live. He wanted the best for his children. So.

He was able to be gentle with them. He was able to be firm with them. And kind. This is part of Paul's. Authentic. Ministry. And he wanted them.

To live. Lives. Worthy of God. Who called them. Into his kingdom. And glory. So that's.

[28:54] Perhaps the last main question. For us. Are we. Letting the gospel. Are we living lives worthy. Letting the gospel affect. How we live our lives.

Each day. In the things we say. And the things we do. In our daily life. And in our daily.

Church life. So you see. In a very short space of time. Paul probably wasn't there very long. We read that he.

Preached on three Sabbaths. He may only have been there. For three weeks. Or less. Paul has. Not only preached. The message to them. But he's demonstrated to them.

The sort of lives. They should be living. As believers. By sharing his life. With them. And there's a.

[29:52] A closing strain. Of thought. If Paul loved. And cared. For these Thessalonians. So much. How much more. Did God love.

And care for them. And how much more. Does he love. And care. For us. We might ask ourselves. If Paul had this.

Authentic. This correct. This right. Ministry. How can we be like. Paul. How we can. How can we have the right. Motivation. In every. Aspect of our lives.

I found this little. Quotation. It's been said that. We become. Like. What we worship. And think.

Through that. We become like. What we worship. And certainly. If that's true. Paul was the way. He was. Because he knew.

[30:51] The Lord Jesus Christ. So well. He worshipped him. He spent time. With him. He preached. His. Good news.

And so. It's as simple as that. Isn't it? Simple. But tough. Every day. We need to keep. Looking to Jesus. Relying on him. Living for him.

On a day to day basis. That's what Paul did. So let us keep. Living. The truth. Day by day.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.