

June 15, 2008 - 8:30am and 11am Worship - Rev. Donald W. Hackett D.Min.

First Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, PA, Text: 1 Thessalonians 2

Topic: The Ultimate Challenge – Being the Good News of God

Main point – God prepares each us for important, life-changing work...being the message of God.

Key Passage – 1 Thessalonians 2:8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

Background

Paul was writing a letter from one seaport to another. He was down in Corinth toward the tip of Greece helping a vibrant, energetic young church work through some of their growing pains. While there, other young churches were on his mind. In particular, his friends in Christ in Thessalonica were on his mind. They were about 200 miles due north at another seaport and trade center along the Aegean Sea. Paul had explained the good news about Jesus Christ to them a few years before (around A.D.51) and they allowed God's word and Spirit to transform them. Paul wanted to encourage them and comfort them as they struggled to be followers of Jesus Christ in difficult times.

Paul begins his letter with thanks to God. Their lives spoke volumes about how good and great is the living God. From there Paul rebuilds the bridge with these friends by reminding them about how Paul and his coworkers had loved and served them. This portion of scripture is jammed packed with jewels of wisdom on how we can love and serve others. How appropriate on Father's day, that we explore these truths for our own lives and relationships. Let us hear what Paul wrote:

The Text - 1 Thessalonians 2 (NIV) Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

1You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. 3For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. 5You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. 6We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 8We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 9Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

10You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Paul's Style of Ministry - 1. Prayer and Thanks

I can imagine Paul coming into Thessalonica. A few days before, he had been beaten up and jailed in Philippi for healing a slave girl with psychic powers. Her owners did not want her to be healed. She was a big money maker. The judges and mob agreed in the decision to publicly whip and imprison these trouble makers. We know from the account in Acts 16 that Paul and his co-worker, Silas, were praying and singing hymns in jail at midnight. Would you and I be praising God in this situation? I think if I was used by God to heal someone, I would expect that the consequences would be better! Paul tells us elsewhere to give thanks in all circumstances. He practiced what he preached.

Jewel #1: Search for God in all circumstances by praying and giving thanks. Philippians 4:6,7 says it this way: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

As many of you know, my mother-in-law, Harriet Yang is not doing too well. She is in her 80's and has been a dialysis patient for 10 years. Over the last year her health has been failing. In the last 30 days she has been in the hospital for a week, in skilled care for a week, back in the hospital for a week, and this past week, again, she was discharged to skilled care. My wife, Rila, and I are the closest family and so much of the daily duty of helping Harriet and her husband, Ih Cheo Yang, rightly belong to us. We are honored to journey with her parents in this difficult, but rich season of life. What has helped me in this time is daily seeking God in prayer and thanks. As I drive to the hospital or Willow Valley, I quietly pray for God to go before me and to attend to Harriet. I ask God to fill me with the love and peace so I can offer that to her. I also thank God that we are not alone in all this. I know God is there with us each step of the way. I am so thankful that Jesus is there, and even here right now. Followers of Jesus pray and give thanks.

Let us return to that jail cell with Paul and Silas. In the middle of this prayer session God intervenes. The jail is rocked by an earthquake and all the doors swing open. The jailer wakes up and thinks everyone has escaped. He pulls out his sword to kill himself and Paul stops him. The jailer was so shaken by what had happened and by what he saw in Paul, he falls to his knees and pleads, "What do I have to do to be saved, to really live?" Paul replies, "Put your entire trust in Master Jesus. Then you'll live as you were meant to live—and everyone in your household." The jailer and his family did believe and trust their faith and lives in the hands of Jesus Christ. When the authorities realized that the men they had beaten were Roman citizens, they hurried to apologize and escort Paul and Silas out of town.

Paul's Style of Ministry - 2. Trust fully Master Jesus

Let us pause here for a moment. Did you hear the jailer's question? "What do I have to do to be saved, to really live?" This is the crown jewel of the morning. It all starts here. How do we live the way we were created to live? How do you and I become people full of life, hope, love, and wisdom? We invite Master Jesus to live in our lives. We decide not to trust our plans and agenda, our own limited wisdom and strength. We decide to give up our self-centered lives and exchange them for lives that have Jesus Christ at heart of all we say and do.

