

## **Together for the Gospel**

### **1 Thessalonians 1 & 2**

For the next couple of weeks I want to talk about regrouping as a church and refocusing on some of the most important things that we do together. We've done this before when we thought the major waves of disruption from COVID were over and I'm hoping they actually are this time. We are heading into the latter half of the summer and the new ministry year will be here soon and we'd love to see you fully re-engaged in the life of the church and making it a priority in your life. What we're doing is very important and deserves an important place in our lives and schedules and I want to help us see that again with the next two sermons.

One of the most important reasons for us to regroup and refocus is so that we can work together to reach our community with the good news of Jesus, and that's what I want to talk about today. This is one of the core parts of the mission that Christ has called us to. We reach people for Christ through different events that we do together and through our own personal lives and ministry, but we need one another for all of this for encouragement and support. I want us to remember why this is so important, because sharing the gospel isn't all that easy and I think we can easily push it aside, especially if we don't have the support and encouragement we need from one another.

When it comes to sharing the gospel, I wish there was a simple, comfortable method of sharing that would be readily received by lots of people. That would make it easier to share. When I went on mission trips to Mexico, we would go into homes and neighborhoods to deliver food, someone would share a testimony about Jesus, someone would share the gospel, we'd ask if anyone wanted to receive him, and several people would respond. Homes were open and people were receptive and that made it easy to share.

But it doesn't seem to work that way around here. It feels more complicated. In my experience, there are a lot more barriers to work through and people seem more closed or uninterested. It feels uncomfortable. Religion is a topic you don't talk about because people have all kinds of strong opinions and can be opposed to what we believe. So it's easy to let it slide and not even try. We hope people

eventually end up hearing about Christ and believing, but we aren't that excited about taking the initiative.

So this morning I want us to remember why it's so important. I want to use the book of 1 Thessalonians to guide us because Paul writes a lot about what happened when he shared the gospel in Thessalonica and why it was important for him. He and his team shared even though it wasn't easy. They faced all kinds of obstacles and opposition. In fact, they had just been chased out of a city before coming to Thessalonica. They had been beaten and imprisoned and forced to leave town by the city magistrates. Yet when they showed up in Thessalonica they continued to share. Why would they do that? I want to point out three reasons I see in the first two chapters of this book. The first can be seen in what Paul writes about the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thess. 1:2-8...

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-8.

*<sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.*

The thing that sticks out to me in these verses as Paul is describing these new Thessalonian believers is that they were having an influence for Christ throughout that region of the world. They were gaining a reputation for themselves and for Christ and it was a very positive thing. They had gone from being not a people, to becoming a people who were spreading the fame of Christ around them. Christ was being honored and magnified through them. And that's the first reason it's so important for us to come together to spread the gospel in our community – for the glory of the one who died for us.

Peter talks about this transformation and glorious purpose in the believers he writes to in 1 Peter 2:9-10. This is somewhat of a theme verse for our church: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

When people come to Christ, they are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light and they begin to proclaim the excellences of the One who saved them. They bring glory to Christ, and that is perhaps the most important reason for us to regroup and refocus on spreading the good news together. Christ is worthy of all glory and praise – from our lives and from the lives of everyone he died to redeem. When our neighbors turn from living in sin and darkness and are lifted up from brokenness to a new life in Christ, Jesus is glorified. He is exalted in them. And God has given us an important role to play in that – we are the messengers. God uses us to point the way. So when we share the gospel, we have the opportunity to glorify Christ through others who turn to him.

I see another reason in the last two verses in chapter 1.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

*<sup>9</sup> For they themselves [people in neighboring regions] report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

So people were definitely hearing the truths of the gospel through the testimony of the Thessalonian church and in those truths they were hearing how the Thessalonians had turned to God from idols and were waiting for Jesus who would deliver them from the wrath to come. These are staggering spiritual blessings that were a new reality for the Thessalonians because Paul and his team shared the gospel among them. They were no longer trapped in the dead end road of worshipping idols. No longer caught up in dead religion that could offer them to joy, no freedom, no life, and no salvation. Instead they had been set free to serve the living and true God who alone gives life, joy, and salvation.

Not only that, but because the gospel was shared among them, they were no longer under the weight of God's judgment for their sin. They would be saved – delivered from God's wrath through the redemption of Christ. Once, they were on the wide road that leads to destruction, but in Christ, they would be saved. They would not suffer God's judgment in hell; they would receive his grace and kindness in heaven.

So not only is Christ glorified when we share the gospel with the people in our community, but people are saved from a dead end life of idolatry and from God's eternal judgment. God has chosen to use us to be his messengers to bring the message of reconciliation to a lost and dying world – to our neighbors who are currently separated from God. And it's time for us to regroup and refocus so we can more effectively bring the good news to them.

Romans 10:13-15 says, *“For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?<sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!””*

So this is the second reason we need to regroup and work together to spread the gospel in our community. The third is at the end of chapter 2. In the first part of chapter 2 Paul defends his ministry among them. There must have been some criticism of Paul from jealous Jews who were saying that he had ulterior motives for sharing the gospel with them. So Paul defended himself by explaining how much he cared for them which was demonstrated by his hard work among them without receiving any pay. He cared for them like a parent cares for their own children.

He continues to describe his genuine love for them at the end of chapter 2 by talking about how hard it was when he was forced to leave them because of persecution.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.

*<sup>17</sup> But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to*

*face, <sup>18</sup> because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. <sup>19</sup> For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> For you are our glory and joy.*

Why did Paul want to get back together with them so much? Because they were his hope, joy, and crown of boasting before the Lord at his coming. This is describing a celebration of victory that Paul would experience at Christ's return. The joy and glory of that celebration wouldn't be just because he made it to the finish line, but because the people he shared the gospel with would be there too. His joy would be multiplied by every person who would join in that celebration that he had a part in helping them get there. There is an eternal reward of joy that can only be experienced by taking part in the spread of the gospel. And Paul wanted that reward to the fullest, so he gave himself fully to that work.

Not only was he motivated by the glory of Christ and their salvation, but also by his own reward. And these are the same reasons it's so important for us to regroup after these long months of the pandemic and work together to share the gospel. It's for the glory of Jesus Christ, for the salvation of our neighbors and friends, and for the joy and glory we will experience when the people we reach join us on that day of celebration.

So I encourage you to recommit yourself to engaging in the life and ministry of this church. We can't do it without you, because you are the church. And together we have the awesome responsibility and privilege to reach our community together.