

I Thessalonians 2:1-12

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning.

Glad you're here. Just want to say, Jeff, if you'd like to come back and finish, your testimony was a great prelude to our passage today. So you can just come back and share a little more, and I'll sit down.

No? Okay. That's all right. We're ready for the sermon, so we can do this. But truly, it's encouraging to hear your stories and your testimony of what God has done in your life.

And what we're going to look at today is another rich picture of that. So let me pray, and then we'll dive in. God, even as we have just sung, how high and how wide and how rich, Lord, is the grace that you have shown in Jesus Christ.

You have not treated us as our sins deserve, but you have covered them with your love and with his blood so that we might know you, so that we might be yours, your children, so we might be part of the family of God.

[1 : 30] And Lord, we praise you for that. And Lord, we pray this morning as we look at this passage that you would, Lord, capture our hearts again with that great gospel truth.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. His name was Adoniram.

He left with his bride to sail halfway around the world. He saw his homeland only once the rest of his life. His work was fruitless for the first close to 15 years.

He was imprisoned. He endured unspeakable suffering, being hung by chains every night for months on end. He buried numerous children, two wives, and spent months sitting at the edge of his own grave in such despair that he longed for the jungle tigers to come and end his life.

He did see some measure of success eventually in his ministry, but then was forced to flee because of political instability. He died at sea and has no grave to remember him.

[2 : 43] Adoniram Judson lived a hard life. And he's not alone. He's one of countless others whose stories are not famous, who we will never know about, who have lived such hard lives.

Who would want to live a life like that? How about this as an alternative? This is from Reader's Digest.

They took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells.

Does that sound better? After our snowstorm last weekend, goodness, it does sound a little nice to be able to walk on a beach, collect shells for a little while. But it raises a question, doesn't it?

What is a life worth living? One life full of suffering and hardship. One life with a goal of ease. Our passage today paints a picture.

[3 : 56] A picture of a life that is worth living. If you want to turn with me, we're continuing in our series of, in 1 Thessalonians, we're going to be looking at 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 1 through 12.

It's page 5, I'm sorry, page 986 in your pew Bible, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. And while you're turning there, let me remind you a little bit of the context of the book of Thessalonians.

Paul is writing this letter to a group of people where he had been briefly, maybe only a couple of weeks, certainly only a couple of months. He had proclaimed the gospel to them.

They had believed. They had experienced opposition. Paul had left out of a desire to care for the church.

And so this church was characterized, this group that he was writing to was characterized by being young in their faith, being left without a teacher, an older Christian to help them continue to understand it.

[4 : 56] And they were facing persecution. In chapter 1, if you remember, Paul has just written to them, reminding them of what they have seen of the gospel dynamic at work.

That God had called them in love to be his. That they had seen the gospel dynamic. That God had given them joy in the face of the suffering and the persecution that they were facing.

And that the gospel had actually not only gone into them, but it had sounded forth from them so that all the people in the region where they lived were hearing about what God was doing through the gospel in the lives of these Thessalonians.

And so now he comes to a point at the beginning of chapter 2 where he looks at, he says, now consider the example of myself and my companions as we came to you.

And so let's look at the passage together so we can think through what he is saying. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

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4 Thessalonians chapter 4. 5 Thessalonians chapter 5. 5 Thessalonians chapter 5. 6 Thessalonians chapter 6. things that's most striking about this passage, and maybe you heard it, is that Paul says six different times in 12 verses, you know. He isn't saying anything to them that they don't already know. Verse one, he says, you know, brothers. Verse two, he says, you know we suffered. Verse five, he says, you know how we came to you. Verse nine, he says, you remember how we came to you. Verse 10 says, you were witnesses of how we lived. And verse 11 again, you know how we were. Why? Why is he so concerned about telling them something that they already know? Well, Paul's concern seems to be this.

