

“Our Confidence in the Gospel”
1 Thessalonians 2:1-4
(Preached at Trinity, May 5, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul marveled with great gratitude at the great display of saving faith being observed in the life of the Thessalonians. The transformation upon their lives was remarkable, but consistent with others coming to saving faith.
2. Paul was particularly thankful for their conversion, knowing the great opposition most people were showing towards the Gospel. To receive Christ was to face a world of opposition and persecution. Paul always made this clear.
Acts 14:21-22 NAU - "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
3. As we come to **Chapter 2** there are two elements set before us.
First, Paul is continuing to describe the unrelenting opposition to the Gospel he was experiencing, but despite the opposition, Paul was continuing to proclaim the Gospel with boldness and confidence.
Second, Paul is implying that one of the tactics the enemies of the Gospel were using was personal attacks upon his personal credibility. They knew that if they could convince people that Paul was a false teacher with false motives, they could discredit the Gospel. Paul is defending his credibility.
4. This morning I'm going to focus on the first: that despite powerful opposition, Paul was continuing to proclaim the Gospel with boldness and confidence.
1 Thessalonians 2:2 NAU - "as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition."
5. As Paul traveled from city to city it would seem the opposition was increasing in intensity. They were stoned, beaten, and imprisoned. Often, Paul was forced to flee due to the fierceness of the opposition.
Acts 14:5-7 NAU - "And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, ⁶ they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel."
They were treated no differently at Philippi
Acts 16:22-23 NAU - "The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order *them* to be beaten with rods. ²³ When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely"
After suffering greatly at Philippi Paul and his group then made their way to Thessalonica. They then fled to Berea and then to Corinth

6. Over and over the Gospel stirred up bitter opposition and often violent outbursts. Despite the open hostility to the Gospel many were believing the good news. Despite the opposition and the hatred Paul knew the Gospel could not be stopped. While most would hate it and turn away, many would receive it as the words of life.
7. This forms the context as we begin **Chapter 2**.
 "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,"
 And adjective from the word κενός which literally means "empty, futile"
- a. Paul had been forcibly thrown out of Thessalonica. He was anxious to hear if his ministry among the Thessalonians had been fruitful or had it been in vain or fruitless.
1 Thessalonians 3:5 NAU - "For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain."
- b. The Gospel is never futile nor empty in its work. It perfectly accomplishes the purpose of God, both when it is received and when it is rejected.
2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NAU - "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. ¹⁵ For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶ to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?"
8. Still, Paul was grieved over the hardness of men's hearts and grieved when he was forced to leave a town with men still perishing in their sins. In such an environment one might be tempted to make some minor adjustments to the Gospel to make it more appealing, that is if you didn't have absolute confidence in the power of the Gospel and the surety of the outcome.
9. Instead of fear and uncertainty Paul went from town to town with great boldness.
1 Thessalonians 2:2 NAU - "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."
10. Paul never felt the need to make adjustments to the Gospel.
1 Thessalonians 2:4-5 NAU - "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. ⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness"
11. This is where a solid Biblical theology is essential.
- A. First, knowing the Gospel has been entrusted to us we go forth.
 "but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak"
- B. Second, we must understand the surety of God's covenant purposes. Nothing is left to chance. There will be a great harvest of souls.
12. This week, I want us to consider Paul's great motivation in his work of preaching. Paul gives three sources for his boldness in the face of great opposition.
- I. The greatness of God – "We had the boldness in our God"
- II. The power of the Gospel – "to speak to you the gospel of God"
- III. The personal call of God upon him as a minister of the Gospel –
1 Thessalonians 2:4 NAU - "just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak"

13. Paul often writes from the prospective of His apostolic ministry. He was called as a preacher of the Word. But Gospel work is not for preachers only. Do you have confidence in the Gospel?
- I. Paul was bold because of the greatness of God – “We had the boldness in our God”
- A. Paul knew the purposes of God cannot be thwarted. This is true in every area of life.
1. Nothing can prevent God from doing His holy will
Daniel 4:35 NAU - "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"
 2. God has determined to save a multitude whom He has chosen
Ephesians 1:5 - "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,"
 3. Jesus came to accomplish the salvation of His people. Not one will be lost. The Gospel has never been in doubt.
 4. Paul was involved in this great work, and suffering was a part of it. Paul was following the charge of Christ:
Matthew 10:23 NAU - "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next"
- B. Paul knew that God’s hand was upon his life
“We had the boldness in our God”
1. Paul knew his life was in God’s hands.
We need to understand God’s absolute sovereignty over all things. Our life is in His hands.
 2. Such trust in God produces boldness and courage. God took the fear out of their hearts. Knowing he was in the sovereign hand of God gave Paul great boldness.
 3. Trusting in the abiding presence of God gives great confidence in the face of opposition. What can mere man do to those enveloped in the love of Christ
Romans 8:35 NAU - "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"
- II. Paul was bold because of the power of the Gospel –
“to speak to you the gospel of God”
Paul had boldness “in God” to preach the gospel “of God.”
- A. Paul had absolute confidence in the Gospel
1. There was no need to change it. In fact we dare not change it.
Galatians 1:8 NAU - "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"
 2. It was God’s gospel. It came from God and God was making it effectual.
Galatians 1:11-12 NAU - "the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

