

**Video: Hope in the Darkness** Today our world desperately needs a message of hope. 2020 has been a tough year. Many people have come face to face with the uncertainty and fragility of life. As a result, many are worn out, burdened and afraid.

What people need most of all is Jesus. As we were thinking about last week, we need to let the message of the Jesus ring out from us to let people know that this is hope, even in the darkest of times.

But this is not easy. And I think many of us don't feel very good at it. We don't feel don't feel as if we're strong enough, we know enough, or that we are the right kind of people to do this.

But Paul in our next section of his letter to the Thessalonians helps us to see why we can dare to share the gospel of hope. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6: "You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. <sup>2</sup>We 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. <sup>3</sup>For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. <sup>4</sup>On 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. <sup>5</sup>You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. <sup>6</sup>We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else."

### 1. Our Mission

This section marks the start of Paul's defence of his ministry. He said here: "You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure." 1 Thessalonians 2:1

Clearly, as often happened to him, Paul was under attack. People were criticising him, and he felt obliged to defend himself. Not for his sake. But so that this church would not turn away from the truth that he had shared.

#### a) Not a failure

In this case, some people thought that his mission in Thessalonica was a failure. They felt that it was in vain, empty, a waste of time and effort.

We don't know why they were saying that exactly, but it isn't difficult to imagine:

- Maybe it was because so many people had opposed him. After Paul preached for 3 weeks in the synagogue there, "The Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city." Acts 17:5

Surely there must be something wrong with Paul's preaching for it to stir up so much anger and animosity.

- Or maybe it was because Paul's ministry had caused problems for those who'd welcomed him. When this mob couldn't find Paul, "They dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials." Acts 17:6

Far from bringing people into a great life, it looked like Paul's ministry had just put them in danger. Surely that wasn't right.

- Or maybe this was because after Jason and the others had been released, "As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea." Acts 17:10

This humiliating night flight from the city didn't look good. Maybe people were saying, "He caused all these problems for you and then ran away. And he hasn't been back since. How can he claim to love you? He abandoned you! He's a coward!"

Has someone ever accused you of being a rubbish Christian or that your efforts to live for Jesus are all in vain? Do you ever feel like a failure?

If we look at our circumstances, at what people think of us, the problems that we are facing or the hard choices we've made, sometimes we can be tempted to wonder if what we've done is really of any value at all!

But Paul didn't agree with this assessment of his visit. He said categorically that his visit to them was not a failure. It was not in vain. So why was that?

#### b) Suffer For Christ

Part of the reason was because Paul knew that following Jesus involved suffering for him. The Lord showed Paul this right at the start when he first met him. The Lord told Ananias that **“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”** Acts 9:16

And Paul suffered intensely for Jesus. Even just before they arrived in Thessalonica. He wrote: **“We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi.”** 1 Thessalonians 2:2

During his time in Philippi, Paul had been followed around by a slave girl who was demon-possessed. Her owners exploited her for money, getting her to tell people their fortunes. She couldn't actually do this, as only God knows the future. But the spiritual forces of evil within her enabled her to deceive her clients into thinking that she could.

So her owners got rich, while this poor girl was held in darkness. This troubled Paul so much that he said to the spirit: **“In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!”** Acts 16:18 And at that exact moment, the spirit left. This young girl was miraculously set free from the oppression of evil.

But her owners were furious. Their income stream was destroyed. So they seized Paul and Silas, dragged them into the marketplace and falsely accused them. Against the law, the magistrates ordered that they were stripped and flogged severely. Then they were thrown into jail, with their backs bleeding and their feet in stocks.

It was a terrifying, painful and humiliating experience for them. But it didn't mean that their efforts were a failure, a waste of time and effort.

That's because suffering for doing good is part of what we're all called to: **“If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”** <sup>21</sup> **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”** 1 Peter 2:20–21

Suffering does not mean our faith is in vain. If things turn out badly for us, if people criticise, ridicule or reject us, that doesn't mean that living for Jesus is a waste of time.

Suffering for Jesus is what we are called to:

- It is following in the footsteps of the one who went to the cross for us.
- It is also through suffering God works for our good. **“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”** 2 Corinthians 4:17
- And it's one of the ways we honour our Lord because we show that he is worth losing everything for!

### c) **Speak for Christ**

And so Paul & Silas' suffering in Philippi didn't stop their mission. When God rescued them from jail, they kept on going. They travelled to Thessalonica where the situation wasn't much better. But despite this, **“With the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.”** 1 Thessalonians 2:2

Paul knew that his mission was not only to suffer for Christ, but to speak for him. This was his calling, his responsibility and so this is what he did. He spoke openly, freely, courageously in this city.

And as we've seen, the lives of many of them were transformed. They **“turned from idols to serve the living and true God.”** 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

Of course, Paul wasn't responsible for this transformation. He didn't produce that change. It was God who brought them to faith in Jesus and it was God who transformed their lives through the power of the Spirit.

But Paul was responsible for preaching the gospel. This was his mission. No matter what it cost, no matter how hard it got, his mission was not just to suffer for Christ, but to speak for him.

And so his visit in Thessalonica was not in vain because he had been faithful to the mission that God had given to him.

And this is our mission too. Of course, we can't do this in our own strength. We need the help of our God just as much as Paul did. But if we have put our faith in Christ, then we are called to speak for Christ. To speak openly, freely, courageously.

This is what the early church did. Even when persecution broke out against them and they were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, Acts 8:4 records that **“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”**

We are not responsible for saving anyone. We can't even save ourselves. But we are responsible for speaking up for Christ, even when it causes suffering in our lives.

