

PM 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 The Pastor's Portrait

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Preacher: Rev Jonathan Watson

[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 for our Bible reading this evening. 1 Thessalonians and chapter 2. We've, in previous Lord's Days when I've been with you, worked our way through 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, which teaches us so much about the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and also the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel creates the Church and the Church spreads the Gospel. And chapter 2 deals with the subject of the Christian ministry, the ministry of the Church.

And this evening's sermon is, I suppose, entitled The Pastor's Portrait because in this passage we have a fourfold portrait of the true Christian pastor.

And as we read the verses together, verses 1 to 16, perhaps you could try to spot what those four portraits are that make up the overarching portrait of the true Christian pastor.

So let's read together from chapter 2, verse 1. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

[1 : 25] 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 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.

[2 : 47] For you remember, brothers, our labour and toil, we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward 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 is, what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

For you brothers became imitators of the churches of God and 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.

But wrath has come upon them at last. Amen. So bring words that end that reading from God's word.

[4 : 40] We're going to sing the hymn on the reverse. Well, if you have your Bibles with you, please open them to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Would you agree with me when I say that we live in days when the social standing of the Christian minister has never been lower, generally speaking?

Reports of clerical abuse of children, the covering up of such abuse, and other criminal behavior by the church's hierarchy, the moral failure of church leaders of all denominational persuasions, have led to scandal after scandal, and to the lowering of people's estimation of the role and the importance of the work of the Christian minister.

how vitally important it is for the church to have not only an educated ministry, but to have ministers who, in the words of the Apostle Paul, have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, and whose hearts God tests.

As we turn our attention to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, we need to remember the context in which Paul is writing this letter to the church of the Thessalonians.

[6 : 23] Paul, Silvanus, also known as Silas, and Timothy, had been in Thessalonica for only a short time.

But it was a time of remarkable blessing. God was present in power and mightily blessed Paul's preaching of the gospel to the conversion of many who you remember in those lovely words at the end of 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from Heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who rescues us from the wrath to come.

But gospel success often leads to opposition and that was what happened in Thessalonica. A great wave of opposition leading to persecution arose against the apostles and the church.

And Luke in his Acts of the Apostles chapter 17 tells us that the brothers thought it best and prudent that Paul should leave the city.

And so under cover of darkness they led him out and he made his way from Thessalonica to Berea and there took the gospel. it would be perhaps as much as five years later before Paul would be able to visit the city of Thessalonica again.

[8 : 03] Five years! And it seems that in that period of time the enemies of the gospel the opposers of the ministry of Christ's apostles made every effort to slander and accuse Paul in his absence.

And from the defence that Paul makes in chapter 2 of this letter we can piece together and identify some of these accusations some of these slanders that were levelled against Paul.

That's a very bitter thing I don't know if any of you have experienced it but it's a very bitter and sorrowful thing for anyone let alone a Christian minister to be falsely accused and misrepresented and slandered.

If you've ever read the life of C.H. Spurgeon you will know that this is something that he himself experienced in the first few years of his remarkable ministry in London in the mid to late 1850s.

And the newspapers and the magazines of the time attacked Spurgeon mercilessly lampooning this young man and seeking to undermine his preaching which by the way God was blessing so much during those remarkable years.

[9 : 30] So bad did that opposition get that he and his young wife Susanna made up a little framed text picture which they put in their bedroom above their bed the words of which they read every night before they fell asleep words taken from Matthew chapter 5 verses 11 and 12 which read blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who went before you and I'm sure the apostle Paul drew comfort from these words of our Lord Jesus Christ just as much as the young Spurgeon did but more was required more needed to be done as far as the work of the gospel in Thessalonica was concerned you see the enemies of the gospel knew that if they could destroy the reputation of the messenger then there was a good chance that they could destroy the message itself and then it would be an easy thing to drive a wedge between the Thessalonian

Christians and the Christian apostle and missionary of the gospel and so they threw accusation after accusation against the apostle Paul in his absence they were saying things like the man is a coward who fled the city at the first sign of trouble to save his own skin or they said he's a charlatan a man who preaches and teaches falsehoods whose motives are impure and who practices deceit in order to please people in order to exercise power and authority over them with the sole aim of stripping them of their wealth to enrich himself now judging from Paul's defense of his visit to Thessalonica in the 16 verses that we've read in chapter 2 we can work out that these were the kinds of things the kinds of slanders and accusations that were being leveled against

