

Ministry Matters

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 November 2021

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 0 0] Please turn with me now to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, Thessalonians that follows Colossians.

We're going to read the first 16 verses and then focus particularly on the first 7 verses. We'll read of Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians.

For you yourselves know, brothers, 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've 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, like an excuse 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.

[1 : 2 3] 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 very own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

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 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 asked 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 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 also to fill up the measure of their sins.

[3 : 0 0] But wrath has come upon them at last. Especially, as I said, we're going to consider the first seven verses along that theme of ministry matters, and three aspects of ministry that very much this passage, or certainly the first seven verses, that show and express in regards to ministry, the ministry of the word, what we might call success in ministry, but certainly the successful message, the message that truly impacts the lives of those who hear it and receive it with joy.

And I'll say the sincere message, certainly as Paul preached, as he proclaimed the good news, he did so in utter sincerity, without any kind of duplicity at all.

And following on from that, of course, with Paul being the messenger, carrying the message and proclaiming the message, he did so in utter selflessness, not seeking glory for himself, but glory to God.

And as we look at what Paul's saying about his own ministry in Thessalonica, and see how we can apply that in ministry of today, and even in your own response to various ministries that shall be said around at this time.

So let's look, first of all, at the first two verses this week, see what we might describe as the successful message. You know, it's one of the great aspects of the Bible, you know, that we're given insight, insight into the mind and the heart of the Lord's people, the people whom God in his wisdom has given to us to know concerning their witness.

[4 : 47] And we're given particular times insight into their minds, into their hearts. Now, of course, the greatest insight we have is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We've been privileged to know something of Jesus' emotional life, something of his tears, something of his sorrows, something of his joy, his sinless suffering, his opening, as it were, his heart, so that our hearts might respond to the Lord Jesus and truly know that, yes, he was a man just like us, but sin accepted.

And then when you come to the Apostle Paul, again, you see that he wasn't some kind of man, some kind of apostle that somehow was immune from pain and sorrow and suffering in the work of the Gospel.

Because we have to say this, whether Paul 2,000 years ago, whether even through the ages, even to our own age, all Gospel workers will suffer.

All Gospel workers do suffer. And will suffer from one degree to another. Whether you're a minister, whether you're an elder or a deacon or a missionary, a male believer, a female believer, you're all going to undergo to some extent the pains of service in the Lord.

[6 : 15] You'll suffer verbal abuse, maybe even physical abuse. You'll suffer in being falsely accused. You'll have criticism, negative criticism thrown at you, even lovelessness.

Because all who profess the name of Jesus, you're called to serve God and you're going to suffer in that service. Does this Jesus suffer for our sake and being like Christ?

You will suffer. I will suffer. Somebody once so famously wrote that when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

It's that call of suffering for the Lord Jesus. Suffering in a world that despises our Savior. Savior despises his servants. And yes, in that calling a man, bidding a man to come and die, that dying, of course it means dying to sin.

But surely it also means that sense of bearing your cross. Because in union with Christ, you're going to face the insults and hostilities of others.

[7 : 22] Just as Paul here faced these insults and hostilities in his work in ministry. But ministry matters. And ministry matters to Paul as it must matter to all, even to this very day and age.

Because all who serve, whether from a pulpit or from the pew as it were, you go into the battlefield, you go into enemy territory.

As we'll see, Paul having gone into that battlefield and enemy territory so often. And just as we go through this particular section of Paul's letter, you'll see how Paul responded to these attacks.

Because these were attacks on Paul. They were attacks on his ministry. That ministry that mattered to him because, well, he could do no other but proclaim the gospel, proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was servant of the Lord. He was minister for the Lord. He was an apostle of the Lord. And so he's bold. He's bold in reaching out to others.

[8 : 32] He's bold in opening up regarding his own faith and regarding his unashamed testimony to the Lord Jesus. Even when he was faced with particular accusations against him.

So we're going to look at these particular accusations. Because as we read the passage there in chapter 2, we realize that, yes, he faced considerable criticism, negative criticism in Thessalonica.

Now, we'll look at these particulars in a moment. But, you know, we'd really have to see first of all that he was successful in his ministry. I mean, in chapter 1 that we were looking at last week, you read in verse 5, for example, that Paul had come to that church there in Thessalonica, and he says that he'd come in power and the Holy Spirit with full conviction.

That Word, the Word of God that was preached with full conviction, that was accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. What happened? Many were saved. Many in Thessalonica were converted.

And Paul could later write in verse 10 of chapter 1 that the believers had turned from idols. Turned from idols. And had turned to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven.

[9 : 54] And that's the impact of Paul's preaching accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was preached, as you can see, in sincerity, full conviction, that what Paul was preaching was the true Word of God.

