

1Thessalonians 12-03-02b

Let's resume our study. We're in the second chapter of the first Thessalonian letter. And in my New King James Bible, the chapter is subtitled Paul's conduct.

And in verses one through 10, he reminds his audience of what kind of messenger they observed. And this is important because sometimes we think, well, it's, we are clay and we're fallible and flawed. And really everybody should be looking at the Bible and looking at the Lord Jesus and looking at God and the angels in heaven.

But it is inescapable, it is inescapable that our message, the message of Christ is going to be evaluated in the light of the messengers. And the messengers are us. If it wasn't for us, they wouldn't print Bibles.

If it wasn't for us, there wouldn't be churches. If it wasn't for us, you know, there are no apostles. There are no angelic visitations, certainly not of a large order for communicating the truth.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated through believers, the living church in each generation. That's us. And notice the space in chapter one and in chapter two that Paul devotes to the good example set by the messengers.

Now, we have to be careful here because we do not try to set a good example for its own sake. Well, I need to model patience or I need to model humility or I'm going to strut around putting on a righteous front for your benefit so that you can have a good example. This is actually practiced in a lot of corners of Christianity.

It doesn't matter what I'm thinking or what I'm actually doing, I just have to put up a good front because it's my responsibility to give you an example. And that's how it's looked at. Well, this isn't what Paul is saying at all.

This goes back to the entirety of the Christian faith and the Christian life. It has to legitimately be sourced in a valid messenger. It has to come from somebody who is approved and you can't fake approval.

People will see through it. You can't be a hypocrite. You can't be a shell that has a false front.

You can't be just wearing a little righteous Christian mask and inside be full of dead men's bones like the Pharisees. Everybody could see through the Pharisees. Everybody knew they were self-righteous.

They were hypocrites. They preached one thing and practiced something else. And the last people to find that out were the Pharisees themselves.

They thought they had everyone fooled. They thought that their big show was a success and it

was a dismal failure. They were a byword.

They were known for hypocrisy. Jesus pronounces the seven woes on them. You tie the spices in your spice cabinet and you've left off the great central principles of the law.

Well, we can be equally guilty and we can be equally blind and equally self-deceiving. This has to be genuine. So what it means is we don't strive to set a good example.

We strive to become a good example and you will note the difference. We do not go out to set an example. We strive to become what we should be.

And when we are what we should be, we will be a good example among many other things. This is what the Apostle Paul did. He didn't go out and mimic righteousness.

He was dedicated. He was faithful. He did love the Lord Jesus and God the Father.

He did greatly appreciate the truths that God entrusted to his care. We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, he says in verse four. God is witness.

We didn't flatter you and you know this. We didn't seek glory from men, either from you or from anybody else. Verse six, we could have made demands on you as apostles of Christ.

We could have imposed authority on you. We had the right to do it, but we didn't. We were gentle among you as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

Why this particular example? Why the example of cherishing children? Well, it is the exact opposite. Would a nursing mother and her attitude toward her infant, how do you compare that to the Jews of the synagogue who were trying to defend their territory and trying to keep their God-fearers coming down to the synagogue and so on? It's opposite ends of the spectrum. There's nothing nursing mother-ish about that.

This is more like wounded bobcat mother than nursing infant mother. Paul says, look at the difference. Do you really think a messenger of God is going to be fierce, is going to be legalistic, is going to be violent, is going to stir up mobs and hire muggers and thugs? Do you really think they're going to appeal to the civilian authorities and make false accusations? Look at where the legitimacy is in these two basic sources of information.

Are you going to go with the Jews of the synagogue or are you going to go with the apostles of Christ? Well, look at their manner of life. And you have to be able to appeal to this. Therefore, we have to be people who are characterized by the fruit of the spirit before we try to deliver a message.

And this is not an encouragement to put on an outward facade. It's an encouragement to stop trying to share the message until we have mastered some of the basic skills of the Christian life.

We should not send neophyte believers out to share the gospel.

Some celebrity gets saved, some football player or some actor or some notable personage somewhere. First thing we want to do is send them on an evangelism circuit and have them give their testimony. We're relying on their fame and their notoriety to impress and pull people toward the gospel.