Paul but Paul keen to see the work of the gospel preserved among the Thessalonians answers these accusations it's not just about defending himself but it's about keeping the Thessalonians in the faith of the message that he proclaimed to them and so he appeals to the Thessalonians themselves and he asks them to call to mind the things that they themselves had witnessed and did you notice as we read through this passage these kind of statements look at chapter 2 verse 1 he says for you yourselves know see how he's appealing to them and to what they themselves had experienced first hand oh yes this is what the accusers are saying this is what the enemies are saying but you yourselves know because you were there you're witnesses verse 5 as you know verse 9 for you remember verse 10 you are witnesses verse 11 for you know he says and you can see how

Paul is is saying basically to the Thessalonians look I've got nothing to hide my life and my work are an open book open to public scrutiny and you Thessalonians you have personally witnessed it all I've got nothing to be ashamed about but he also appeals to his own conscience in the sight of God and verse 4 has these remarkable words where he speaks of himself as being approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak not to please men but to please God who tests our hearts here's a man who is standing to use the old phrase *coram deo* before the face of God he's living before the face of

God under the eye of God his conscience is clear I speak as one approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel and so I speak not to please man man didn't entrust me with the gospel but God did the God who tests our hearts verse 5 he says God is witness there are some things that others can't see others can't possibly know inner things things to do with the heart things to do with the motivation behind the action but Paul is speaking out of a clear conscience and he even calls God to bear witness that he's speaking the truth with regard to these things that the

[15 : 35] Thessalonians couldn't possibly see but God is witness chapter 2 verse 10 he says you are witnesses and God also and then notice the way he defends his ministry of the gospel from the accusations that have been made with regard to his motives his message and his methods I want you to notice in particular how he uses four metaphors or word pictures to illustrate the true character of his ministry among the Thessalonians and these four metaphors or word pictures are so very instructive for us for they not only reveal the true and faithful character of the apostles own ministry but they provide us with a model of a true Christian pastor or to use the phrase found in the prophecy of Jeremiah a shepherd after God's own heart who will feed the Lord's flock with knowledge and understanding and the first metaphor he uses is that of a steward a steward now he doesn't actually use the word steward but the concept is present in what the apostle says he portrays his own gospel ministry as something which has been entrusted to him and that phrase entrusted with the gospel conveys the idea of stewardship look at verses three and four he says 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 now I cannot read those words without thinking about Paul as a steward who has been given a stewardship entrusted with the gospel what are we to understand by this Paul wants the Thessalonians to understand that God had entrusted the gospel to him just as a householder might entrust his property to his steward and throughout the epistles Paul refers to both the privilege and what an immense privilege it is to be entrusted with the gospel but also of the overwhelming sense of accountability that he has to discharge that stewardship faithfully as one who must give an account of his stewardship to

God and here he uses the idea of stewardship of having had the gospel entrusted to him as a stewardship from God to counter the slanderous accusations being levelled against him notice he says that his appeal did not and does not spring from error verse 3 now why can he say that because his message the gospel of God came direct from God and was therefore true not false or erroneous and he also says in verse 3 nor was his appeal due to impurity I think he's referring there to impure motives now the Greek word means impurity or uncleanness and can refer to sexual immorality and it's possible that

Paul's enemies were hinting at this since it was not unusual in those days or sadly today for travelling teachers to indulge in such moral uncleanness with the woman over whom their teaching had influence but the word here probably refers to Paul's motivation impurity of motive and to such evils as ambition and pride and greed and the quest for popularity and Paul says my appeal did not spring from impurity I'm not interested in ambition and pride and greed and popularity I'm a steward who has been entrusted with the gospel by

God and in the third place Paul says that his appeal was not out of any attempt to deceive we're not trying to trick you he's not using the tricks of the trade of the traveling orator and teacher to win people over to him to line his pockets he's open he's speaking as one who stands before the face of God who's got nothing to hide no tricks up his sleeve who wants to preach the unadorned simple truths of the gospel so his message was true his motives were pure his methods were open and honorable because he understands himself to be a steward of the gospel entrusted with the gospel and so he speaks responsible to and accountable to

[21 : 53] God he says God had approved him God had tested him and found him to be genuine that's the idea behind this word approved here and then as a result of that successful test God had entrusted him with the gospel making him a steward of it and as a result it was God that Paul was trying to please not man and then notice what he says at the end of verse four it is God he says who tests our hearts the word tests is in the continuous present tense which shows us that for Paul he understood that this testing of him by God is a test that never stops he's always under the divine probation we speak as men who are tested by