[8 : 18] You see, in the broader context, this young church facing persecution, Paul was desperate that they would not lose hold of the gospel. He was desperate that they would stand firm and continue to believe in the gospel, that it worked such incredibly powerfully in their lives. And so he wanted them to stand firm. And so he's reminding them in this chapter, in this section particularly, of the character and the life of the men who came to proclaim the gospel, because he was afraid that they might think that the men who came to preach the gospel to them were empty or fleeting. And so the gospel they proclaimed would also be empty and fleeting in the hearts of the Thessalonians, and therefore they would forsake it. And so this is his concern.

So he starts in verse 1, and he says, we want you to know, do you remember, brethren, our coming to you was not in vain? Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. This word here, it might easily be seen to think, you think it might be fruitless, but fruitless doesn't actually make sense in the context. It has more to do with our coming to you was not empty, was not like a vapor here today and gone tomorrow. It was not without character or substance.

If you look at verse 2, you'll see why I say this. Because Paul didn't say, when we came to you, remember, we came and we bore lots of fruit. Now he could have said that. He's already said that.

He's already said that in chapter 1. But instead, he says, the opposite of this vanity that he's afraid of is we spoke the word boldly. And this is the first of a pattern that Paul's going to run through the whole passage where these contrasts. We were like this, not this for you. We were like this, not this.

So this first one is we did not come in vain, but we came and we spoke boldly the word of God. This is what we did. This is what we did. And do you see how central, again, in this passage, this speaking is to the life and ministry of Paul and his companions? In verse 2, he says, we declared to you the gospel of God. In verse 3, he refers to his appeal. In verse 4, he says, we spoke to you. In verse 5, he refers to the words that he gave to them. In verse 8, he said, we delighted to share with you, not only the gospel of God. And then in verse 12, we urged you and exhorted you and encouraged you.

[11 : 19] All of these, God used, Paul and his companions came and the main activity they did was to speak words, words, words about God and words about what God had done. And this, Paul says, is a contrast to the vanity. Why would he say that? Well, in the first century, there was a culture of traveling teachers. They would go around to different cities and they would come in. You see this most clearly when Paul goes to Athens and the Areopagus, the place where ideas are bantered around. These teachers would come in and they'd try to win a hearing and win disciples. And in the midst of it, they would become little minor celebrities. They would gain following, followers who would also give them financial gain. There were all sorts of characteristics about this culture of these itinerant teachers in the first century. And Paul says, we were not like that. I was trying to think of a modern day equivalent to what these traveling teachers are like. And certainly there are some of the most obvious examples might be certain televangelists or people that you might see on TV. But it also occurred to me that maybe another close analogy would be, and I'm going to probably step on toes here. But let me just do it. Those pseudo news entertainment talk show guys. Let me give you names so you might remember who I'm thinking about. Jon Stewart, Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, Bill Maher. I think I hit the spectrum. So if you're conservative or liberal, you're equally offended by I just hit one of your heroes.

But to recognize that these guys today, they're entertainers and their whole job is simply to have a successful career so people will think that what they say is important and do well.

That's what they're there for. They're on TV. Maybe I'm too cynical, but I don't think they're crusaders who have the substance that Paul had and his companions had. Because Paul said, we came and we spoke to you the gospel of God. See, the weight that Paul brought as he did this activity was, the message I bring to you is from God. And the boldness that I have to you is because I do it before God and in God. The God of the universe has worked an incredible thing in the gospel. And I am bringing that to you. And I'm doing it in the face of persecution. Do you see in verse 2, he says it twice. I am not a lightweight that when it gets hard, I give up and pack up and go home. I suffered in Philippi and I came to you and I did the same thing. You remember our coming to you is not in vain.

But instead, I came and spoke the gospel to you. A life shaped by the gospel has weight because it's grounded in God's call and God's message.

Think of Martin Luther standing before, here I stand, I can do no other. So that's the first contrast, not vain. But we came and we spoke to you. The second contrast then is in verses 3 and 4. Look with me again. Our appeal does not, you see this pattern, our appeal does not spring from impurity, error, 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 heart.

