

BIBLE STUDY

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Encouraging Members

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

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Remembering Why You Believe – part 1

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

If you were with us last week you know we began our study of this wonderful letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. And just to make sure our minds are again fresh about this context, let's review a little.

- As you will see again in a moment, Paul traveled to Thessalonica after being persecuted in Philippi.
- He went to the synagogue and started having huge success, not only among Jews, but also among the Greeks.
- However, the Jews became jealous and literally formed a mob to have Paul, Silas, & Timothy arrested.
- However, they never found these men, and instead the mob arrested one of the local church members.
- The church then helped Paul, and his companions escape to a town called Berea, which is about 50 miles away.
- And as Paul was preaching there, it wasn't long before some of the angry Thessalonians tracked him down and began causing trouble for him in Berea as well, so that he was forced to flee again.
- This time Paul found himself alone in Athens (and you are familiar with what occurred there).

But always on his heart was this new young church at Thessalonica.

How were they doing?

Did their faith continue?

Had they stood strong?

(1 Thessalonians 3:1-2) Read

Paul wanted to make sure that the Thessalonians were standing strong. However, Timothy never really did have to encourage the Thessalonians, for in fact they encouraged him. (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8) Read

And so, it is obvious that this new church
Had served as an encouragement to Paul.

That was what the entire 1st chapter was about.

- Since the Thessalonians stood strong.
- Since their faith was heard about in the whole region.
- Since they served God, loved people, and persevered in hope:

Paul knew that true salvation had occurred
And Paul fell to his knees and thanked God.

(1 Thessalonians 1:2-4) “

And as we said then, Paul was thankful to God because
Their perseverance in the faith revealed two things.
God really did choose you.
God really did change you.

And that of course meant that God really was using Paul.

It is the greatest encouragement a preacher of the gospel can receive.
3 John 4 “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

This is the type of encouragement Paul received from the Thessalonians.

And we said then, that as a believer you should go out and live
In such a way that it encourages other believers to do the same.

Let your lifestyle of obedience be an encouragement,
Not only to those who teach you, but also to those who serve beside you.

And that is one type of encouragement.
THAT WE SAW LAST WEEK

Tonight, we see a second type of encouragement.
It is the type of encouragement that Paul gives to the Thessalonians.

WHY DID THEY NEED IT?

Put yourself in the shoes of the Thessalonians.

- Paul came in, stayed a short while and started a church,
- And then he had to flee.
- You were left behind, with the hot-headed mob.
- And not only do they hate Paul, but now they hate you as well.

And this might have been fine at first, or even for a while,
But when that type of hostility endures it can wear on you.

We all know that suffering and hardship and opposition
Can cause us to question what we thought we once knew.
To give you an illustration:

TURN TO: MATTHEW 11:1-6

You could easily make an argument that no one ever lived who was more bold or
passionate than John the Baptist, and yet here even he is in doubt.

Did he forget what God had told him?
Did he forget the dove at the baptism?
Did he forget his specific role from God?

It's amazing what spending time in prison will do to a man.
And so, he needed encouragement from Jesus to see
That his prior convictions were still accurate, and he simply needed to hold on to what
he knew was true. That is the same type of encouragement Paul is giving here.
No, we have no record that they were in denial, but certainly Paul knows it is a
temptation.

And so, Paul writes this letter.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS 2ND CHAPTER?

On one hand, it is a defense of his own ministry.

You must know that those Jews who ran Paul out of town are doing everything they can to undercut and discredit his ministry.

Paul even speaks a little of this opposition later in the chapter.

1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 “who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

And so we know Paul and the Thessalonians had opposition.

In fact, in our text tonight it is heavily implied

That the Jews were accusing Paul of being:

Wrong about the truth (3)

An impure man seeking sex (3)

Even a flat-out liar (3)

Some may have accused him of being in it for the money (5)

Others accused him of being in it for the glory (6)

And so certainly Paul would be defending his own ministry, just as Jesus did to John the Baptist when he said, “the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

So, there is a “defense” element here.

But more so than that this is a passage about encouragement.

Jesus concluded to John by saying,

“and blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

It was a form of encouragement for John

To come to his senses and stand strong for Christ.

