

Sunday Update
25th October 2020

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. 2 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. 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. 4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. 6 We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 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, because you had become so dear to us.

I had a phone call the other day from a major media and entertainment company – OK, from Virgin Media (other media companies are available!) – and the person on the call began by congratulating me on being a valued customer over many years. Because I am a valued customer, she wanted to tell me about some benefits she was going to talk to me about today. I can't remember exactly what they all were but she offered me super-duper broadband speed, the top notch broadband; she offered me some extra TV channels that I don't have; and there were some other offers as part of this call. "How does that sound to you?" she asked me. I thought it all sounded very good; as a valued customer over a long period of time, being rewarded for my loyalty appealed to me immensely. Then she told me that this package would only cost me.... I ended the call as quickly as I could, feeling that I had been duped and feeling disappointment.

The cynical world in which we live is fed by phone calls like the one I've described. "There is no such thing as a free lunch" is seen to be true over and over again as people try to reel you in. It gets worse when some of the phone calls try to persuade you that you have a problem with your computer and that by paying them some money then can fix it for you over the phone. It is a scam; they are lying to you! Once they have you hooked they take your money and run; you never had a problem with your computer! Lots of people are swindled by that kind of phone call or by e-mails from the family of a dead Nigerian prince and they want you to help them transfer money to the UK; all they need are your bank details....

1 Thessalonians is written to young Christians to help them live out their faith in a tough world. Paul has already commended them for the qualities he has seen in their lives, shaped by their new-found faith. He has described them as the model church and spoken about them as a role-model for churches in other parts of Greece. In today's reading, he writes to them about his ministry, and the way in which he has carried out that ministry in Thessalonica. In particular he writes about the motives that lie behind his ministry, how he conducts himself and what makes him conduct himself in that way. There is a part of this that opens up the whole question of motives for all of us; why do we do what we do? What motivates us to be the kind of people we are or we aspire to be?

Paul, Silas and Timothy arrived in Thessalonica in the same way as lots of other people had done before them. In the cynical world of the first century, people watching would think "what's the catch?" There were lots of wandering salesmen or travelling teachers, with something to sell or a new philosophy to promote. They would make their pitch and then out would come the hat to be passed round: "We

can't do this without support; here's a bottle of snake-oil to buy and it will really cure all known ills" (I've watched too many westerns!!) These other people were either out to make money from the people of Thessalonica or were out to make a name for themselves.

Paul was different! He arrived in Thessalonica from Philippi. He came bearing the scars of ministry there, having been beaten up by the mob and thrown into prison by the authorities. He arrived in Thessalonica bearing the physical, emotional and spiritual scars of that experience. In Thessalonica, he is going to do exactly the same thing as he did in Philippi with the real risk that he will face the same reaction from another crowd of people who didn't like what he said. That's what happened! (You can read these stories in Acts 16 and 17) Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica under the cover of darkness for fear of the mob and for their own safety. Why do a second time, what had caused you trouble the first time you did it? You need to have a very good reason!

In 1 Thessalonians 2 Paul tells us what did *not* motivate him. He says "*we're not trying to trick you*" – this word is used for luring, catching and reeling in fish; Paul didn't use cunning to reel in the Thessalonians so that he could trick them into giving him money; "*we didn't put on a mask to cover up greed!*" Paul is not in the business of ministry for financial gain, tricking money out of unsuspecting dupes! Neither is he out to be popular - "*we are not trying to please men...*" – he is not trying to make a name for himself, or build a reputation; he is not out to flatter people into supporting him.

His motive is clear: he is out to please God and only to please God. If he suffered for ministry in Philippi, he needs a strong motive to do that same work elsewhere, knowing the risk. The strong motive Paul has is the deep desire in his heart to do what God has called him to do. "*We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel*" and Paul's motive for ministry is the discharge of that trust in order to please God. That is what he does: he preaches the gospel; he tells people about Jesus and what God has done for us in Jesus; he preaches the gospel so that people can believe in Jesus and to please God. James Denney was a Scottish preacher and professor of the early 20th century; he had a sign on the wall of his vestry: "No man can bear witness to Christ and himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save." Preaching ministry is not about the preacher, but is about the God to whom the preacher points.

Why do we do what we do? Why do we believe in the Lord Jesus? Why do we love our neighbour? Why do we share the stories of Jesus with other people? Why do we live our lives trying to be the kind of people Jesus wants us to be? Why do we do all of that knowing that it is hard to do, that it will tax our strength and commitment? Why do we do all of that knowing that it goes against the grain of our culture and that people might laugh at us? We need a really strong motive for this kind of lifestyle.

We do all of this from a deep desire to please God, to be the kind of people that God wants us to be. Somehow we are able to see beyond ourselves and understand that there is a deeper motive than simple self-satisfaction; we want to please God and we look for ways by which we can do that. We are motivated to do that by the love that God has for us: He has loved us in Jesus and our life is a response to that love. We live in these ways and do these things because we have been loved beyond measure by Jesus. These are the highest motives for Christian living: we don't always reach these highest motives and sometimes we are motivated in other ways, lesser ways, self-centred ways. Yet, here is our aspiration, a motive to aim for over and over again. We aim to please God, inspired by His love for us.