## 2. Our Message

But Paul didn't just defend his mission here. He also defended his message. He said here, ["For the appeal we make does not spring from error."](#) 1 Thessalonians 2:3

### a) God's Truth

Paul's visit to Thessalonica wasn't in vain because Paul didn't go there and tell lies. He didn't teach something that was false. He had told the truth.

Previously in this letter, Paul had called his message, ["Our gospel."](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:5. That's because this is what he preached everywhere. It was his message.

But it wasn't something that he had made up. This wasn't 'his truth' as people talk about in this post-modern world. This was the absolute truth. This was the one and only good news of hope. That's because it was God's gospel: ["With the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel."](#) 1 Thessalonians 2:2.

Paul didn't go there to share his ideas, thoughts, opinions or feelings. Neither was it something that he had learned from other people, from college or from books.

This is what he stressed to the churches in Galatia: ["The gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup> I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."](#) Galatians 1:11–12

Paul's message was the good news that God had given to him. And he was simply faithfully passing it on.

### b) Entrusted To Us

And so that is why he said about himself here that he was ["entrusted with the gospel."](#) 1 Thessalonians 2:4

He saw himself as a steward of this precious treasure that God had trusted him with. And so

- Paul was going to carefully look after it – making sure that he didn't add to it or take away from it because he knew that it was the revelation from Christ.
- He was going to faithfully share it – because he knew that it was the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.
- And he was going to entrust it to other faithful believers who would also pass it on to others because he knew that it was the only hope for this world!

This is what he said to Timothy ["The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."](#) 2 Timothy 2:2

This is so important. When we share with others, we need to ensure that our message is the unchanged, unaltered, unadulterated truth of the gospel of God. This is the good news that will save sinners. This is the only message that will bring people to God. This is the only hope in this dark world.

## 3. Our Method

But we also need to be careful how we share this message. We careful with the method we use.

### a) Not Deception

For many people, the end justifies the means. If it works, if it achieves our goals, well then that's ok.

But that isn't ok when it comes to sharing the gospel. Paul said here, ["Nor are we trying to trick you."](#) 1 Thessalonians 2:4. Paul didn't twist the message to make it more attractive or palatable to the Thessalonians. He didn't exaggerate the blessings that come from trusting in Jesus. He didn't hide the cost of following Jesus.

He also said, ["You know that we never used flattery."](#) 1 Thessalonians 2:5. He didn't lie to them to win them over. He didn't tell them how great they were to boost their ego in order to get them on his side.

These are the methods of false teachers. Paul warned Timothy that people ["will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."](#) 2 Timothy 4:3

## b) But Honesty

But Paul refused to use any deceptive or underhand methods to achieve his goal. He was committed to speaking the truth in a truthful way.

That's why he said, **"We speak as men approved by God."** 1 Thessalonians 2:4. Paul knew that this ministry had come from God. By grace, Jesus had appointed him as his apostle. And so he was committed to speak in a way that was consistent with a servant of God. And that meant that we had to speak the truth!

Our God is the God of truth. The Bible says that **"it is impossible for God to lie."** Hebrews 6:18.

So it doesn't matter if other methods seem to be more effective. It doesn't matter whether other people seem to be more successful than us. If we want our lives not to be in vain, if we want to honour our God and represent him faithfully in this world we must reject all forms of deception or flattery.

We must speak the truth openly, clearly and honestly.

## 4. Our Motives

But lastly, we'll only be willing to do this, if our motives are right. In our Cold-Case Christianity course, J Warner Wallace said that there are only 3 motives for all the crimes that detectives investigate. They are money, sex and power.

But Paul said here that **"the appeal we make does not spring from... impure motives."** 1 Thessalonians 2:3. Paul wasn't motivated in his ministry by these kinds of impure, unclean or selfish motives.

### a) Not Personal Gain

As we'll see in chapter 4, Paul preached against all forms of sexual immorality. And he said here that he did not preach for personal gain. **"Nor did we put on a mask to cover up our greed."** 1 Thessalonians 2:5. He wasn't in this for the money.

In fact, we'll see next week that instead of getting rich from his ministry, Paul worked to provide for his own needs, so that he wasn't a burden on anyone.

### b) Not Pleasing People

Neither did Paul work so hard so that people would praise him. **"We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else."** 1 Thessalonians 2:6. Paul didn't do this for applause, acclaim or fame. Which was just as well, because most of the time he suffered rejection, criticism and humiliation.

### c) But Pleasing God

So what drove Paul in his ministry? And what made him so confident that his ministry in Thessalonica was not in vain? It was because **"We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts."** 1 Thessalonians 2:4

Paul was serving God. He was seeking to please him. And so it didn't matter what other people thought of him. It didn't matter how much opposition and criticism he faced.

In a sense it didn't even matter how much success he saw in his ministry, because God doesn't evaluate things the way people do. He tests our hearts, not our circumstances.

All that mattered was whether Paul was being faithful in what God had called him to. He had been entrusted with the gospel, and so his responsibility was to hold onto it, live a life that is consistent with it and share it with everyone he could.

## Conclusion

And that's our calling too:

- Our mission is to speak for Christ, even if it involves suffering for him.
- So our message must be the glorious gospel of Christ, which is entrusted to us.
- Our method must be consistent with Christ, full of honesty and integrity.
- And our motive must be to please Christ, and bring glory to him.

And if we do this, then even although we might face difficult circumstances and critical people, we can dare to share this gospel because we can be sure that it will never be in vain. This is God's promise: **"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."** 1 Corinthians 15:58