

Not In Vain

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen. You may be seated. Kids, you are excused to your King's Kids classes.! For you yourselves know, brothers, sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain.

But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive. But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak.

Not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed, God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

But we were gentle among you, like babes among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 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.

[1 : 44] For you remember, brothers, sisters, our labor and toil. We work night and day, but that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses. And God also, how holy and righteous and blameless we conducted our conduct towards you believers. Was our conduct towards you believers. 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.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

So as always, to fill up the measure of their sins, what wrath has come upon them at last. May God bless the hearing of his word. Lord, is anybody changing?

[3 : 15] Has all my sacrifices for the advancement of the kingdom been all for naught? Have all my efforts in my ministries or marriage or parenting or attempts to share the gospel with non-Christians, have they all been gospel efforts in vain?

Maybe you're a teacher in King's Kids or a mentor in King's Place or a leader in our youth ministry. Maybe you are serving on the worship team, on the Connect team. You're involved in the Sunday breakfast, in the women's or men's ministry. You're a life group leader or you're a deacon or you're teaching a TDI class or you're an elder.

Maybe you've been wondering, am I making any kind of difference in anybody's life for Christ? Has all this sacrifice been for nothing?

Maybe you're serving on multiple ministry teams. You go to life group. You gather Sunday after Sunday. You're trying to share the gospel with non-Christians in your life.

[4 : 37] But has it all been worth anything? Have you found yourself asking that question? If you look at chapter 2, verse 1, For you yourselves know, brothers, that are coming to you was not in vain.

Not in vain. 1 Thessalonians was originally a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica around 4951 A.D.

He probably wrote it from Corinth. And what you need to know about this letter that is now the book of 1 Thessalonians is that this letter was to a brand new church just months old.

And right out of the gate, this church suffered hardship. They were being afflicted because they were followers of Jesus. And they were being afflicted by those who rejected the gospel.

They were hindering them. Making life hard for them. And on top of it all, just weeks, maybe months, after this church has been established, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, this apostolic band, PST, they leave all of a sudden under the cover of night.

[5 : 56] So just imagine it. This, these baby Christians of a brand new church in a hostile environment are now experiencing an abrupt leadership vacuum.

It's ripe for all sorts of challenges. Maybe there are influencers from those who had rejected the gospel, and they're influencing this church, and people in the church are maybe, well, maybe they are right.

Maybe, maybe the gospel of Jesus Christ isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Maybe it's not the only way to salvation. Maybe they have a point. Maybe Jesus isn't who Paul, Silas, and Timothy claimed him to be.

Or maybe you're in this church, and you're like, why did they leave? Were they in it for themselves? Or maybe you're thinking, you know what?

Were we just being naive? Maybe there's more to the story than what we're hearing. Here's what I want to convince you of this morning.

[7 : 10] Our gospel efforts are never in vain. Our gospel efforts are never in vain.

And from this passage, there are three reasons. Reason number one, the gospel of God is the power of God. That's reason number one. Reason number two is that the gospel shapes how we go about gospel ministry.

Reason number three is the gospel shapes even how we receive the word of God. It's all about the gospel. So what I want to do is help you.

If you are wondering if your efforts are all in vain, you're discouraged, disappointed, frustrated, you're like, maybe I just need to be less involved. Your gospel efforts are never in vain.

Because the gospel is God's power unto salvation. So let's look at this first point. The gospel of God is the power of God. In verses 1 through 16, 1 through 12 primarily, there are a number of things said about the gospel, and it serves us well to be reminded of what the gospel actually is.

[8 : 28] So the first thing I want you to notice is a prepositional phrase. And I need your participation. Here's the prepositional phrase. It's just two words. Of God. Can you say that? Okay, so I'm going to point you to a series of little phrases, and then I'm going to look to you like this.

And then you're going to say, of God. You ready? There's a test. 2-2. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel.

Excellent. Look at 2-8. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel. Oh, excellent.

Verse 9. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil, we work night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaim to you the gospel. Oh, we've got a pattern here.

Verse 13. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive the word which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

[9 : 47] That of God is talking about the source of this message. The Christian gospel has not been conceived originally in the minds of men.