The jailer believed and accepted as true that Jesus was the only one worthy of his worship and life service. He was baptized that night and entered into a whole new way of

living. The same process is true for you and me. If we want God to live in us and through us, we must confess that Jesus alone is the one we will follow and worship. We invite the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, to come into our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual lives to take up residence. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come when we ask him to forgive us, heal us, and fill us with the wisdom and power to live for God. Where are you today? Are you ready to start a real life, a life saturated in God? If you are, I invite you to close your eyes and whisper to God, "Come into my life, Jesus. Forgive, cleanse, and fill me with your Holy Spirit. I am yours now. Thank you. In Jesus name. Amen."

Jewel #1 - Discover God in all circumstances by praying and giving thanks.

Jewel #2 - Trust fully Master Jesus.

Paul's Style of Ministry - 3. Serve With No Strings Attached

When Paul and Silas left Philippi, they headed south and eventually came to Thessalonica. Paul was probably still quite sore from the beatings he had received. He most likely was carrying a bag with clothes and provisions, as well as his tools, for Paul was a tentmaker by trade. Paul would support himself by making and repairing tents in each town he visited. In that way, Paul would not be a burden to anyone. Many people in his day used religion as a way to trick people out of their money. Paul wanted to be sure that if people came to a living faith in God, it was free. No hidden agendas. No strings attached. A pure gift from God. That is how Paul received it. That is how he passed it on. Jewel #3 - Serve with no strings attached.

I saw this in action this past week. Upon entering the skilled care room of a member of our church, Mary, I saw she had a visitor. Her name was Jen. She was an attractive young woman who was a hair dresser at another care facility. Mary had moved recently. Jen had gone out of her way to find Mary and visit her. As I stood in the doorway of the room, I could tell that this was a precious gift Jen was giving Mary. There were no strings attached. You and I are going to be given opportunities to serve others this week. There are people who God is going to bring our way to help. Let us ask God to show us how to serve with wisdom, grace, and with no strings attached. Jewel #1 - Discover God in all circumstances by praying and giving thanks. Jewel #2 - Trust fully Master Jesus. Jewel #3 - Serve with no strings attached.

Paul's Style of Ministry - 4. Put your whole life into your work.

The secret of Paul's ministry is that he puts himself totally into it. He did not just share abstract theological concepts. Rather, he lived and worked closely with the people he came to serve. When Paul arrives in Thessalonica he preaches for three Sabbaths in a row. He explained how the Messiah had to be put to death and raised from the dead in order to save us from our sins. A number of people from all walks of life became followers of Jesus. This greatly upset some religious leaders so they incited a mob to hunt down Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas were able to slip out of town unnoticed and make it safely to Berea. In those short three weeks lives were transformed and destinies were changed. As we read earlier, Paul said, *"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."* Paul was hard-working, honest, transparent, and living the message he was commissioned to spread. Paul and Silas left town in a hurry, but the sweet taste of Jesus was in the mouth of many new converts.

Put your whole life into your work. That is how we live in this community. In our ministry, in our mission, in our workplaces, and in our neighborhoods, we invest our whole selves.

- When we do Sunday school and Market Place, children, youth, and adults become fully engaged in learning and doing together with all our senses.
- When we do Confirmation, we partner youth with adult mentors to share life and learn together.
- When we do Choir and sing, we do not just learn notes and lyrics, but we allow the music to express the deep yearnings and prayers of our hearts, minds, and souls.
- When we do missions, we are hands-on. We go in person to cultivate partnerships and to engage in mutual ministry in West Virginia, Honduras, and Kenya.
- When we study the Bible together, we gather in smaller groups so we can share, discuss, support and allow our lives to be influenced by each other.
- When we care for each other, we visit in person, share the burden and a prayer, and allow another's burden to become our own.
- When we serve others by sponsoring refugee families, we allow God to use our words and our actions to express love, truth, grace, and the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Here is what Paul has taught us today:

Jewel #1 - Discover God in all circumstances by praying and giving thanks.

Jewel #2 - Trust fully Master Jesus.

Jewel #3 - Serve with no strings attached.

Jewel #4 - Put your whole life into your work

Homework

This week read Acts 16 and 17, and then reread 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2.

As you read, ask God to show you what you need to do this week to let God live in and through you in Christ. God's Spirit is so eager this week to show you if we have ears to hear and hearts to obey.