God who are approved by God who are trusted entrusted by God and who are always seeking to please the God who is constantly testing our hearts now dear friends this is a great truth and an essential one to grasp for any aspiring minister but also for a congregation looking to call a minister does the candidate for ministry understand himself to be a steward entrusted by God with the gospel and that this stewardship is something that he will have to give an account to God for on the day of judgment Paul was a steward entrusted with the gospel that's the first part of the portrait of the pastor the second part very quickly is that of a mother

Paul he says is a steward but he also says that as a minister he is like a mother to his people look at verses five to eight of this chapter four things Paul mentions that were not part of his motivation and coming with the gospel to Thessalonica and you can see in this section how he's on the defensive we can imagine the kind of things that were being leveled against him he says we never came with words of flattery in other words we were not interested in using flattery to gain an influence over you nor with a pretext for greed that is we didn't hide our true intent by making an appearance to serve the Thessalonians while all the while we were really wanting the Thessalonians to serve us nor he says did we seek glory from people whether from you or from others and you can see that how all three evils are sinful ways of using other people to serve and enrich oneself

Paul rejected them all that's not what we were about while we were with you but the fourth thing he mentions is something that he could legitimately have done he could have made certain demands on these people as an apostle of Christ but he refused to do so and these demands doubtless involved the exercise of apostolic authority and the raising of financial support but Paul did neither he made no demands upon the Thessalonians instead he says this we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children isn't that a beautiful picture of a minister think of the contrast the apostles authority set against the mother's tenderness gentle among you but he also speaks in verse 8 of being affectionate and sacrificial in their love towards the

Thessalonians see what he says 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 so very dear to us you see the accusation behind these words of defense was that Paul was using the Thessalonians for his own greedy and selfish ends but the truth was the exact opposite he gave himself to serve them here was no self centered dictator but as a pastor he displayed the gentleness the affection the self giving self sacrificing love of a mother father towards his people so the pastor is a steward entrusted with the gospel the pastor is to be like a mother tender affectionate gentle self sacrificing and then the third metaphor he uses is that of a father verses 9 to 12 again the apostle refers to the fact that while he was with the

[27 : 55] Thessalonians he was not a burden to them instead he reminds them of how he worked how he labored and toiled he said how he worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God verse 9 just as a father with his children he set a good example and he provided helpful instruction and teaching so a good father does not sponge off his children but by his own hand and by his own hard work he provides for what his children need so Paul didn't ask money or financial support of any of the Thessalonians he says he would rather work night and day labor and toil are the words he uses so as not to be a burden for his children in the faith and as for his example look at these words in verse 10 what a challenge they are to us how they search our own hearts and weigh us in the balance he says you are witnesses and God also brings

God into the situation how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers for you know how like a father with his children we exhorted each 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 this is a father who not only sets his children a good example for them to follow but provides for their education by personally exhorting he says encouraging and charging them what a lovely expression this is to walk worthy of God to walk in a manner worthy of God it's really the equivalent of keeping God's commandments not to merit salvation we can never merit salvation but in order to show our thankfulness for the grace we have received from the

God who has called us into his own kingdom glory we could develop this aspect of Paul's ministry further but we must move on the true pastor is entrusted like a steward with the gospel the true pastor is gentle and loving and self sacrificing like a mother the true pastor sets an example of hard work and provides for the education and training of his children and the fourth and final metaphor Paul uses in this passage is that of a herald a herald I want you to look at verse 9 of chapter 2 where Paul says for you remember brothers our labour and toil we work night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God or while we heralded to you the gospel of God and look at verses 13 and 14 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 became imitators of the churches of God and Christ Jesus that are in Judea for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews and so forth so like the first metaphor of the steward this fourth and final metaphor or word picture is implied by what Paul says in these verses and we shall see it clearly if we pay close attention to what he says he did while in Thessalonica what did he do when he was among them he proclaimed the gospel of God and that word proclaimed is an important term because it conveys the idea of heralding a message and that is the usual

New Testament word frequently used when speaking about the preaching or proclaiming or heralding of the gospel and it is the concept behind the words of verses 13 and 14 again I repeat them 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 and there could be no mistaking the implications of what Paul is saying here the gospel that he preached is nothing less than the word of God you remember that in the Old Testament the prophets were the communicators of the word of God and often they introduced their prophecies with phrases like thus says the