What actually impresses and pulls legitimate converts and legitimate faithful people to the gospel? It is the fruit of the spirit. It is not fame. It's not celebrity.

It's not achievement. It's not wealth. It isn't name recognition.

And Paul says, look, we didn't have a famous name. We didn't come in looking for money. We didn't try to make a kingdom out of you and turn you into subjects and serfs and slaves.

We were gentle among you. We treated you like a mother would her own children, affectionately longing for you. We were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives.

Those three things, messenger, message, recipients. Paul says, we didn't just impart the message to you. We imparted ourselves to you.

This is a strong argument for indigenous, long term presence and residence of the messengers with the people. Paul would love to have stayed in Thessalonica a lot longer than he did. He tried to send Timothy back.

They tried to train pastors and have them reside in every town. Remember when he writes to Titus, writes to Timothy, and he reminds them that there is a resident pastor. There's supposed to be a long term relationship where those who have something of the faith to impart can invest themselves in their recipients, not just throw a message at them.

We imparted not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives because you had become dear to us. And this is another characteristic of the genuine message. What's the difference in a cult? What's the difference in a false religion and genuine Christianity? Genuine Christianity is by definition.

An assembly of people linked by the love of Christ and love for one another, genuine love, not rapacious love, not advantage taking love, not authoritarian dominance. You look at some of the cults that we've seen in past years. You got your Jim Jones's and your David Koresh's and your various other outlandish and infringe groups, personality cults.

And there is nothing of this. There's not the working and laboring day and night to not be a burden, to not impose, to not have others carry one's weight. You remember our brethren, our labor and toil, laboring night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you.

You didn't say, well, Jason, sure appreciate you putting us up here and buying all the groceries because we are, after all, apostles. And you know, you'll get a reward in heaven for that. They didn't settle.

They worked. They labored. They toiled.

They did whatever they could. And that is a genuine expression of love. Now, all of this comes back to the question.

So what? Why do we care about this? Well, if we are ever going to be a two pass, if we are going to be those who are leading the life that follows that pattern, that is worthy of imitation, worthy example. These are things that will be true of us. We will not allow ourselves to be a burden.

We will work and toil with a view toward the well-being of others. And the great thing about that is others are working and toiling to be of benefit to us. And the whole body mutually edifies and builds itself up together in love.

You remember Ephesians chapter four. This is the wonderful thing about a fellowship and a mutual relationship of like minded believers is that everyone is looking out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. The mind is in each of us that is in Christ Jesus, who wasn't looking for his own welfare.

If Jesus was looking out for himself, he'd have never gone to the cross. He would have never taken on human flesh and been subject to our frailties and the indignities and the shame that were heaped on him by ignorant and blind men. He endured it for us.

He put himself out to the ultimate degree for us. And this is what we endeavor to do. We try to follow that example in a genuine and heartfelt way.

That's what Paul did. We labored night and day, though we might not be a burden to any of you. And we preached to you the gospel of God.

Why did they do it? Because it facilitated, it made it possible to impart and to communicate and to reveal and to illuminate and to transfer these wonderful truths about the plan and purpose of God, God's salvation. And you are witnesses, verse 10, and God also. This is the second time now he has said that God is a Martus.

God himself is looking. God is the one who approves. God is looking for those to whom he can entrust this message.

Remember that back in verse four, we were approved by God to be entrusted. Wouldn't it be great if you and I, God looks at us and doki mazo, he tests for the purpose of approval. He says, you know what? This is an earthen vessel in which I can put my treasure and it will be conveyed without loss to people who need it.

People to whom it will be a blessing and there will be blessing for the communicator. There will be blessing to the ones who receive it and the glory of God will be reflected. It's win, win, win.

You are witnesses in God also. How devoutly and justly and blamelessly. These are three great words in Greek.

Devoutly is a word that means it's hosios. And this is about the only place in the New Testament that it is used. And it means someone who is dedicated in a religious sense.

That's why they use devout. You know, people typically say, well, he's a devout Jew or a devout Catholic or a devout Christian. And what does it mean? It means they take it seriously and they're dedicated to it.

Then they're not messing around. It's not taken lightly. It's not a shallow, superficial thing.