3. There was no doubt in the mind of Paul that God was saving His elect.
 - a. He didn't feel the need to handle the Word of God deceitfully
2 Corinthians 4:2 NAU - "but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."
 - b. He did not feel the need to soften the edge of Scripture by preaching flattering words
1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NAU - "and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
 - c. All of the clever methods being used today are actually a testimony to a low view of God's power to save His own. They feel they need to use clever ways to attract sinners to Christ
 4. God's Kingdom is an unstoppable force. It will continue to grow upon the earth. Jesus taught this in the Parable of the Leaven.
Matthew 13:33 NAU - "He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened."
- B. Paul knew the Gospel was the fulfillment of God's covenant promises.
1. In the Great Commission Jesus declared that the missionary work of the church would have worldwide ramifications.
Matthew 28:19 NAU - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"
 2. This great expansion of the kingdom through the Gospel was foretold in the Old Covenant and it is being fulfilled in the New Covenant. God promised Abraham that his offspring would be too many to count.
Genesis 22:17-18 NAU - "indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."
 - a. The ultimate offspring of Abraham is a spiritual seed. It is all who are in Christ Jesus. Evangelism is bringing in all of God's chosen seed. God has promised us success.
 - b. Those declaring the Gospel are promised fruitfulness
Spurgeon: "Just as in Egypt he multiplied the people exceedingly, so will he increase the number of his saints upon the earth; not only shall the faithful be blessed with converts, and so with a spiritual seed; but those who are their spiritual children shall become fruitful also, and thus the multitude of the elect shall be accomplished; God shall increase the people, and shall increase the joy. Even to the end of the ages the race of true believers shall be continued, and shall growingly multiply in number and in power. The first blessing upon mankind was, 'be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth;' and it is the blessing which God now pronounces upon them that fear him. Despite the idols of philosophy and sacramentalism, the truth shall gather its disciples, and fill the land with its defenders."¹
 4. Paul marched forth with these covenant promises, and so do we.

¹ Spurgeon, C.H., *The Treasury of David, Vol. II*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 56.

- III. Paul was bold because of the call of God upon him as a minister of the Gospel –
1 Thessalonians 2:4 NAU - "just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak"
- A. Paul knew this great Gospel message had been entrusted to him
1. It was a Gospel he had received from Christ
1 Corinthians 15:3 – “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;”
 2. Paul was Christ’s ambassador
2 Corinthians 5:18-20 NAU - "Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ"
 - a. An ambassador is an official representative
He represents the one who sent him
 - b. Paul considered himself and his coworkers ambassadors for Christ because God had commissioned them to be His representatives
- B. Paul saw himself as a steward
1. As a steward he was entrusted with the property of another
Matthew Henry: “Ministers have a great favour shown them, and honour put upon them, and trust committed to them. They must not dare to corrupt the word of God: they must diligently make use of what is entrusted with them, so as God hath allowed and commanded, knowing they shall be called to an account, when they must be no longer stewards.²
 2. Paul felt a great burden to be found faithful
God had set Paul apart for the Gospel. He felt the weightiness of this call
 3. Paul saw the Gospel as his obligation
Romans 1:14-15 NAU - "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."
 - a. The word literally refers to a debt.
 - b. No matter what the cost. No matter how severe the opposition, Paul would continue to boldly proclaim the Gospel.

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2339.

Conclusion:

1. How does this apply to you?
Not all are called to be pastors. Not all are called to the public preaching of the Gospel. But all are called to speak the good news of the Gospel. We see this with the Thessalonians. They were boldly sharing the Gospel of Christ.
1 Thessalonians 1:8 NAU - "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."
2. Christians are to press on in this world with great persistence. We must carry the Gospel to the lost. We must persist in spite of opposition, in spite of busy schedules, in spite of every difficulty. We are to seize every opportunity. We are to use every Biblical means. This is why we keep tracts in the back of the church and encourage all to persist in this form of evangelism.
3. We are to continue boldly with great persistence even in the face of opposition. We are to patiently bear with those who do not understand. It may take many years for our work to bear fruit.
4. Never are we to be harsh, heavy-handed, manipulative. Never are we to change the message of the Gospel. If one person rejects it we move on to the next. The Gospel will never go forth in vain.