The Christian gospel originated in the mind of God. The source of the gospel is God. It is His message, His announcement of salvation to all of mankind.

That's why in 2 Corinthians 5.20, the apostle Paul, in talking about his own ministry, he talks about the gospel as God making His appeal through us.

When we're talking about the gospel, we're talking about God addressing people through the gospel, calling for a response. So what I want you to see in this first little prepositional phrase is that the gospel is of God, not of man.

The second thing I want you to notice is that this is an appeal. Did you see in verse 3? For our appeal? Our appeal! This is a spoken appeal. The Christian gospel is something that you proclaim, something that you speak.

[11 : 06] It's heard. It calls for a response. Maybe you've heard the St. Francis of Assisi quote, preach the gospel always and sometimes use words.

Sounds great. It's not true. No matter how good your conduct is, it will not save anybody. There's only one thing that can save a sinner, and that is the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the only thing that can save. Now, your conduct matters. We'll get to that in a little bit. But you need to understand that this gospel calls for a response.

It's spoken, and it's to be responded to. It's not just to fall empty. The third thing I want you to notice is what this gospel of God actually is.

Just a little background. That word gospel, the Greek word, you want to know it? Euangelion. Can you say it? Euangelion.

[12 : 19] English speakers aren't used to saying things like that. You know what a eulogy is? That means a good word. That little eu at the beginning of euangelion, that means good.

It means good news. And back in antiquity, it was bigger than a religious use. So, for example, there are these ancient records of the gospel being proclaimed, the gospel of the birth of Caesar, the gospel of the birth of a new Roman emperor.

And so they would send out messengers all around the Roman Empire, and they'd go into towns, hear ye, hear ye, I have good news of the gospel, of the birth of a Roman emperor.

Emperor. Or let's say the Romans, they send out a legion to battle the barbarian horde in the area of Goth.

And they'd defeat the barbarian horde. They would send messengers out to different places in the empire, announcing a victory. It was good news.

[13 : 30] It was the gospel of a victory. It was used in a variety of ways, this word gospel. We even see it around World War II in these announcements of VE Day, victory over Europe.

Can you imagine that on a picture of a newspaper? That's the announcement of good news, victory over Europe. VJ Day, victory over Japan. It's good news.

It's a declaration of something that has happened. Here's what that means. There can be a variety of gospels.

There are different gospels. There are different good newses. And our world is full of man-made, counterfeit gospels.

If you were to sum up the gospel of Jesus Christ, you could sum it up in four moves, with four words. God, man, Christ, respond.

[14 : 35] If you want to unpack it more, I would recommend this book by Greg Gilbert. It's a Nine Marks book, What is the Gospel? It talks about God as your creator. It talks about man as sinful, that our Savior is Jesus Christ, and that the response is repentance and faith.

That's the gospel. That's the gospel of God. But we're living in a culture of different man-made, counterfeit gospels.

There's the political gospel. The good news of conservatism. The good news of pragmatism. My concern about the MAGA movement is that it's being presented as a gospel.

There's moral gospels. The gospel of what is right in your own eyes.

The gospel according to, if it's not hurting anybody else, don't worry about it. There's the self-helper therapy gospels, which make counselors new priests.

[15 : 49] There's the gospel of, I just need to be the best version of myself. What is the gospel of Jesus Christ?

What is the gospel of God? It's very simple. It is God is the creator. Man are sinners. Christ is the Savior. And then we must respond in repentance of faith.

You know, brings me to the last thing I want you to notice. And that's got to do with power. These man-made gospels, one of the things that is a problem about them is that, well, they're conceived in the minds of men.

And they have absolutely no power to rescue you from your sin. None. And another way that you can spot a false gospel is by paying attention to what that gospel is telling you to trust for your rescue, for your deliverance, for your salvation.

If that gospel is telling you to trust in an organization, or a human being, or yourself, there's no power there.

[17 : 16] But if that gospel is telling you to trust in the God of the Bible for your salvation, we're getting to the gospel, the real gospel, the genuine gospel.

So none of these counterfeit gospels has the power to convert a sinner who is worshiping idols into a worshiper of the one and true God.

There's no man-made gospel that can transform your heart from living for things that are made to living for the creator.