And that's what hosios means. It sort of harks back to the whole burnt offering and the idea of complete dedication to a thing. This is part of what defines me.

You saw with your own eyes, you are witnesses just as God is, that we were devout. Secondly, we were righteous. This is dikaios.

This is just. This means it partakes of truth and of rightness, the righteousness of God in this case. And blamelessly, this is amemptos, spotlessly, without fault.

Nobody can lodge an accusation and say, well, you know, you really ate Jason out of house and home there. You know, you really were a burden. You kept going from house to house and just eating and sleeping late and, you know, moving people out of their rooms.

And kids are sleeping out on the porch and it's dangerous. And, you know, y'all are just kind of lording it around as apostles. They said we were blameless.

They worked, they toiled day and night to make sure of these things devoutly, justly and blamelessly. Three different areas. Devoutness.

This is really dedication toward God, isn't it? Righteousness. This is the quality, the moral standard, the ethical standard that it partakes of. And blamelessly, this is in the horizontal direction.

People can't bring a charge. Nobody had a bad taste in their mouth of those who believe. And Paul is careful to say among you who believe, can't say that there wasn't a bad taste in the mouth of those self-righteous Judaizers.

Can't say that the Greek authorities didn't have a bad taste. But you who believe, you see the truth of it. We were dedicated, we were devout, we were righteous, and we were blameless

among you.

And you are the ones that count. Paul says, I'm not worried about what the Jews of the synagogue thought. I'm not worried about what the Greek civil authorities thought.

For the people who count, who know what's what and have a standard of measure, these three areas, we pass muster. And you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you. This now is the nature of the delivery of the message.

Is it a dominant sort of decreeing, this is how it shall be, and you're accountable to me, and I'm going to hold your feet to the fire, and I'm going to be your mentor, and you'd better come, and I'm going to ask you hard questions, and you're going to have to confess before me? Not at all. Paul says, we exhorted, we comforted, and we charged every one of you. This is the standard of delivery of the gospel of God, of the truth of Jesus Christ, as it's revealed to us in the scriptures.

It needs to be given in an encouraging way, in an uplifting and exhortatory way. And it ought to bring comfort. It ought to remind us of eternal truths that help us put our trials and our challenges in perspective, gives us peace, leads us in green pastures besides still waters, restores our souls, helps to reveal to us the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

This is what a good shepherd will do. This is what Paul did. We exhorted.

This means, got to get with it here, got to get with the program. This is what needs to be happening. But it was comfort and a charge.

It's a great hymn, a charge to keep I have. We've got a mission. We have a purpose.

God has given us something to do while we're here. Doesn't matter our age, doesn't matter our circumstance, doesn't matter what the economics are, doesn't matter what the education is, doesn't matter what the job is, doesn't matter what the relationships are, doesn't matter physically, mentally, morally. What counts is we have been given a charge from God.

We are on a mission. There is a purpose for our salvation. We're not just here to be helpless victims and be plucked like a brand from the fire so that we don't go to hell.

We're saved for a purpose. The military recruits people in because they want to do something with them. We need people to drive submarines and operate aircraft and launch missiles and run logistics and polish brass and paint things and salute things.

We need people to do all kinds of stuff. We need people to process intelligence. We need people to run remote aerial reconnaissance.

We need people to do all kinds of things. We've recruited you. We're training you.

We're investing in you. We're paying you for a purpose. It's a charge.

Does the military encourage their volunteers, their sign-uppees, their people that come in? Do they encourage them? Of course. They say, look, this is what you'll get if you stay in. If you re-enlist, you've got retirement benefits, you've got medical care, you've got training opportunities, you've got security, you've got opportunity to see the world, gain experience, learn how to organize yourself.

You get lots of personal benefits out of this. We are also getting a benefit by your service. This is why I don't feel like being thanked for my service.

Everybody wins if somebody faithfully serves. The service gets what they need. The service member gets what they need.

The American public gets what it needs. The enemy gets what they deserve, hopefully. And everybody wins.

God is glorified. Blessed be the Lord who teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight. Don't need to be thanked any more than you'd run out there and thank the mailman for delivering the mail or, you know, it's superfluous.

We have exhortation, we have comfort, and we have a charge that is delivered. There is a necessary function that we must fulfill. I've charged every one of you.