And that is what Paul is really doing here.
Paul knew that the attacks weren't just to discredit him
But were intended to destroy the faith of the Thessalonians.

And so, by defending his own ministry
He is simultaneously establishing the faith of the Thessalonians.

Just as Jesus called John back to his senses, so Paul does here with the Thessalonians.

3 times in these 8 verses we see Paul use the phrase "you know".
That is clearly a statement to help the Thessalonians
See past the difficulty and past the deception
And take hold of what they know to be true.

Paul is saying, "You remember what we taught you, you remember how we lived, you know it was the truth, now stand strong in it."

It is very similar to the encouragement Paul gave to a struggling Timothy.
2 Timothy 3:14-15 "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

That is what Paul is doing here as well, and even through verse 12,
But we will only make it through verse 8.

But tonight, we see the first 5 of eight reminders Paul gives about his ministry,
So that he may encourage the Thessalonians to follow his lead.

#1 OUR COURAGE 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

There we see our first reference to their memory.
"For you yourselves know, brethren"

This is not new information, Paul is simply reminding them of what really happened.

WHAT DO THEY KNOW?

"That our coming to you was not in vain,"

Even though it is true that Paul was effective in Thessalonica,
He is not here saying that he had a good showing. Instead, he is reminding the Thessalonians that when he came it wasn't just on some sort of sight-seeing tour.

We didn't just come to be able to say we came.

(2) "but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition."

When we came it wasn't a token trip, and it wasn't an easy trip.
We came to you having just been persecuted,
But that didn't stop us from speaking the truth to you.

We faced persecution and opposition, but still we spoke the truth.

And of course, you remember what occurred to them in Philippi.
(Acts 16)

- Paul cast a demon out of a fortune-telling girl.
- They were beaten.
- Publicly humiliated.
- Thrown in jail and chained in the inner cell.
- (But at midnight an earthquake from God set them free)

And after that many preachers would have given second thought to their approach.

"On second thought maybe, we shouldn't be so direct.
Maybe we shouldn't be so confrontational." But not Paul, we came to Thessalonica and did the same thing, and when opposition arose, we still didn't quit.

WHY?

"We had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God"

2 Timothy 1:7 "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."

The only reason he did it is because
God had given him the boldness to do it.

You see the Spirit of God replaces cowardice with courage.

And Jesus expects this type of boldness.

Matthew 10:28-33 "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. "Therefore, everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

I know it is hard.

I know it is dangerous.

Confess Me anyway.

PAUL DID

Paul says you can be certain that we were the real deal
Because we had the boldness of God to speak
Even when it wasn't in our best interest.

Paul said that is what we did, and not only should that prove to you that we are legitimate, but you should follow our example.

Our courage

2. OUR CONVICTION

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4

It is not hard to imagine that those same Jews who succeeded in running Paul out of Thessalonica would also be at work to undo all that he accomplished.

And based upon Paul's defense here, It is obvious what they said about him.

"For our exhortation does not come from error"

- And so obviously there were those who accused him of being theologically mistaken.

“Or impurity”

- This is a term denoting sexual immorality.
- Many of the pagan religions thrived based upon sexual immorality, where having sex with a priest or priestess led you closer to God.
- No doubt the Jews accused Paul of being that type of occult leader.

“Or by way of deceit”

- Others obviously accused Paul of just being a flat-out liar, making up his doctrine to suit his own needs and to gain the approval of men.

Paul sternly refutes all three notions.

“For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.”

If the Thessalonians would remember clearly, they would remember Paul's motives to come and preach to them.

- Paul didn't preach a “user-friendly” message.
- Paul was no people pleaser.
- Paul was no ear tickler.

It was clear Paul saw himself as a steward of the mysteries of God and it was God and God alone that Paul wanted to please.

You may remember his statement to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 4:1-4 “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.”

It was abundantly clear that Paul could (for all practical purposes) care fewer what people thought.

He wanted to please God, and if the Thessalonians would remember correctly that was obvious in the way he preached.

- People who want to please men don't tell them to leave their family religion of paganism.
- People who want to please men don't tell them to lay down all their idols.
- People who want to please men don't tell them that everything their daddy taught them about religion was wrong.