And so Paul could say at the start of chapter 2 that his coming to the Thessalonians wasn't in vain. It wasn't in vain. In other words, it wasn't empty.

It wasn't of no effect. Paul was utterly open about what he was preaching. He was hiding nothing of the truth. And he was hiding nothing of himself.

I mean, he'd been bold in his preaching. He's preaching the good news. Even, as he says, he'd suffered for that in Philippi, previous to Thessalonica. And he's going to suffer for the cause again.

And the results of his faithfulness were evident. I mean, here's this messenger. We might see the apostle, the messenger of Jesus.

[10 : 55] He's been utterly frank. His preaching hadn't been in vain. And the results spoke for themselves. People who'd once worshipped idols, they've turned to the Lord Jesus, and they're waiting for Jesus' return.

We might see that as evidence of success. Now, you might think, well, shouldn't we shy away from that word? From, you know, when we're thinking of preaching the word, should we not just shy away from thinking of preaching and success going together?

But no, I mean, success is a biblical concept. Because we read in God's word of the blessings that God gives when God's word doesn't return to empty, but accomplishes what God desires, what God purposes, particularly in the purpose of saving souls.

You know, when the goal of preaching the word is achieved, may well be souls, people turning to the Lord Jesus. And turning away from sin.

It may well be that Christians themselves, yourselves, being built up in the faith and relying the more on God. And so you can talk of success in these terms, in terms of achievement, satisfaction even.

[12 : 11] You know, God's purpose has been achieved, and, well, surely that's a motivation for anyone to proclaim the good news of the Lord Jesus. There's a great passage in 1 Samuel 3.

Tell me to it after the service. 1 Samuel 3, 19. And you read in that passage, that Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground.

In other words, in other words, that through Samuel the prophet, the word that God proclaimed through Samuel, that word was fully achieved, fully accomplished. All that Samuel proclaimed, having been given from God, every word fulfilled success.

That was what Samuel preached and proclaimed. He did so to the glory of God, and not the glory of self. And God's word fulfilled utterly. And that was the case with Paul.

Paul sought no glory for himself, even though through him, many lives were transformed. I pray then that that's the case, that all who proclaim the word of truth, whether it's here, there, elsewhere in our land, even the word proclaimed today, that the preaching that's been given, even this day, that there'll have been success to the glory of God.

[13 : 38] That the preaching of God's word will not have been in vain. But that those whom God has tasked in the work of ministry, in the work of proclaiming the truth, that there will be and have been that spirit-directed boldness, that boldness to declare the gospel of God, even in the midst of suffering, suffering for the sake of the Savior.

And Paul certainly suffered for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Because, as we're told here, he'd become very aware of the opposition to him and his ministry, as we see particularly in verses 2 to 6.

And so Paul is giving a defense, if you like, a self-defense of his ministry. And he's telling the Thessalonians, he's telling of the sincere message.

And this sincerity in proclaiming that message, because there's no doubt that there were people in Thessalonica who were criticized, who were hostile to Paul, to the message, to the gospel.

You can see there, verses 2 to 6, you know, we can list the criticisms. Verse 3, that he promoted a false gospel, a false teaching.

[14 : 54] Verse 3 again, that he had impure motives. Verse 3 again, that he practiced deceit, that he was being deceptive. Verse 5, that he used flattery.

Verse 5 again, that his motive in preaching was simply greed. Or verse 6, that he was just looking for praise from others. And Paul's very aware of these criticisms. It would seem that Timothy had been in Thessalonica and he reported back to Paul what he'd heard, and Paul is now very aware of the situation there.

But let's look more closely at these criticisms. I mean, he begins chapter 2 with the words, for you. In other words, you know, you know, for you know, you yourselves know.

It's nothing that the Thessalonians don't know. In fact, you go down these first six verses, verse 1, verse 2, and verse 5, in actual fact, and again he says, you know, for you've known.

I mean, in other words, the Thessalonian believers, they could testify that what Paul was saying was actually correct. Paul's not duping himself. He's not a fraud as so many of these traveling preachers were at that time.

[16 : 08] I mean, the Thessalonian believers know that Paul was utterly sincere. But what did they know? They knew that Paul's visit to them wasn't a failure. He hadn't stayed that long in the Thessalonian church.

But it wasn't some kind of empty, purposeless visit. It was a visit of visits that bore fruit. And the Thessalonians knew that. And they knew that Paul, as we said, was utterly sincere and already done.

But, but Paul was being accused by, well, by his opponents of wrong motives. Error, as we say, verse 3, false teaching. This is Paul.

This is the apostle whom God had called to make known the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus. Paul had been tasked with preaching the truth of God's word and to deny false teaching.