Notice it is individual. It's not just, well, we're going to charge the group and a couple of shakers and movers in the group are going to really get things rolling and all the rest of them are just going to kind of follow along in the draft, follow along in the wake, and be carried along by the energy of a few. We charge, Paul says, each one of you.

Nobody is left out. Well, I don't think my resources are very great. I don't think my opportunities are very numerous.

Paul didn't say I charged those of you that have a lot of resources and a lot of opportunities, did he? Charged each one of you. Don't think you're left out. Don't think you've got a pass, got an excusal.

We don't. Each one of us has a charge. Nobody in the body of Christ, no part of the body of Christ is without its function and without its charge as a father does his own children.

Nothing like being a father. There's something for everybody to do. Can you run up there and turn that light out? Can you take out that garbage? You can let the dog out.

Mind cleaning up this? Want to do that? Father can always find something for everybody in the house to do. He's the king of the castle. He can sit there with his feet up.

Say, you go here, you go there, you go here, you go there. Hopefully he's not doing that. Hopefully he's leading by example.

As a Tupac, he's got his shoulder under the load and he encourages his children to put a shoulder under the load so that they will be equipped for life. As a father does his own children, what is the purpose? Why does God entrust and approve and commission messengers? Why does he deliver this faithful, powerful, God inspired message? Why does he get it over to these recipients? So that, verse 12, so that you would walk worthy of God. It all falls to the ground.

Waste of time finding, approving, commissioning, equipping and sending a messenger. Waste of time delivering heavenly truths, divine revelations, powerful illuminations and provisions if it gets there and the people who receive it do nothing with it. So that you would walk worthy of God who calls you, who charges you, who provides for you, who equips you, who sends you this God appointed messenger, who gives you this God appointed truth.

Walk worthy of God who calls you where? To the future. He calls you to the future. We don't always see a calling in the present.

It looks drab. It looks dull. It looks boring.

It looks uninteresting. I don't see any upside to this faithful service. Here I am, you know, hoeing another weed out of the row.

I'm moving down this endless row in the field. There's a servant to my left and a servant to my right. We're just hoeing this field.

We're working the field all day long. I don't see what difference it makes, one weed more or less in my particular row. God says, you are called to the future.

When you get to the end, there is going to be a huge and important payoff. There is a purpose. There is a reason for every weed we pull, every rock we remove from the soil, every tedious.

There's a hymn in the book, and when you look under, you know, index of first lines, it says, how tedious and tasteless the hours. I don't even know what the rest of the song is about. This always fascinates me.

I think, wow, how tedious and tasteless the hours. You can just go in all different directions from that. When I am with you or, you know, when the electricity goes off or, you know, when my iPod battery is flat or, I mean, you know, how would you finish that sentence? How tedious and tasteless the hours, what? Well, things may seem tedious and they may seem tasteless now, but God has called us to his own kingdom and glory.

And the more real those things are, the more motivated we are, the more we respond to exhortation and comfort and the charge that comes to us through the truth of God. For this

reason, verse 13, chapter 2, 1 Thessalonians, for this reason, we also thank God. Paul says, we thank him for you back in chapter 1, but we thank him also without ceasing because, now remember, these three things, we're going to rotate another one in front.

He's been for 10 verses, he's been talking about himself and what kind of messenger he was. Why? He is reminding them that the message they received is legitimate. It wouldn't be a legitimate message if it didn't have a God-approved, God-commissioned, God-ordained, God-supplied, God-powered messenger.

That's one of the ways you know the message is legit. What's another way? Well, we thank God also without ceasing because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, the God-ordained, God-approved, God-powered, God-inspired messengers, you welcomed it. You embraced it.

You grabbed hold of it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you. What did I leave out? It's the word of God that effectively works in you, what? Out loud, what does it say? In you who believe. It's not enough to hear it.

It's not enough to have the God-ordained, God-inspired, God-approved messenger. It's not enough to have the word of God alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. It effectively works in whom? In whom? You who PISTUO.

God PISTUO'd us to deliver the message. We faithfully delivered it to you, as I've told you now in ten verses. And what's great, and why we thank God all over again, is when you heard it, you received it, and it effectively works in you who placed your faith in it, who grabbed hold of it, who treated it like the truth of God that it is.