[15:17] Paul said, we didn't come to try to trick you. We didn't come to try to convince you of something we knew wasn't true. We did not sacrifice truth for effect as we came and ministered among you.

This pitfall is especially, especially pronounced for a preacher, isn't it? It's so easy to want to not offend. It's so easy to want to make people like me by having the best jokes or the most current illustrations or the best ways to connect with you all. And yet, if I do that at the sacrifice of the truth of the word of God, woe be to me and to this church. And yet, let me recognize that the desire to please man instead of God in how we speak is not simply here in the pulpit, but it is something that is true in our everyday lives. It is so easy to be a people pleaser, is it not? It is so easy to allow our lives to be dictated by and determined by the responses of those around us that we give credence to. So in our words, we allow distortions for the sake of pleasing others. What does this look like? It might be a little white lie. We all think, ah, it's not important. It was a little detail.

But why did we do it? Well, because I wanted to please this person. I wanted them to think well of me. It might look like intentional omissions. Yeah, I didn't tell them about that, that conviction, that part of my story, that part of my background, that part of my life, because I didn't think they'd like me if I said that. It might look like, straight up, deception, speaking things that you know are not true in order to convince someone of something that you do want to be true.

It also, I think, can even happen at the level of communicating in such a way, communicating with a kind of certainty that isn't really well-grounded. This is another way that we try to please people.

We speak with a certain authority so that people will respond to us, so that people will be in line with what we want to say. I think of, I don't know how many of you listen to sports talk radio, but sports talk radio is full of this. People whose opinions are far more certain than the grounds upon which they're based. This is the whole basis of sports talk radio entertainment.

[18:07] Paul says we were not like that. That's what the teachers of the first century would do.

They would shade the truth in order to gain a hearing. There were people pleasers. Let me just explore this people pleasing for one more minute, because it's such a dynamic of our hearts, isn't it? But when we start to seek to please people, what a cost it has in our lives. We become lightweight, empty people when we live to please others. Because our lives become characterized by anxiety and worry. Oh, what are they going to think of me? When I walk into a room, you're constantly thinking, oh, how are people responding to me? How am I presenting myself? How am I coming across? You lose your ability to be objectively helpful to other people, because you're always thinking about myself, and how am I doing in this interaction?

How am I positioning myself? And is this person responding well to me that I can't ever escape from that to actually think, what does this person need? How can I love this person? How can I serve this person?

person. We end up actually being very selfish when we're people pleasers, because it ends up being all about me, and how am I coming across to other people? And even more than that, we actually end up losing control of who we are. We let other people define who we could be and not be, what we can say and not say. And as we live out this people pleasing, we find we can never actually please everybody perfectly.

And the spiral takes us into bitterness and resentment. It makes us aggressive and angry towards other people, or it makes us despair and withdraw. People pleasing is a terribly costly pattern of life.

[20 : 19] Paul says, we did not come to please people. We came to please God. We came to please God because he was the one who put us in this position in the first place. When it says he was approved by God, it is a picture of someone who's been tested and tried, where they have gone through the gauntlet of the testing and have come out the other side. Paul said, as God has approved us for this, and because we were approved, then we were entrusted. We were given this incredibly precious, this incredibly glorious truth about what God has done for us in Christ. And he's, Paul says, we now have this stewardship. God, it's not our message that we get to choose how we dispense it, but we've been given, we've been given it by God. And so we give it to you for him and before him.

And this God is the God who is still, even today, testing our hearts so that our motives not, might, might never be that you would like me, that you would be pleased with me, but that my motives might always be to live simply for him and to please him in everything that I do.

This is a man who will stand firm in persecution and not run away.

This is a life that is worth living, not pushed and pulled by the opinions of others, but steadfastly looking to the gaze of God and for his approval.

And friends, do we not know and see that the greatest example of all is Christ? Christ who came to do his father's will, who always looked to his father and obedient to the end, pleased him in every way.

