

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost [Ord 30]
29-10-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12 The Death of Moses

Psalms 90: 1-6, 13-17 God is Creator and controller of all
Show favour on those who fear you.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-13 Paul's work in bringing them the Gospel

Matthew 22: 34-46 The Greatest Commandment
Is the Messiah David's Son

Introduction

Today, I would like to continue on from last week in exploring Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In the first portion of chapter two, which we have heard this morning, we hear Paul recount how he shared the Gospel message with them, and I would like to delve into this now.

Firstly, we hear Paul reminding the Thessalonians of the aspects involved in how he and his companions brought the Gospel message to them. Secondly, we hear how they accepted and decided to shape their lives by the Gospel message. And finally, we hear Paul encouraging them to lead lives worthy of God, who through the Gospel message, has brought them into fellowship with God.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

Let us begin by looking at verses one and two:-

¹ You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.

Let's begin by acknowledging that Paul uses the words "our" and "we" when talking about himself. This is because he realized he was not alone in this great work of sharing the Good News of Jesus, but rather he was part of a "team", or "the Body of Christ" or whatever terminology you would like to use for the "church". As Christians we do not exist singularly but only as a part of the Church. Just as you can't be Australian, unless the nation of Australia first exists to be a part of.

From these first two verses we know that Paul and his companions faced challenges to be able to share the Gospel message with the Thessalonians. In Acts chapter sixteen, we read how Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison for sharing the Gospel message there, but when they were released, they continued to travel and share the Gospel message with others.

Sharing the good news of Jesus can be costly. I recall as a teenager being afraid to talk to others about my faith in Jesus, because I thought it could be embarrassing or I might be rejected. However, at no stage was I concerned that someone would beat me up, or that I might be put into jail. Yet Paul and his companions were willing to endure such hardships so that they could tell others about Jesus. This indicates how important the message must be. If the message was trivial, they would not have been prepared to suffer for it. Christians believe that the good news of Jesus is not trivial, but rather central to what life is all about. One of the questions we need to ask ourselves is, "What costs are we willing to bear in our lives, so others might come to know Jesus like we do?"

1 Thessalonians 2:3-7a

Let us now look at verses three to seven:-

³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Have you ever had a call from a telemarketer telling you that you would get something for free? Do you receive emails promising you great deals if you just, "click here"?

Just as there are criminals and conmen who will try to fraudulently take your money today, there were those who sort gain under false pretenses in Paul's day.

In these verses we hear Paul reminding the Thessalonians about his pure motives whilst he was with them establishing the church in Thessalonica. Paul wasn't there for money or fame or to build up his own ego, but rather he was there in good conscience wanting to do God's will, so the Thessalonians could come to know the way to God.

In these verses we are challenged about our own motives in the relationships we develop with others. Is it just for our own benefit or do we come with good intentions?

1 Thessalonians 2:7a-8

Let us now look at verses seven to eight:-

But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ 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.

There is something innately embedded in us as human beings that we care for our own children. In these verses we hear Paul telling the Thessalonians how much he cares for them. Though he had only spent a few weeks with them, they had received and accepted the Good News of Jesus and were seeking to earnestly live it out. Although the time spent together was brief the connection seems to have been genuine and heartfelt. Paul loved them and wanted the best for them.

In this we are challenged as to the relationships we have with our sisters and brothers in Christ. Do our actions show how we care for others, and how we love others?

1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

Let us now look at verses nine to ten:-

⁹ You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers.

I recall working as a labourer during Christmas breaks when I went to university. At one particular bridge construction site we had to use 80 pound jackhammers all day. It was hard physical work, but at the end of the day you could see the results and feel like you had achieved something.

Here Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the work he and his companions did whilst he was with them. It was hard work, and they were the beneficiaries.

Sometimes being a Christian can be hard work, but the results are definitely worth it. When was the last time you felt the rewards of your labour for God?

1 Thessalonians 2:11-13

Let us now look at verses eleven to thirteen:-

¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. ¹³ We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

In these final verses we are looking at today we hear Paul urging the Thessalonians to live lives worthy of God.

How do we, 2000 years later, live lives worthy of God. There will of course be different and specific things for each of us to do, but as we have been reminded in Matthew 22:37-39 today of the greatest commandment, Jesus said :-

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Do we really love God? How do we show that we love God?
And how do we show we love our neighbours as ourselves?

These are lifelong challenges that we are all called to live into.

Conclusion

In this second chapter of Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians today, we hear Paul reminding them of the efforts he and his companions made to share the Gospel message with them. And we know that these efforts were not in vain. The Thessalonian church continued in the faith of Jesus Christ, as the Church began to grow from its Judean roots.

Sometimes I feel exhausted when reading about Paul and his companions, with all the travel, and all the persecution, how did he maintain it?

But it is evident from this letter that Paul had contentment that what he was doing was in accordance with God’s will, and this gave him an inner peace that transcended all the challenges he faced.

As we reflect on Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians today, may we also reflect on how we love God, and how we are seeking to love one another in our lives, knowing as Paul did, that we are secure in God’s love through the Gospel message. Amen.