

Paul's Way and Their Response

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of July 2000 the preacher is Phil Muleman his sermon is entitled Paul's Way and their response and is from 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 1 to 16 Let me pray Heavenly Father we thank you for your word we pray that it will teach us and encourage us now and inspire us to be better servants for your sake Amen Please be seated You may like to have your Bibles open at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 which is on page 959 For those of you who might be here for the first time today we are preaching through a series from 1 Thessalonians in the weeks ahead A statistic I read some years ago said that dentists have the highest suicide rate out of any other profession

Sorry Claudine The reason being is that it's a thankless job and no one ever really enjoys going to the dentist do they? Let's be honest How many of you look forward to your six monthly checkups?

I don't So much so that I ignore the reminder card that comes every six months and I go once a year if I'm lucky and there was a period of time in my life for about ten years that I didn't even go to the dentist at all I can't stand the thought of what the dentist is going to say about my teeth and what he might be doing with my teeth with those drills that go woohoo and the needles and all those sorts of things Well being a dentist is hard work Isn't that right Claudine?

Yes Being a dentist is hard work and the dentist can get some pretty nasty criticism from their patients on a daily basis possibly It's a tough job Being a Christian witness is a tough job too Anyone who is involved in seeking to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ will be all too aware of the criticism that they will receive from time to time at the hands of those they seek to proclaim the truth of God's love to and perhaps from those they don't even seek to proclaim God's love to We as Christians, we aren't immune from criticism and opposition in our society just as the Apostle Paul was not immune to it either within his own society Now in the book of Acts which talks about the spread of Christianity after Jesus had died and risen In that book we learn about how the Apostle Paul was mistreated in many places that he went to and in particular in Acts 17 we see how there was an attempt to mistreat him that is the Apostle Paul in Thessalonica by some of the Jewish people and the ruffians as it's talked about in Acts 17 from the marketplace in Thessalonica while he was there and even after Paul had left how they tried to mistreat his name and what he sought to proclaim and despite all the persecution that he and his companions

Silvanus and Timothy endured both physically and verbally he reminds the faithful Thessalonians in this letter that he writes to them in verse 1 he says to them you yourselves know that our coming to you was not in vain that our coming to you was not empty of purpose and despite all the sufferings that they had endured in Philippi which was the city he was at prior to coming down to Thessalonica and in Philippi back in Acts chapter 16 you don't have to look it up now Paul was whipped and he was beaten and he was pulled before the crowds and whipped and beaten he was thrown into a jail in a prison cell put in stocks and wrongly accused of things that he had done and despite all those sufferings that he had endured back there in Philippi they continued now that he had arrived in Thessalonica to take their courage from God to declare the gospel of God in spite of great opposition as this passage tells us and there's no doubt that they were unpopular amongst many of the people but their lack of popularity didn't prevent them from doing the work of God they continued on with doing God's work

[4 : 45] Paul had had the courage to preach the gospel and risk persecution at the same time he was outspoken in his gospel proclamation he was frank in what he had to say and so as a result Paul was courageous but his courage where did that come from?

it came from God not from mortals enabling him to be a faithful Christian witness while in Thessalonica despite whatever persecution came his way and the great opposition that is talked about against Paul it seems had continued on as I said a moment ago after Paul and Silvanus and Timothy had left Thessalonica Paul's opponents had called into question among these Thessalonian Christians Paul's motives for the gospel proclamation and there's some implied things that they had said which Paul now goes on to defend because they are grossly inaccurate claims that his opponents had said to these Thessalonian Christians and those claims we think are seen in verses 3 to 6 and in those verses we see that his motives Paul's motives for coming to Thessalonica did not spring from deceit as may have been the case with other people who had come into Thessalonica to speak Paul was not in the business of deceiving others he was in the business of only speaking the truth and neither did Paul come and Silvanus and Timothy for that matter neither did they come proclaiming the gospel with impure motives or even out of trickery and in verse 6 still speaking about the gospel proclamation he says we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed or another way to explain that is a pretext for self-aggrandizement they didn't come with those sorts of motives at all and then finally he says nor did we seek praise from mortals that wasn't the reason they came to Thessalonica far from having such motives

Paul and his companions came to them approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel the proof of that is that they speak the words that God has given them to speak rather than just nice cosy words which would win the approval of people now those were the sorts of people that were around in Paul's day people who would come with nice cosy words and try to win the hearts of people so they could get their own gain from them there were many people around in Paul's day who were good orators and they could easily influence people with their trickery their impure motives their deceit their flattery and greed just as there are those sorts of people around today as well and sadly there are many clergy today who will not speak God's word as seen in scripture they are afraid to tell the gospel of Jesus crucified and risen for fear of alienating themselves rather people clergy

I'm talking about here will go and speak nice cosy words that do not challenge people to grow in faith and godliness or even for that matter to be biblical Christians anyone who claims to be a Christian will use God's word that is the scriptures as the basis for his or her gospel proclamation if they don't then they are not proclaiming the true Christian gospel so for example for someone to say that there are many roads which lead to heaven someone to say that that is unbiblical those sorts of words as nice as they might sound will please other people but they will not please God it is unbiblical to say that sort of thing so as stewards of God as stewards of God's word our gospel proclamation needs to be words which seek to bring honour and glory to him better to quote scripture than say where Jesus says