There's no man-made gospel that can change a rebel to God into a child of God.

Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can do that. The gospel of God is the power of God. And so if you're like, hey, I'm just wondering if what I've been doing is all in vain.

[18 : 15] The answer is no. No! Not if you're preaching this gospel. It is the power of God to change people. And to change people's eternity, change their standing with God.

It is radical in its power. You know, when my dad taught me how to drive a golf ball, he would say, Michael, let the club do the work.

The power is not in you, Mike. The power is let the club do the work. In a similar way, it's the gospel of God that does the power in changing people.

Not in our ability to persuade people. Not in our ability to win an argument. It's in the plain facts of the gospel. It's in the plain facts of the gospel. That God is our creator. That man are rebels.

That Jesus is the savior. And that our response is repentance and faith. It's that simple. It's that simple. There's nothing in vain about that.

[19 : 28] The second area, second reason why our gospel efforts are not in vain, is what the gospel does in us.

The gospel shapes how we go about gospel ministry. The gospel shapes our motives of why we tell other people about Jesus.

You see, this same gospel that saves us shapes the way we proclaim it. There's the gospel message itself. God is the creator.

Man is a rebel. Jesus is the savior. Our response is repentance and faith. And then there's the way we communicate it. One of the things we need to be aware of when we're talking to other people about Jesus is we need to get the facts of the gospel right.

And we need to make sure our motives are right. In verses 2 through 12, we have a listing out of different kinds of motives in sharing the gospel.

[20 : 45] You can lump them into two categories. Not this way, but this way. Don't share the gospel this way. Share the gospel this way.

Let me just point them out. In verse 3, for our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive. This is having to do with the content of the gospel.

We're not going to present a false gospel. We're not going to present a partially true gospel. We're not going to intentionally deceive people.

No, that's not how we do that. One of my concerns in our telling other people about Jesus is that we are doing some kind of adjustment, modifying of the gospel.

For example, there is a temptation for us to tell other people about Jesus, but leave out sin.

[21 : 47] To leave out our rebellion. To leave out the consequences, the eternal consequences of sinning against a holy God.

And we leave it out because we don't want to offend people. The sad thing, though, is when you present a modified gospel like that, it leaves people thinking, well, what's the point?

What do I need to be saved from? If there's no danger, if there's no rescue, what's the point? We face a huge temptation in our culture to soften the gospel, to make it palatable, to make it unoffensive.

But that's not the gospel of God, gang. The gospel of God will be offensive to people because we're confronting people in love for them with their sinfulness.

Here are some other not this ways. In verse 5, for we never came with words of flattery, as you know. Words of flattery, you're using your words to manipulate people.

[23 : 07] You're trying to praise someone in order to gain some kind of credibility with them. You're flattering them so that you can be well thought of with the hope that you will be less offensive.

Flattery is a manipulation. Nor with a pretext for greed, God is witness. At this time that Paul's writing this, there were charlatan preachers cruising around the empire, preaching a counterfeit gospel with the hope of making a quick buck and then moving on to another town.

They exist today. Some are religious, some are non-religious. They're declaring to you some kind of false hope.

It's not God is the creator, man is a rebel, Jesus is the savior, and we must respond in repentance of faith. Paul's very clear here.

We weren't there to make money from you. We'll see that come up in a little bit again. Verse 6, nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

[24 : 31] We did not seek glory from people. We weren't in it for fame. We weren't in it for power. We weren't in it to get likes. We weren't in it in order to get some kind of esteem and be well thought of.

You see, all of these motives that we're looking at here, this flattery and greed and vain glory, it's all selfishness.

It's all a preaching of the gospel for your own gain. Fear of man would be another one in here related to flattery. And usually the fear of man shows up in our not telling people about Jesus. We don't proclaim the full gospel because we fear being rejected. And what that amounts to is a quiet shame over the gospel.

So we modify it. Or we just stay quiet about it. We are not to speak the gospel in error or from selfish motives.

[25 : 41] Those are not of faith. There's a better way. But this way. Verse 2. Though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much affliction.

Boldness. Not shame. Spirit-born courage. Remember what Paul said Romans 1.16? I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation.