AND YET PAUL TOLD THEM TO DO ALL THESE THINGS

Point being Paul's conviction was obvious.
(The Thessalonians had no reason to question Paul's motives)

And this is the example they should also follow.
Don't be swayed here and there by every wind of doctrine,
Nor give too much credence to what men think.

Set your heart on pleasing God
And strive to be always found faithful to Him.

That is what Paul did and it's what he challenges the Thessalonians to do.

Our Courage, Our Conviction

3. OUR CONTENTMENT

1 Thessalonians 2:5-6

And again, it is easy to see some of the false reports that must have been circulating about Paul.

"He's just a prophet for profit"

And Paul says, you know that wasn't the case.

"For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed – God is witness – nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority."

And Paul said you know that wasn't us. We didn't flatter you. We didn't ask for money.

And even though we are apostles, We did not put our authority on display
So that you would be enamored with us.

We didn't "Throw our weight around" so to speak. Now, had we come in our festive robes with our apostleship credentials, taking up offerings and flattering you just before we passed the plate, then you might think we were up to something. But we didn't do any of those things.

In fact, Paul would remind them later that they worked for all they got.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."

Paul was not the type of person

Who did what he did to make a prophet or to get famous.

2 Corinthians 2:17 "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

Their ministry was not only marked by courage and conviction,
But also contentment.

And not only was Paul reinforcing what he taught them,
But he is also encouraging them to follow his example.

(1 Timothy 6:9-12)

That is the example Paul gave the Thessalonians.

Our Courage, Our Conviction, Our Contentment

4. OUR COMPASSION

1 Thessalonians 2:7

You may also remember that false prophets are antagonizing. 2 Peter 2:10 "Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties,"

False prophet's brow beat people and manipulate people. But Paul said, if you will remember we didn't do that either. "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing

mother tenderly cares for her own children." We didn't have any huge emotional alter calls. We didn't try to use scare tactics.

Paul might even say, "We determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We were with you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and our preaching was not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power. So that your faith would not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

We weren't coming trying to badger you into results.

We were coming simply letting God work through us.

We were gentle.

We were patient.

This was Jesus.

Matthew 12:15-21 "But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, and warned them not to tell who He was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY."AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

The truth may indeed be scary to some, but Paul didn't intentionally scare them.

He was compassionate, he was gentle.

And there again is not only a proof, but also an example to follow.

Colossians 3:12-14 "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

Follow our example.

Our Courage, Our Conviction, Our Contentment, Our Compassion

5. OUR CONSISTENCY

1 Thessalonians 2:8

When Paul came, he didn't just give you the truth, he gave you, his life.

"Having so fond and affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."

We call it consistency in the Christian life.

It is the works that go hand in hand with our message
And give us credibility.

"People don't care what you know until they know that you care."

Scripture says it like this:

James 2:14-17 "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

If there isn't a consistency in your life that matches the message, then your message is in vain.

And Paul tells the Thessalonians to stop and ask themselves. Did Paul practice what he preached? Did Paul exhibit the love he was promoting? And if the Thessalonians looked back, they would know that he did.

And this encouragement stands to remind them that the truth they accepted from Paul was THE truth, even if momentary hardship was causing them to question it.

Furthermore, they are reminded that the example Paul gave is the example they are to follow.

And so, Paul sets out to encourage the church who so greatly encouraged him.

And with this we learn another aspect of encouragement.

Sometimes (as we saw in chapter 1) We encourage by living an obedient life
And therefore encouraging those who instruct us, but also challenging those around us.

Other times we encourage by reminding people why they know Christ is real, and the gospel is true.

In those moments of hardship and suffering we remind them why they believe,
And that sort of encouragement is equivalent to giving them Christ all over again.

When you remind a discouraged brother why he believes in Christ, he leaves with a renewed hope and a renewed joy as though he just found Christ for the first time.

And in our world of disillusionment and chaos, it is so important to continually remind one another why we believe.

And so, this week, not only do I encourage you to live an obedient life as a form of encouragement to others.

But also, if you see a down-trodden brother, verbally remind him/her why they believe,
And why Jesus is just as good a decision today as he was on the day they first accepted him. And through that encouragement help them stay the course.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

I pray these lessons are helpful and that you are growing!