Paul wasn't a peddler of any kind of false teaching. Paul was a preacher of the truth of God's word. That wasn't all that Paul has been accused of, accused of error.

[17 : 14] He's been accused of impure motives. And the sense here of the word would suggest that somehow Paul has been accused of some kind of moral impurity. Apparently, well, at that time, there were these wandering, itinerant preachers and they'd go round that particular part of the world and certainly they could be correctly accused of using the positions for impure motives.

and they would use trickery. Paul mentions that in the end of verse 3. You know, the sense of tricking hearers with fine-sounding words that might seem plausible and yet are utterly devoid of the truth.

So, Paul, in fact, would later refer to these people as peddling a false gospel, but not Paul. Not Paul. So, Paul is defending himself against all these accusations.

He's not like the others. He's not like other itinerant preachers and teachers. He's not like those who simply spoke for what they could get out of their hearers.

So, he's compelled to stress that his motives were pure and quite different from these unscrupulous preachers. That's what he says in verse 4, just as we've been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts.

[18 : 40] So, Paul's motive in ministry was pure. In fact, so pure that Paul tells us he was approved by God. God, in his choosing love, God had entrusted Paul with the message of the gospel and given this privilege to share the good news.

By being entrusted by God, Paul had no selfish motives. He had no impure motives. But he was doing what he was doing by command of God.

He was doing God's work. Ministry mattered to Paul because it was the ministry that God had given him to do. And so, Paul would seek God's honour and God's approval rather than any kind of approval from man.

And you know, in our own 21st century world, we might even say our own 21st century marketplace, there are so many different shades of proclamation, shades of proclamation that claim to be God-directed and Jesus-honouring and Spirit-directed.

But it's so important for you who hear and listen, so important that you make a distinction between those who do proclaim the gospel out of pure motives and those who proclaim out of impure motives.

[20 : 04] Seek God's wisdom. Seek that discernment from above to discern whom you ought to and whom you ought not to listen to. And ask yourself, according to the criteria of Scripture, does this person, does this church leader, does this minister, does this pastor, does he preach truth rather than error?

Does he uphold Christ as the only Savior of mankind? Does he affirm that yes, Jesus is Lord? Does he acknowledge that Jesus died for the ungodly?

Does he affirm that if you confess your sins that God is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness? Does he proclaim that Jesus is the only way, the only truth, the only lie?

That's the proclamation of truth, not error. So listen to those who do proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. But of course, there are those who peddle a false gospel, those who deny that Jesus is Lord and won't accept the divinity of Jesus and won't accept that salvation is found in Jesus alone.

Avoid them. Shun them. Just close your ears to them because there are those who masquerade as apostles of Christ. False teachers, false prophets, peddling a lie as opposed to proclaiming the saving grace of the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 38] But then consider motives because no Christian worker is going to do the work that God has given them to do for any kind financial gain. But you who speak in the name of Jesus and to direct others to the name of Jesus, you'll do so with a willing and sacrificial heart.

You'll want to point others to Jesus and not to yourself. Look to the Lord Jesus. Look to the one who had nowhere to lay his head.

Look to those who have no self-motiv as it were in proclaiming the word of truth because Paul's motive, Paul's motive wasn't to make money out of the gospel.

It was to win souls for Jesus. Paul's motives were utterly pure. And that's why Paul's defending himself in verses 5 and 6.

as we see him as he strenuously defends himself as regards his pure motives because he speaks about further accusations against him that flattery and, well, greed.

[22 : 48] And then verse 6, you know, he emphasizes that he's not trying to please men or he's not trying to please men but God. As he says, we didn't seek glory from people whether from you or from others though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

So Paul's telling the Thessalonians that his motive in ministry was to honour and glorify God. So he's telling of his motives.

He's speaking about his integrity in ministry. I mean, he's just told the Thessalonians because he's serving God, because he's pleasing God, he's not going to use flattering words to try and make his hearers feel good about themselves or, in fact, they needed to hear the message of salvation.

Paul isn't some kind of hypocrite appearing to be one thing and actually being something else altogether. We're wearing masks at the moment and it's sometimes very difficult to tell who's behind the mask at times but Paul didn't wear any kind of mask of insincerity.

People knew exactly who Paul was and what Paul was. He didn't need to wear any kind of mask to cover up insincerity or any kind of motive or impure motive or financial gain or whatever.

[24 : 07] No. The Thessalonians were his witnesses. God was the ultimate witness. Paul had preached with that utter integrity. He proclaimed the word of God selflessly.

He didn't want popular acclaim. He didn't want financial gain. So that what the Thessalonians saw was what they got. He's a man of integrity.

He doesn't wear any kind of metaphorical mask to hide his real intentions. His preacher wasn't to win praise from others. His purpose was to win people for Christ.