[22 : 23] The gospel life is one that is focused on pleasing God and not man, and that is what gives it weight. Paul goes on in verses 5 through 10, and he says not only is a gospel-shaped life not about pleasing man, but pleasing God, but it's also not about getting from people, but it's about giving to people.

Look with me. He starts in verse 5 and he says, For you know we didn't come with flattery or with greed. These are both dynamics where when I'm flattering someone, it's because I want to get something from them.

Paul says we didn't come to do that. Flattery gains you acceptance. Greed gains you wealth and the comfort and power that comes from it. And then he goes on in verses, in verse 6, and he says we didn't try to get glory from you either.

Glory gives you significance and identity. It props you up in the world, and if you seek it from people, you become like a rock star.

Isn't that what many of us think? Wow, wouldn't that be great? I want to gain glory from people. It's also in verse 9 what you see, this self-getting.

[23 : 38] Paul says we didn't come to be a burden for you. And the reason why he said that is because the traveling teachers would come, and like a speaker might come today and say, I will come speak for you if you will put me up in your hotel, pay for my plane ticket, and I'd really like a bottle of Evian by my bedside table.

Thank you very much. A kind of demanding of provision. That was a pattern of the first century, and Paul says we didn't come to be a burden like that, but instead we came to give.

Look with me. This is where he goes in verse 7. He says we loved you like a mother. A nursing mother loves her child.

For those of you who are single, particularly you men who've never seen this, a nursing mother is one of the most selfless tasks in the world. It demands all of your attention.

It demands that you stop everything else you're doing. And it demands that you give out your time, your love, your sleep, your milk to your baby.

[24 : 50] And that's how Paul holds it up, as a paragon of selflessness. She doesn't get to decide when to feed the baby.

When the baby's hungry and cries, the baby gets fed. She loses an immense amount of control over her life in order to take care of a baby.

What a beautiful picture. What a beautiful picture. Paul says we were like that. He goes on in verse 8 and he says, we selflessly gave ourselves to you.

We delighted in you so much that we wanted to share with you. And we didn't just drive by, shoot the gospel at you and keep going. We delighted to share with you not only the gospel, but our very selves.

We didn't just give you words or ideas and hope that that might be helpful. But we were with you. We were among you. We were a part of life with you when we were with you.

[25 : 58] Because you had become dear to us. You became beloved of us. And so we delighted to pour ourselves out, as Paul says in other places, pour ourselves out for you.

Not to get, but to give. I think of some of my own experience in my life.

There's a guy who's been a part of my life for a long time. I met him as a freshman in college. When I was a cocky, didn't think I needed a lot of help freshman, he reached out to me when I didn't think I needed him.

And he kept pursuing me. And he said, hey, come on, let's go hang out. And he'd invite me to read the Bible sometimes, but sometimes we'd just talk, or we'd go get ice cream, or we'd go for a walk in one of the parks nearby our university.

As we grew, during the four years I was in college, he moved from being a single guy to being an engaged guy to being a married guy. And in every step along the way, he not only sat down with me, and week in, week out pointed me to the scriptures and pointed me to Christ.

[27 : 18] But he involved me in his life. He involved me in his engagement. Not technically, but... But he processed that with me.

And he let me in. And once they were married, he and his wife, Cindy, they invited me to come and have lunch with them and to be a part of their lives. And after I graduated, they took me on a mission trip where we shared everything from Diet Cokes, which were precious in France 15, 20 years ago, to street evangelism, to just talking about what is God doing in our lives.

And then I had the privilege four years later to go and work with him for a couple years in ministry. By that time, he had kids, and so I'd go and lie on the floor and play with their kids and eat meals with them.

They involved me in every part of their lives. And I saw the gospel at work. I saw the gospel in the way that he took care of his wife and how he ordered his home and how he thought about his priorities as much as I did from how he taught me the Bible.

And I'm not the man that I am today apart from him. He who shared not only the gospel, but his very self with me.