Not just the word of men, not a philosophy, not advice, not helpful hints, not some tips to get along, but as it is, the word of God, the word of truth. You welcomed it, and it effectively works in you. This is the payoff.

After one cherry, two cherry, three cherries on the machine, here comes the money out the bottom. Lots of it. It effectively works.

This is how you know it is legitimate. This truth, this affirmation is what bolsters and supports and reinforces their dedication and their faithfulness in the onslaught of opposition that they face in Thessalonica. They are continuing to be subject to persecution, to derision, to blackballing, to cold shouldering, to blacklisting.

They're suffering all kinds of things from the community. And Paul says, just remember, this is how you know you're on the right track. You had faithful messengers giving you a powerful message, and look what it did when you received it.

And you who believe, look at the effect. You, brethren, became imitators, became memetai,

became followers of the worthy example of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus, for you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen just as they did from the Judeans. You're not the first to be harassed and persecuted and denigrated and stepped on and ground into the dirt for responding to this message.

You are following in the same pattern and after the same model that these faithful believers in Judea did. Who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets? These Judeans that were persecutors, the same kind of people that are persecuting you are the ones who killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted and hounded the prophets and have persecuted us. And they do not please God and they are contrary to all men.

Look at the contrast between Paul, who is like a nurturing father, like a nursing mother, he is caring, he is careful to not burden anyone, he is looking out for their best interest, and look at the Judaizers who kill people, who kill the prophets, who kill the Lord Jesus, who persecute Paul and persecute them. Paul says, which source do you think a legitimate message is coming from? Where do you think the truth of God actually is? And just remember, those who followed the Lord Jesus in Judea suffered just like you're suffering. These persecutors forbid us to speak to the Gentiles so that they might be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.

But wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. And it literally says, at the last. And this is something we'll take up next time.

What does it mean, at the last? Just remember, one of the hallmarks of genuine Christian faith and practice is looking ahead, treating what is future as a present reality, right? I have treasure in heaven. Can't see it now, but I know that it's there. The Lord Jesus is coming back.

I can't see him now, but I know that he's there. I have opportunities and great blessings and rewards in eternity. Can't see them now, but I know they're there.

And these persecutors have a justice and a judgment coming. I can't see it now, but it is already set. The execution date has already been fixed.

It is as inevitable as all of the glorious positive things that are going to happen for us. Wrath has come upon them. Can't see it now, but it's just as real as all of those wonderful positive promises.

Well, Paul has talked about himself. He's talked about the power of the message. He has talked about the effect in those who believe, the production of it.

And it is equally true of us. We've got the same messengers. We've got the same message.

We have the same opportunity to receive it in faith and live in its light and have that future become real to us. The time is short. The opportunities are great.

And it doesn't matter what opposes us. It doesn't matter how fierce the resistance. We're not the

first to face it.

We are memetai in that regard. Others have done it. We can do it.

Think about this as I get older. All of us as we get older. A lot of people are older than me.

And you look at it and you say, you know what? I'm not the first person to get old. Other people have done this. If other people can do it, I can do it.

Not easy. Doesn't make it any easier. But I'm memetai.

I'm a follower of others that have been faithful and been diligent and done these things with grace and with perseverance and looking to the Lord and looking ahead, looking beyond, looking past the cross to the crown. This is what Paul is comforting and exhorting and charging the believers of Thessalonica with. And this is what God is encouraging and comforting and charging us with as well.

We'll pick up in Chapter 2, verse 17 next week. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the powerful truth of your word.

Thank you that we can have confidence that it is delivered to us authoritatively and legitimately. Your Holy Spirit confirms its truth and its power in our souls. And for we who believe it is your power for deliverance, for sustaining grace, for the ability to rise above ourselves and to produce the fruit that comes to those who abide in the vine, to those who are enabled and empowered by your spirit and who are informed and illuminated by your word.

We thank you for all of these provisions. We thank you for the opportunity. We pray that our lives will reflect your glory both now and in the ages to come and that when the Lord Jesus returns, we will not have any reason to be ashamed, but by faith and patience, we will inherit all of your wonderful promises to us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.