His confidence in his unashamedness was because he was convinced of what the gospel was and is able to do. There's another reason to make you bold.

If you look at the end of this passage in verse 16, Paul is actually trying to comfort the Thessalonians and saying, hey, those who oppose you, God's wrath will fall upon him. Vengeance is God's. But it's a reminder for us. God's wrath is coming. There is a judgment day when Jesus returns. This is Matthew 25. He will sit upon his throne and all billions of the people that have ever walked the earth will be gathered before him and he will divide them into two massive groups.

[27 : 17] The sheep and the goats. One group are those people who believe that Jesus is the Christ for salvation and the other group of people are those who rejected it. There's coming a day.

Most of the eight point whatever billion people on the planet right now aren't typically thinking that God's wrath is coming. But we are. And it makes us bold.

It helps us to cut through the hype, the distractions to what matters most. In verse 9, there's another, but this way.

For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil, we work night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you. The work that he's talking about is being a tent maker.

The apostle Paul would travel and he had a skill of making tents. Apparently, people needed a lot of tents at this time. But he would set up kind of a shop and he would make tents out of leather and canvas apparently or other things and people would come into the shop, share the gospel with them.

[28 : 29] Silas would share the gospel, Timothy. And when they weren't making tents, they were out sharing the gospel. But the reason why they did that was to provide for themselves so they didn't charge those hearing the gospel any kind of a fee.

It allowed them to stay very clear of an accusation of being for the money. They were sacrificial in their hard work to not be a burden to them.

Verse 10, we learn of other motives. You are witnesses and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. Holy, righteous, blameless.

Don't misunderstand that as a claim to perfection, but it's claiming that they've been changed by God. That they are being conformed to the very image of Jesus Christ.

Holy, righteous, and blameless. And that kind of life validated the gospel that they were preaching. That's where the Francis of Assisi quote is helpful.

[29 : 41] Preach the gospel always and make sure your life adorns it. We all know what happens when your life communicates a different message than the gospel itself.

you will be either thought of as a fraud or the gospel will be thought of as a fraud. One of the things we need to pay attention to is how we're living our lives.

We're not perfect, but are we striving to be holy and righteous and blameless? Are we striving to be like Jesus? It will adorn the gospel. people. In verses 7, 8, and 11, Paul shifts gears.

He makes a different kind of appeal. He talks about their relationships. In verse 7, he says, but we were gentle among you. Now, that word gentle in the original language actually means infant.

It actually means we were babes among you. We were infants among you. And the way it's being used is saying that we were innocent among you all. We're blameless. And then we read, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children, so being affectionately desirous of you, we are ready to share with you not only the gospel, but also our own selves because you'd become very dear to us.

[31 : 02] And so here is this picture. We've gone from an innocent baby among you to now a mom who's affectionate and desirous, a nurturer, trying to help and grow her own children.

It's quite a picture. And then, verse 11, 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 like a stern father.

So we have innocent baby, nurturing affectionate mother, stern dad. God. And it's not just one of these that characterized their relationship with the Thessalonians, but all of them.

It was rich and it's familial. It's family. It's loving. It's good.

And so what Paul is getting at here is how the gospel shaped his interactions with the Thessalonians to adorn the gospel preaching.

[32 : 15] There's one more aspect of this I want you to see and it's the driving motive for sharing the gospel.

You ready? Verse 4. But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak.

Not to please men, but to please God who tests our heart. Who is Paul? What's motivating him to share the gospel with people?

To please God. God. He's the one who tests hearts. He's the one who will hold Paul to account one day. That is why Paul is sharing the gospel.

We see it again in verse 5. But we never came with words of flattery as you know, nor with a pretext for greed. God is witness. He is very aware that God is witnessing all of his actions in terms of representing God.

[33 : 21] God. Verse 10. Again, we read, you are witnesses and God also. Another reference to God as witness. That is really unusual in the New Testament.

12. We exhorted each one of you and encourage you and charge you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. Again, what was driving Paul in his faithful proclamation of the gospel was not what men thought of him.

It's what God thought of him and moving people to live their lives for the glory of God, advancing his kingdom. That's what was driving Paul.