[28 : 48] And again, friends, is this not the pattern of our Savior as well? Jesus, who did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, made himself a servant, took on human flesh, was obedient even under the cross.

He lived to please his Father even unto death for our salvation. And so this is how God accomplished the gospel, and this is the pattern of the gospel life then for those who embrace it and believe it.

And finally, verses 11 and 12, Paul says, you remember our conduct. 11 and 12 isn't actually a contrast. I think 11 and 12 is the one place where you see Paul saying, this is the goal.

This is why we have done all that we have done and why we have done it the way we have done it. Because what our desire is for you, look with me, verses 11 through 12. He says, like a father, like a father taking the role of a moral instructor for his children, I took this role in your lives.

And this is my purpose. We exhorted each one of you and encouraged and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and his glory.

[30 : 23] Paul says, this is what you were made for. This is what you were saved for. This is why the gospel has come to you so that you would be gods and you would live in a manner worthy of a God who has called you into his kingdom and his glory.

And Paul doesn't use those words lightly. His kingdom is the extent of his effective will working itself out in the world. And he says, God has plucked you out of this world that we all live in, this fallen world that is decaying, that is full of hurt and pain and strife and bloodshed, that is full of toil and suffering, that is full of what the writer of Ecclesiastes said was vanity, vanity to pursue this life outside of God.

It's the emptiness that Paul says, we were not like that. God rescued you from that kingdom, the kingdoms of this world, so that you could be a part of his kingdom, so that you would know his righteousness at work in your life and through you in the lives of others, that the world would work the way God intended it to, that you would know his love at work in you and through you to other people so that you might even be one who could love your enemies, that God's kingdom would come to you with his truth so that you would know what is unchanging in a world that feels like it's always changing.

God has called you out of a world that is falling apart and dying and decaying into his kingdom and his glory.

His glory, which is the radiance of his being, the expression of all that he is, that has at its pinnacle the very work of salvation that Paul has proclaimed with his companions the whole time.

[32 : 33] that God in the rich mercy that he has in Christ has proclaimed that in Christ our sins can be forgiven, our alienation from God can be removed, that we can be restored, that the curse and the penalty of our sin is taken away because Jesus died and rose again.

And not only has he done that, but he has rose again to give us a life, a life worth living. And it looks like this.

It is an imitation of what Paul and his friends did. It is a life lived for God and his kingdom and his glory. It is a life lived to serve others for the sake of the gospel.

You've heard me say that as we of the elders have been talking that we want to be a gospel-centered church.

This passage is one of those passages that I would go to to say, what does it look like? Look here. If we are to be gospel-centered people, if we could live lives that sought to please God and not man, that sought to give and not get, that sought to share the great news of Jesus Christ, with others and our very lives as well, so that others would live in a manner worthy of God who calls us into his kingdom and his glory.

[34 : 05] Oh, what a church we would be. And yet, my goal, just like Paul's goal, is not that our church would be a great church.

My final observation of this passage is, look how many times he points to God. The emptiness of the teachers was that ultimately their life and their ministry was a human-derived and human, a human-derived activity with a goal of human glory.

And for Paul, it was the exact opposite. It was a God-derived activity. And it was for God and God's glory. And oh, may that be true for our church as well.

Let's pray. Lord, I pray today, if there are those here who do not know you, who see the emptiness of life, wonder if it's all worth it or not.

God, I pray this morning that they might see, Lord, the incredible, incredible weightiness, worthiness of you and your kingdom and your glory.

[35 : 25] God, I pray for those who know you this morning, but whose lives still feel empty and weightless. God, will you help them see if perhaps they have fallen into these things, fallen into people-pleasing, living for self, getting, not giving.

God, I pray you would remind them of the gospel. Lord, remind them of what you have done for them in Christ. Lord, I pray for this church.

Lord, that you would make us a church from which the gospel rings forth because you are shaping us by your gospel.

Lord, that the preciousness of Christ is the treasure of our hearts. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.