

Hurst Green
12th Jan 20
The Sermon they see
1 Thess 2:1-8

So we continue in Thessalonians and remember Paul had visited Thessalonica in Acts 17. He had stayed for only three Sabbaths teaching them about Jesus and some had believed.

Acts 17:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a **large** number of God-fearing Greeks and **not a few** prominent women.*

Not bad for three weeks of preaching!

But the Thessalian's had had an impact on Paul as well;

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (ANIV)

² *We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.* ³ *We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And last week we looked at this work of faith, this labour of love and the endurance of hope.

Now we move onto the next chapter and although we read to verse 18 I will focus on the first 8 verses.

We read the whole section because this is all one letter and it hangs together as such. I wonder – did you, knowing we are doing 1 Thessalonians, prepare by reading the whole chapter so you could see the big picture? If you did you can stand with the Bereans having a more noble character and searching the scriptures to see if what you were told is true.

So for this week take a look at verse 8

1 Thessalonians 2:8 (ANIV)

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.*

And that verse is our focus this week.

Why? Because our faith is more than a set of doctrines and commands that you can learn by rote – it is how those affect your life.

Remember what James said?

James 2:19 (ANIV)

¹⁹ *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.*

The demons believe but that does not make the difference in their lives.

We probably all have known people who say that they believe but their life doesn't show it.

Your life is the best sermon that you will ever preach to your neighbours whom you love as yourselves.

You have that love because you know the commands of your God because the words are important too. It says in verse 8 that he shared the gospel but also that he loved them. That is the gospel that is seen with your eyes.

Jesus told us this

John 13:34-35 (ANIV)

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

And that love is seen in how we interact.

Have a think about this.

Think back to those people who have been in your life. They may be relatives, people in Church, missionaries, even great speakers. Those people you have looked up to and viewed them as great Christians.

Why did you identify them as that? Probably because of the way they lived their lives. Even if they were great speakers it was still their lives that mattered. A great speaker with a poor lifestyle is just a clanging cymbal because they have not love.

The gospel of Christ is so much more than a list of do's and don'ts – it is truly the gospel of love – a gospel of relationships and personal interactions. Through that we become living sermons; sermons they see rather than sermons they hear.

But Paul has already told us some of **what it takes to live this sermon of love**. Throughout the epistles we are told of the price we must pay to live as Christians – the question all the time is are we prepared to?

From that statement this sermon could have gone many ways but let us look firstly at **the desire to be a Christian**.

Remember we are responding because God first loved us. That is 1 John 4:19 at the end of an underused section on God's love and our responding love which also says:

1 John 4:11 (ANIV)

¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

And we know that famous verse from 2 Cor 3

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ANIV)

¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Our faith is not one that lets us stand still in comfort having warm and fuzzy times while we wait for heaven. Our faith is one of action. Loving one another is not a passive thing as James says.

James 2:14-17 (ANIV)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

And that action is twofold. There is our love in action which we are talking about today and there is our growth in our faith and our growth is not limited remember:

2 Corinthians 3:17 (ANIV)

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Nothing can stop us growing apart from our self. Those degrees of glory are there to be grasped and enjoyed if we want to.

Perhaps an interesting exercise for the New Year would be for you to take a look at yourself and ask four questions:

- How have you grown in the last year?
- How have you grown in the last five years?
- Is there anything hindering your growth?
- What could you do to accelerate your growth?

On the window sills there are some sheets for you to take away and hopefully consider.

Now in growing as a Christian we are looking at what it takes to love one another and of course we have that famous passage on love in 1 Corinthians 13 which is used so often at weddings etc.

But, of course, as I keep reminding you these are epistles – they were written as a single letter and so rather than pick out odd verses that make us feel comfortable we need to read around and see what else we are being told and the start of Chapter 14 is:

1 Corinthians 14:1 (ANIV)

¹ Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

We are to eagerly desire the spiritual gifts which are listed back in 1 Cor 12: Messages of wisdom, messages of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues and interpretation.

All of which are studiously ignored in most of the western church and which we have not eagerly desired in this church preferring to keep things comfortable!

We need these gifts!

So that was some words on our desire to be a Christian and our desire to grow in our Christian life which we need if we are to follow the examples Paul gives us on what it takes **to live this sermon of love.**

Let's look at them back in 1 Thessalonians 2.

Starting with the first part of verse 2

1 Thessalonians 2:2 (ANIV)

*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.*

This is something we are not very good at here. We don't like all this mention of suffering and being insulted.

I am not advocating that you go looking for suffering but the fear of being insulted is probably the one thing that stops us preaching the gospel to our neighbours. We don't want people to be rude to us, to tell us to go away or to lose their friendships.

If they will stop their friendship with you because you tell them of your faith they are not your friends any way because your faith is, or should be, a key part of who you are. If they want to love you then they need to understand that.

And of course round the world many of our fellow Christians face far worse on a daily basis. Recently the Government asked the Archbishop of Truro to produce a review on the persecution of Christians around the world. This review revealed that Christianity is persecuted in many ways in many different countries and, where Christianity is persecuted so are minorities.

Suffering and insults and, as that verse goes on to say, strong opposition are what we should expect not avoid!

Because as Paul did we dare to tell people of his gospel. Elsewhere Paul lists his sufferings but has learnt to count it pure joy because he obeyed our Lord who told us to share the gospel because people need to hear it.

1 Thessalonians 2:3 (ANIV)

³ *For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.*

And then our motives – where is our heart in all this? If we are obeying the command to love our neighbours then that is good but if we are doing it for any other reason we are flawed.

It's not about numbers, donations or anything else. It is all about the love of God and remembering what Jesus said

John 14:15 (ANIV)

¹⁵ *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.*

And sharing the gospel is what we have been commanded to do!

Because in doing this

1 Thessalonians 2:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *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.*

We are doing this to obey God and so please God and we know he tests our hearts and knows our true motives.

And this is picked up in verse 6

1 Thessalonians 2:6 (ANIV)

⁶ *We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. ~~As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you,~~*

So to live this sermon of love we need to be doing it from **the right motives.**

And then

1 Thessalonians 2:5 (ANIV)

⁵ *You know we never used flattery, ~~nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.~~*

Not using flattery to try and persuade people that the gospel is real.

“excessive and insincere praise, given especially to further one's own interests”

It is getting on someone's good side by paying them insincere compliments so that they feel good about you.

This does get used but we need to avoid it

And

1 Thessalonians 2:5 (ANIV)

⁵ ~~You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.~~

This is one that permeates parts of the Church. Where what you give is more important than where your heart is. We are only interested in getting you into our club so that you can contribute.

Now of course the need to give and support the Church is very real and is going to be very real for us as Keith arrives and we need to pay him but it is never the motive.

Greed and love are not good bedfellows.

So there are some of the things that you need to live the sermon of love in a real and authentic way.

That sermon is the one that really counts as you share the gospel with your neighbours because we need to the words as well.

1 Peter 3:15 (ANIV)

¹⁵ ~~But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.~~ Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

So live this sermon of love!

As you think on these things we will take up our collection but don't forget to answer those questions I have given you.