I am the way the truth and the life rather than to say any way will get you to heaven because that is biblical to say that Jesus is the way the truth and the life so Paul answers his critics and defends their motives for the gospel proclamation in Thessalonica by telling his readers that they came as people approved by God and they didn't come seeking praise from mortals and in our Christian lives too we need to strive to please God first not simply to be people pleasers who try to remain popular at any price well Paul goes on in verses 7 to 12 and continues to defend their motives moving on and talking about their conduct among the Thessalonian Christians while they were there and Paul's conduct it seems was not one of authority now him being an apostle he does have certain rights to financial support plus a bit of GST and hospitality but Paul chose not to assert that right rather he chose to set an example among them and he sets that example by reminding them how he came among them and in verse 7 he says we were gentle among you like a nurse probably referring to a nursing mother we were gentle among you like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children any healthy caring mother is gentle with her child looking after them and nurturing them aren't they the image of a nursing mother here as seen in verse 7 is a challenge to any Christian who seeks to minister to others gentle like a nursing mother

[11 : 03] Paul adds that he was not only as gentle as a nursing mother with them but as affectionate and sacrificial too look at what verse 8 says it says so deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves because you have become very dear to us far from using these people to minister to himself for his own gain he gave himself to them don't you think that it's amazing that this tough man Paul just read some of his other letters the things that he writes in the letters that he's written in the New Testament that this tough man Paul should use a metaphor of a nursing mother to describe his conduct among the Thessalonians some Christian some Christians especially

Christian leaders often become so self-centered and autocratic the more that their authority is challenged the more they assert their authority and we all need to cultivate more in our everyday ministry of the gentleness of the love and the self-sacrifice that Paul talks about here of a mother not just women guys as well self-sacrifice is at the heart of Paul's ministry he reminds the Thessalonians of their labour and their toil we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaim the gospel of God self-sacrifice Paul considered the gospel message of God about the good news of Jesus Christ to be so important that he did not want anything to be a hindrance in its proclamation he reminds them that they are witnesses as you know you are witnesses along with

God about how pure upright and blameless their conduct was while he was among them he reminds them of how he ministered to them when he was there and not only was he gentle among them like a nursing mother as verse 7 tells us but he also dealt with them with each of them like a father with his children in verse 11 now that raises a good question in our mind what is a good father like is it someone who encourages their child to make something of their life that is have a good education get a wife buy a home pay off the mortgage get kids have kids and a good family car and all that sort of thing is that a good father according to Paul a good father is one who urges and encourages their children to live a life worthy of

God God and friends living a life worthy of God doesn't mean all those worldly things that I've just mentioned as positive as they can be it means putting Christ first and his priorities as number one in your life Paul came to these Thessalonians urging encouraging and pleading with them to live lives worthy of God as a father would his child he wanted their lives to reflect God in their everyday living he wanted them to be perfect because God is perfect he wanted them to be loving because God is love we love him because he first loved us loved us in 1 John 4 now of course we cannot be perfect in this life can we I said that last week but as Christians perfect perfection begins when we accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and it is fully realised when we get to heaven it's the only way we'll get to perfection well Paul has defended his motives to the

Thessalonian Christians and he's reminded them of his conduct toward them while he was there and that is to set an example to be gentle like a nursing mother and encouraging them to live lives worthy of God as a father would his child and now in verses 13 to 16 we now read about the Thessalonian Christians response and ensuing hardship after all of these words in verse 13 Paul gives thanks to God constantly that they receive the word of God for what it really is God's word that's what it really is it's not just some other human word that has come among them to be proclaimed it's God's word why is that if you look back into chapter one in verse five it says we discover there that the gospel message that Paul preached came not in word only not just with some orators sort of good words and good speaking and so on it didn't come in that only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction and when these people responded to the word of God that Paul proclaimed it transformed their lives it brought them into a union and a relationship with

[16 : 44] God it gave them these Thessalonians who received God's word it gave them the right to become inheritors of God's kingdom now we may hear great speakers today such as Stephen Covey and those speakers who want you to think positively about yourself and they can all be good things too that those people say they can be emotive as well they make you feel good they make you want to respond in some sort of way but are they really transforming the only really transforming message for this world is the gospel of salvation that is brought about through faith in Jesus Christ and friends in an age where people are searching for hope the gospel of Jesus Christ offers so much it offers so much more than what some emotive speaker might speak at one time yet why are we as Christians reluctant to tell anyone about the hope that belongs to all true believers all true

Christians perhaps it's because we often don't know what it is that we are meant to do you see the church has been good at telling people for centuries how to behave in church and it's neglected the teaching of how we should behave as the church out in the world therefore people live lives that are one behaviour on Sunday morning for example we're all you know very godly and so on and totally different live lives which are totally different Monday through to Saturday we need to rediscover afresh from God's word what it is to be his church not just here on Sunday but in the workplace at home wherever we may be and as Christians we need to be letting God's word continually transform us into his likeness so that we too can be involved in the transformation of other people's lives now essentially that is done by God's