[34 : 06] Lord or the word of the Lord came and so on and here in verse 13 the apostle Paul do you notice what he's doing here he is putting his preaching of the gospel to the Thessalonians on the same level as the word spoken by the Old Testament prophets and you notice and you notice too he doesn't scold or rebuke the Thessalonians for regarding his preaching of the gospel too highly why because he says that when they heard the word of God that he proclaimed to them they accepted it not as the word of men but as it really is the word of God that's how they responded to his preaching and he doesn't school them for that and say look you

Thessalonians have got this all wrong this is just my words like so many modern day church leaders who don't seem to have any conscience whatsoever about taking up the Bible and saying but Paul was a first century Jew what did he know this isn't really God's word we've got to reinterpret it or we've got to take the myths and legends out of the Bible we've got to modernize it and interpret it for ourselves today in the light of the spirit of the age in which we live far from it Paul's preaching the gospel was the preaching of a herald sent by the king of heaven to declare the king's message to the people of this world and the

Thessalonians got it spot on when they recognized in Paul's preaching nothing less than the very word of God and you notice how Paul thanks God constantly for this very thing the way the Thessalonians had recognized his preaching to be nothing less than the word of God and notice this too he adds this word of God which is at work in you believers it's the word that works within us that transforms us that changes us from being the people that we once were into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ and that is the greatest proof and demonstration of the truth of the preaching of the gospel it changes people into the likeness of Jesus

Christ so the gospel is the word of God the power of God to salvation for all who believe it's this gospel that saves it's this gospel that transforms and sanctifies it's this gospel that produces the kind of steadfastness and perseverance that enables believers like these first century Thessalonians to withstand and to endure the opposition and afflictions and persecutions of the world so what can we learn from this passage this evening we can learn what are the key characteristics and rules of a true and faithful gospel minister we could boil it down into two parts and say the true gospel minister the faithful gospel minister is committed to two things he is committed to the word of God because he is a steward entrusted with the gospel and he is a herald who must proclaim this message that

God has given him and he is also committed to the people of God gentle loving self-sacrificing like a mother hard-working setting a good example providing for the education and training of his children like a father committed to the word of God committed to the people of God so I trust and pray that these words may be an encouragement to you to see in them not only the picture of a faithful true gospel minister but also to see in them a portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ the chief shepherd who was committed to the word of

[39 : 38] God and who was committed to the people of God in a way that the apostle Paul even the great apostle Paul couldn't achieve but at a practical level I trust that one day you as a congregation will be able to be in a position to call a minister to serve you here in Dumfries what kind of man are you looking for well don't let it become oh I want somebody like this or I want somebody like that or he has to be this that or the other but look for a man who's committed to the word of God and a man who's committed to the people of God who understands what it is to be a steward of the gospel entrusted with the gospel and who wants to please God and not man a man who is committed to heralding the gospel as the very word of God and will be faithful to that message but a man who also shows the gentleness of a mother the self sacrificing love of a mother who shares not only the gospel but his own self with the people and a man who is so committed to the people of God that he's like a hard working father providing for the needs of his children and dedicated to their teaching and training and instruction otherwise we'll be left in a mist and fog of subjectivism or mysticism lord show us the man you have for us and all that kind of thing the lord has shown us the kind of man let us take these metaphors word pictures painted for us in 1st

Thessalonians chapter 2 and let us seek these kind men and if we can't find them what should we do we should pray the lord of the harvest to send forth such labourers into his harvest field that's something we can all do and the lord will answer prayers that are offered in accordance with his word and will is this the kind of men the kind of man you want for this place pray that the lord would provide him and there are many other churches in the denomination who are very much in a position like your own so pray not only for yourselves but for the other vacant churches too like Livingston where I worship and on

Wednesday nights in our prayer meeting we pray I certainly pray for Dumfries so together we can have fellowship though we're apart at about 100 miles or whatever it is you pray for us and we'll pray for you may the lord bless his word to us let us pray heavenly father we thank you for your word we praise you that you have given it to us and that it is the living and abiding word of god we pray that it may teach us and guide us and direct us shape our minds shape our thoughts shape our hearts shape our desires oh lord we do pray most of all for the raising up for the churches today men who have the characteristics of a true faithful christian pastor and above all we pray that we might adore our lord and saviour jesus christ the great shepherd the chief shepherd the good shepherd the one who laid down his life for the sheep oh we praise you for him that he is the great shepherd and overseer of our souls hear our prayers gracious lord and bless us now in christ name amen let us sing our well easy to keep sure