Prayer: Thank you that you love us deeply and forever, with a love that is new every day. Being loved like that, help us to be the kind of people You want us to be; may it be our deep desire to please You;

may we reflect Your love for us in the ways that we think, speak and behave. Forgive us when our motives are selfish and self-centred, or when we are motivated by greed.; May Your Spirit help us to walk in Jesus' ways.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- Pray for the world in which we live, for the influences that motivate people to be good influences, to be honourable, to be godly, rather than selfish, self-centred and greedy.
- Pray for those our children and young people and teachers going back to school this week, picking up a new term; those going back to school, still struggling with the lingering effects of lockdown earlier this year, bearing the emotional scars of these 6 months; for students who are caught in the Covid situation and the universities in the way they handle this situation.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital start to climb again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

All creatures of our God and King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUZD0hgtSgE>

Give thanks with a grateful heart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMTmZKotTYw>

Meekness and Majesty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXggFYQQTJ0>

Speak O Lord

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=my90e3a_nlM

Fight the good fight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVu7epY8WNE>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS The next issue of “EVERY DAY WITH JESUS” Booklet for November and December 2020 is now available and please contact Ian Aitken for a copy. Also, new issues of the “WORD FOR TODAY” Booklet and “WORD 4u2TODAY” Booklet for Young People for November and December 2020 and January 2021 and “OUR DAILY BREAD” for December 2020 and January and February 2021 are also available and please contact Michael Merriman for a copy.. Let the Bible feed you.

Shoebboxes – we’ve said already that we won’t be making shoebboxes up this year; the way in which we do it is just not possible given the Covid restrictions. However, we would encourage you to donate the money you might have spent on shoebox material to Blythswood and Jean Dewar is happy to act as the channel for your donations, either in cash or by cheque. You can also donate online at <https://blythswood.org/donate-to-shoe-box-appeal/> Margaret Black in Balerno is sending some shoebboxes and Tillie Boulogne has some leaflets, though you would really need to make up a whole box by yourself.

Tearfund Quiz – Saturday 14th November from 7.30pm on Zoom. We have done this in the Hall for 2 years and this year we will do the Quiz on Zoom. Your “ticket” will be a donation to Tearfund, which you can do online by a donation into the church bank account with the reference “Tearfund” or by giving the minister some money and he will send it on.

Remembrance Sunday – Sunday 8th November is Remembrance Sunday. As part of the service we will have an act of remembrance around 11am; there will be some appropriate bible words, the traditional words of remembrance and the 2 minutes’ silence. There will be a recording of the wreath being laid in front of the communion table as part of that service. The wreath itself will be placed outside the church building on the morning of November 8th and will sit in the church garden for that time to allow anyone who wants to take time to remember in a personal way to do so outside. We’re not allowed to hold any formal act of remembrance outside in a way that would gather a crowd, so please stay safe. Later in the day, the wreath will be placed at the war memorial in Currie as part of our acknowledgement of those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of our peace and freedom.



So deeply do we care

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Holy God of strength,
we come to you in our weakness.
Show us how to care deeply
for those around us,
and love others as you love us.
Amen.



Play together...

You'll need: 2 cups cornflour and 1 cup of water in a bowl or on a tray.
Play with the mixture and experiment with it.
What happens when you use strong movements to put your hand in?
What happens when you are gentle?

Question...



Can you think of times when you would need to be very gentle? Why is it important? What would happen if you weren't?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%20%3A1-8&version=NIRV;NIV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.

Talk together...



- Have a conversation about strength. What is it? How is it shown? Are there examples or people who show it? What sorts of strength are there? Is strength always a good thing?
- Are there any times when caring for someone requires strength?
- How/When does care for someone require gentleness?
- Are there any situations that need both strength and gentleness?
- Is God strong or gentle?
- How do you think the Thessalonians felt when they heard these words?
- What does verse 7 make you think about?
- What or who do you care deeply about?
- How could we show others that we care deeply?

Praise together...



God's amazing children by Vineyard
Worship UK & Ireland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwlxrVLQgxA&list=PLMoyWLnAWFN4UMAPOmVaLciC1fpguZ8bF&index=10>

Pray together...

Feather prayers – give each person a few feathers to hold. Touch them and feel how gentle they are. Then pray, using your own words or the words below.

Lord, help us to be gentle, to know when we need to be gentle, to have the strength to be gentle. Amen.

Make something...

Caring vouchers: commit to caring.
Give each person 2 pieces of paper and write "I care for you so much that..." across the top of each.

Discuss ways you could show how much you care. These could be practical things you could do, or about spending time with someone.

Each person should write or draw on their vouchers what they want to offer.

Sign your vouchers and add a date they are valid until. Encourage each other to give your vouchers to the appropriate people to "cash in" at any time.

Do something...

You'll need: balloons, skewer, washing up liquid.

Blow up a balloon, not inflating it too much, and tie a knot in the end.

Do you think it's possible to put a skewer through a balloon without popping it?

With a gentle approach it is possible! Coat the skewer in washing up liquid. Starting at the top of the balloon (where the colour is darkest) slowly spin the skewer as you gently push it into the balloon. Carefully push it through to the opposite side, next to the knot. The skewer should go through without popping the balloon.

What would have happened if you had jabbed the skewer into the balloon? Sometimes gentleness is more effective than strength.