It was not selfishness, not that way. It was God's glory that way. And if you are engaging in gospel ministry, pursuing your marriage, raising your kids, and your motives are for God to be exalted, it is never in vain.

It's never in vain. God is our witness. We proclaim the gospel of God in the way that pleases God.

[34 : 42] The last reason is that the gospel of God shapes how it's received. And I'm going to be brief here just for the sake of time.

Have you ever wondered what to be looking for when someone hears the gospel of whether or not it actually resulted in their conversion? Have you ever wondered that?

Parents, have you ever wondered, hey, what should I be looking for in my children to know whether or not they've become Christians or not? Well, we've got two pieces of evidence in verses 13 through 16.

I'm not saying that they're the exhaustive, but we've got two. Let me point them out to you. The first in verse 13 is, and we also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, remember the gospel is a spoken appeal, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it actually is, the word of God.

When you are talking to people about Jesus, what you are paying attention to is how a certain person is hearing this news.

[36 : 06] Who are they hearing it from? We know that the Thessalonians, that they had received the gospel message in 1.5 with full convictions.

They were fully convinced that it was God appealing to them through Paul's preaching to repent and believe the gospel, that this was God at work. If someone hears the gospel of God and they think, this is interesting, but you know what, this is just one more take on the whole religion thing and it's just another attempt man is trying to make sense of his own life in this world.

They're not hearing it as from God. The Spirit apparently is not at work in them. But if a person, having heard the gospel, becomes acutely aware of their real guilt for their real sin against a real holy God that has a real punishment for eternity by that God.

And then they hear what God has done in his love, sending Jesus to pay for their sins in full, not in part, but the whole.

And they realize that this is God appealing to them in love. That this is God speaking to them. This is God saying, come to me. Be reconciled to me.

[37 : 34] I want to be in a relationship with you. When they are hearing that and experiencing the Spirit of God is at work drawing them to himself. And if it's a true work of the Spirit, they will repent and believe in this gospel.

And at that moment, they've crossed from death into life. They've gone from being in the domain of darkness and being rescued into the kingdom of the beloved Son. So one of the things that you're trying to pay attention to, one of the evidences of whether or not someone is saved or not is are they hearing this message as from God?

That's who we're representing. We're ambassadors. The second piece of evidence is at the end of verse 13.

But as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers. You see, not only does the gospel make this initial converting impact in our lives, the gospel continues to work in us.

It's like a nuclear reactor on a submarine. It just keeps on generating power, God's power in us to bring about lasting change.

[38 : 50] And the lasting change that the Apostle Paul points to here is that the Thessalonians suffered gladly for Jesus. even as babes in Christ.

That's why he can give thanks. He's fully confident that his coming to them was not in vain because the power of the gospel, because of the way that it was presented, and because of the way that it was received.

If you're in the room and you've been wondering, hey, is my gospel effort in vain? The answer's no. Not if you're preaching the gospel of God as the power of God. Not if your motives are being shaped by this gospel, and certainly not if it's being received in humility.

these are the things that we're paying attention to. Now, if you're not a Christian, and you're in the room this morning, the question is, is God making his appeal to you today?

[40 : 07] Is he calling you to come to him through Jesus? And if you're like, yes, come find me after the service.

We'll seal the deal. Help you move from death to life. And live for him forever.

Will you pray with me? God, we're so grateful that this gospel isn't just a nice little add-on to our lives.

That this gospel, the gospel of God, the true gospel, the only gospel, this is your power of salvation to all who believe, and it radically changes us.

It makes us those who once lived for ourselves into those who now live for you.

[41 : 24] God, forgive us for our fears. Forgive us for modifying your gospel. Forgive us for shamefully keeping silent.

Forgive us for thinking that our salvation is enough and all will be well. God, we are so grateful for the work that you are doing around the world at this very moment.

Father, would you pour out your spirit upon us, Christ the King Church, that you would give us clarity. clarity of what matters most and that you will give us power, boldness to speak and let the chips fall where they may, to live for you.

God, would you build your church? Would you add to your kingdom? Would you bring more and more worshipers into relationship with you? And we ask this in the name of Jesus, our confidence,

our sufficiency, our joy.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.