Holy Spirit but isn't it great to know that God still wants to use us in the process of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ as Paul preached the word of God in Thessalonica the Holy Spirit transformed people's lives and as we make an effort to proclaim God's word today we should also expect God's Holy Spirit to transform lives as well well it's obvious that God's word transformed these Thessalonians lives in an amazing way because we are told that they became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are back in Judea a little bit further west these people in Thessalonica became imitators of those churches in terms of conduct in other words they themselves suffered persecution in Thessalonica from their own compatriots just as the churches in

Judea suffered at the hands of their Jewish compatriots now this is a very important thing to remember these next few verses it's important to remember here that the church in Thessalonica is made up of some Jewish converts as well as many Greek Gentiles look at Acts chapter 17 there were many Gentiles in that church and their compatriots the Thessalonians compatriots would therefore be both Jewish people as well as Gentiles the point is though they suffered at the hands of their compatriots that is both Jews and Gentiles and Gentiles are anyone who is not a Jew I'm a Gentile but what sufferings at the hands of the Jews does Paul have in mind in these verses he tells us in verses 15 and 16 he says of the Jews he says the Jews killed both the Lord

Jesus and the prophets and drove us out they displeased God and opposed everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins but God's wrath has overtaken them at last now these verses contain a fivefold condemnation of the Jews ranging from what they did to Jesus to what they continue to do to prevent his followers from preaching the gospel so the five things are first of all of the Jews they killed Jesus secondly they killed the prophets which Jesus himself testifies to in the gospels he accused the Jews of killing the prophets thirdly he says Paul writes they drove us out referring to him being kicked out of the places he went to such as Philippi and other places they drove us out and in a sense that seems to put them on a level with the prophets in the Old Testament fourthly he says they displease

[22 : 13] God the Jews displease God especially in their rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and God as their Messiah and the last thing is he says that they oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles some Jewish people were going around and creating disturbances wherever Paul went proclaiming the gospel and then Paul goes on and he says as a result of their antagonism they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins this continual type of hostility towards God will eventually will if you keep on rejecting God will eventually bring his wrath his anger on them when he will be seen as the judge of all people on that day when Christ returns now what it sounds like here in those verses it sounds like it's very anti-semitic writing from Paul on the surface doesn't it it sounds like it's a polemic against the

Jewish people to state that the Jews killed Jesus today would be regarded as anti-semitic and highly inflammatory amongst many people now it's true that the Romans were also implicated in Jesus death and so are all of us as Jesus died for all of our sins that's part of God's plan as we read it in the gospel isn't it so what is the point of Paul what's the point of Paul making this statement here we know that Paul himself is a Jew isn't he he was a Jew going around and persecuting the early Christians so in a sense he's condemning the Jews he's condemning himself here as well what's the point that Paul is making as Christians we can't look at history without feeling ashamed of the anti-semitism that's been carried out in the name of the

Christian church let me give you three examples one of the early church fathers a guy by the name of Christus preached against the Jews likening them to animals making wild accusations of infanticide and even cannibalism against them he preached a series of sermons in the early church during the crusades the church failed to stop Christian fanatics from pillaging Jewish communities people in the reformation Luther himself called for people to set fire to the synagogues and the homes of Jewish people confiscating their books and silencing their rabbis there is no justification for this kind of anti-semitism in Paul's words here and neither is there justification for any form of racism within the church that we might glean here from the Bible and from

Paul's other writings especially when you look in the letter to the Romans we see clearly that the apostle Paul loved his people the Jews he loved them he longed for their salvation even stating that he would give up his own salvation if only it would help them in chapter 9 verse 3 look what it says there Paul's point here what he says this fivefold condemnation of the Jews is not to be taken out of context and used as justification for anti-semitism it is there to state the facts many of his Jewish contemporaries had rejected Christ and were now opposing the gospel and hindering Gentiles from being saved that's what was going on and as a result God's wrath had come upon them and would continue to do so if they rejected

Jesus it's not a passage which gives us permission to be anti-semitic whether we are Jewish or whether we are Gentile that is anyone who's not a Jew we cannot ignore the facts of salvation that is brought about by faith in Jesus Christ because in him alone in Jesus alone forgiveness of sins is made possible and a relationship with God is brought about to reject Christ is ultimately rejecting any hope for anyone whether Jew or Gentile of eternal life and therefore heaven and for those of us as Christians we cannot ignore the commission that we all have here to proclaim the good news about Jesus Christ now we may not win the hearts of people as we proclaim the gospel truths and persecution is of one sort or another is bound to come our way but in the end who are we trying to please

[27 : 28] God or human beings let me finish with a song which I think we're about to sing number 550 may the mind of Christ my saviour may the mind of Christ my saviour live in me from day to day by his love and power controlling all I do and say may the word of God enrich me with his truth from hour to hour so that all may see I triumph only through his power may his beauty rest upon me as I seek to make him known so that all may look to Jesus seeing him alone he ha there he and throw, he he