And you know there are many lessons even for ourselves today. Beware of any preaching, any preacher even, who doesn't proclaim the whole counsel of God.

Who will never preach in regards to sin. Who won't say that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Because we have to say with the deepest of distress, there are many, even this day, who will use a pulpit to deny the reality of sin, to deny that God is a God who will not look upon sin.

[25 : 29] There are many who will simply preach a social gospel to make people feel good about themselves. But that's not pleasing God, that's pleasing man. That's the kind of flattery that Paul hated.

The greed. Greed, you know, the greed in the sense of being greedy for fame, being greedy for popularity. sincerity. You will beware, again, use discernment.

Beware of those who will wear a mask of insincerity, who will deceive those who listen with words as smooth as butter and who will say peace, peace, when there's no peace.

Beware of those who will use even the pedestal of a church, a church pulpit, to conform to the cultures of the day and seek the approval of secular man.

Rather than the approval of the one true God. And you know, all who've been given this privilege of proclaiming the word of God, it's for each one of us and each one of you to examine your heart and examine your heart continually as to your motive in telling others of the Lord Jesus.

[26 : 43] And you're listening to the word that is proclaimed. Well, yes, ask, is the whole message of the word of God being proclaimed, even when it hurts, even when it offends the sinner, even when there are messages that bring rebuke.

And may all who do proclaim the word of truth do it with utter integrity to point others to the Lord Jesus Christ. And as the words proclaim, as the words proclaim with pure motive, as the words proclaim for glory to God and not to self.

Because, you know, self is the greatest snare to any preacher, any preacher of God's word. Self is that great snare that so many have fallen into.

And pray, yes, pray for every preacher of the land that you won't fall into that snare. And we thank God that Paul didn't fall into that snare, as you see in verse seven, the selfless messenger.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. Remember who's saying these words? Who's writing these words? This is Paul.

[27 : 59] This is Paul, the man who before his conversion had been breathing out cruelties against the church. This is the same Paul who thought nothing of entering the homes of Christian believers and dragging them out forcibly.

Dragging them out, sending them to prison and even worse. But Paul had been transformed by the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. And Paul had been changed from the once violent hater of Christ and his people to this gentle apostle, this bold apostle, this faithful apostle of the Lord Jesus.

And what do we find him saying and doing? We find him caring, caring for the souls of men and women and doing it with a gentleness of spirit.

And he compares that gentleness to a mother's care over her little children. You see, that was Paul in his self-giving love for others. That genuine self-giving love.

Because he so loved these Thessalonians, these young believers. And he acted in such selfless care because he loved them.

[29 : 09] he knew that he had that pastor's heart for others. And with that ultimate purpose, as we said, not of self-glory, but of God's glory as he sought to nurture these young believers in that gentle, caring spirit.

And you see, that's the ministry that matters. Selfless, caring, gentle, nurturing the flock of the Lord Jesus in the name of the Lord Jesus.

So pray for those who have that spiritual rule over you. That they'll show the same selfless, caring, gentle, nurturing spirit.

That they'll show the compassion of the Lord Jesus. That's exactly what Paul showed here. And yes, the world might and the world does. scoff at such.

It scoffs at the preaching of the word. It scoffs at the pastoral care of those under the word. The world will hurl insults at those who are Christ's servants.

[30 : 19] But you who know the Lord Jesus, you who have that love for the Savior and love for his word, support those who do have that caring, gentle, nurturing spirit, and action in the church of the Lord Jesus.

Because ministry does truly matter in the 21st century. Does it matter in the first century here with Paul? It's matter through the ages. So we give thanks to God for such as Paul.

And give thanks to God for those who truly do show forth the tender, loving care of the flock, the flock of the Lord Jesus. even showing Christ within those who do minister in his name.

Who show forth the Lord Jesus, the caring shepherd, the one who ultimately shows his tender, care, gentle, loving of yourselves.

Yes, show that one to another. Show that care and gentleness one to another. as you show forth the love of the Lord Jesus even within the fellowship of the Lord's people.

[31 : 34] Amen. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, you teach us and show us your way, your ways.

Truly, Lord, we do pray, show us your ways and teach us your paths, even paths of righteousness and holiness. strengthen us, Lord, to be the more bold in proclaiming the truth of the Word of God.

Strengthen our hearts, Lord, when we are attacked for proclaiming the name of the Lord Jesus. We know, Lord, that even as the Lord Jesus was hated by others, so all who follow him will know a measure of hatred.

But, Lord, help us to be faithful. help us, Lord, to be true, to be servants, glorifying your name in full submission of the calling that you give to each one of us.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray these things, as we continue in worship of your name. We pray, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[32 : 46] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.