

MOTHER AND FATHER LIKE SHEPHERD

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Key Verse: 11

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children.”

In chapter 1, Paul, Silas and Timothy gave thanks for the faith of Thessalonian Christians and their faith in action. The gospel was not just words but came to them with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction as they welcomed the message. Thus they became examples to all other churches in the region.

In this chapter 2, Paul and his coworkers are sharing their testimony on how the gospel was preached in spite of severe persecution in Thessalonica. It is God who enabled them to dare to preach the gospel and to care for the disciples like a mother and father. The work of God was evident that they also could suffer for Christ. May God grant us one word of God through today's passage. Amen!

- I. Approved by God through God's Tests (1-7a).

Look at verse 1, “You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. Verse 1 is the connecting sentence between chapter 1 and 2. In chapter 1, the gospel came to the Thessalonians not with words only but with power. There was the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and some Jews and Greek converts accepted the gospel of Jesus, including prominent women (Acts 17:1-4). In the rest of chapter 2, Paul shares the inside story of how they struggled in doing God's work in Thessalonica.

Before Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica, they were persecuted in Philippi outrageously. It could have discouraged them from preaching the gospel in Thessalonica. But they overcame discouragement and preached the gospel again. But they faced strong opposition in Thessalonica again, when the gospel challenged some of the Jews. They were jealous of God's work among others and hired mobs from the market places and invaded Jason's house to find Paul and Silas. When they could not find them, they dragged Jason to the city officials. In spite of strong opposition, they continued to dare to tell people the gospel of Jesus Christ. How could they overcome and do God's work there? **Look at verse 2. “We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.”** They could overcome and continue to serve God's work with the help of God. Without God's help, they could not do so. With human strength, we cannot do anything beyond our own human limitation. With human wisdom, we cannot understand God's wisdom. When Paul, Silas and Timothy depended on God through prayer and his word, they could experience strength and wisdom from above. With the help of God they had sufficient courage to preach the gospel in spite of strong opposition. This reminds me of **Philippians 4:17**, which says, **“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”** **May God bless each one of us to experience the help of God in all situations, whether good or bad.**

In verses 3-7a, they are highlighting what was happening in their hearts and lives during the time in Thessalonica. **Look at verses 3-7a, “For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you.”** They

said that it was the time of God's test. God was testing their hearts. In what ways was God testing them? **First, it was a test of motive.** Those who have impure motives are trying to trick others for their benefit. They do lie, not entirely, but only little sprinkles like the serpent in Genesis 3, even though the lie will be revealed soon or later. In fact, the people in Thessalonica lied that Paul, Silas and Timothy were defying Caesar's decrees. When people are falsely accused, they act violently, but Paul, Silas and Timothy were different. They did not fall into human argument but continued to preach the gospel. They dared to speak the whole gospel even though the Thessalonians might not understand. They spoke that Jesus is the Promised Messiah, who died on the cross for their sins and rose again from the dead. They could do so because they were trying to please God. The goal of their life was to live for the name of Jesus and his kingdom, which was the power source of their strength.

Secondly, it was a test of greed. Apparently, the people accused Paul, Silas and Timothy of being greedy, taking money or things from other people when they accepted the gospel. But they declared that they did not use flattery in order to cover up their greed. This might be another reason why they worked as tentmakers in Thessalonica, while they did not work in Philippi. In Thessalonica they worked hard, not only to support themselves but to share with others so that no one could accuse them falsely. The Thessalonian Christians could not but see what sacrificial lives the apostles lived while they were with them. Even if they would not accept the fact, God was their witness how they lived in their city.

Thirdly, it was a test of seeking praise from people. When there is a success, there is praise from men. Wherever Paul, Silas and Timothy went, there was the work of God. Then those who accepted the gospel would thank God for Jesus and thank the apostles for bringing the good news to them. Of course, they did not seek praise from people, but probably some of the people accused them that they did. Yet, how easy it is for a human being to enjoy praise from people, even though they did not seek it. It was also God's test through the persecutions which purified their hearts, so they would seek praise not from people but from God to the end. Even though Paul had authority as an Apostle, he did not use his authority but humbled himself to be like a young child among them. (6-7a)

Then what happened? God approved their work. Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. They proclaimed, "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah." The Jews were persuaded and joined them, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. They fearlessly preached the gospel just as God entrusted the life-giving message to them. They had a clear motivation in doing God's work. It was for the glory of God and for his kingdom. God tested them, yet they were approved by God.

In Christ, we may also go through strong oppositions. In these days, there are many strong oppositions against Christianity in America. For example, a pastor is on trial because he refused to conduct a marriage for gay couples. However, it can be the time of God's test. Sometimes, God tests us showing what we have in us, just as a school test shows how much we really know. It could be the time of purification and/or of growing in the image of Jesus Christ. Thus, we grow in Christ through tests. God also tested Abraham to see whether he loved God more than God's blessing, Isaac. So God asked him to offer his son at the place God wanted. Abraham prayerfully obeyed, and God testified that he passed God's test, saying, **"Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.... I swear by myself that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky**

and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

(Genesis 22:12-18) May God bless each one of us to pass God’s tests and be a blessing to many others. Amen!

II. Mother and Father like Shepherd (7b-16).

In fact, the Christians in Philippi were spiritually very young. They had just come to accept Jesus as their personal savior. Within a few months if not a few days, they were receiving persecutions. How did Paul, Silas and Timothy help them? **Look at verses 7b-8, “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”** They took care of them like a nursing mother. A newborn baby needs a mother’s attention 24/7, which is very tiresome without much break. A baby is very demanding; crying for any and every reason, and often a mommy can distinguish what a baby is crying for. She is ready to feed or clean up baby poops anytime and anywhere. It is mother’s instinct to provide and protect her own children because she loves them. Yet, it is not easy to do so. One of the women coworkers at my job said that it is easier coming to work than taking care of her children at home, so she decided not to take a vacation at home this summer. Like newborn babies, the Christians in Thessalonica cried for help or made a lot of mistakes. Paul, Silas and Timothy gave them spiritual milk, which is the word of God, according to their needs, and cleaned up after their mistakes. It is easy to say but hard to do so when they are really not your own children.

How could Paul, Silas and Timothy take care of them like a nursing mother? It was because they loved them so much so that they were delighted to share not only the gospel but also their lives with them. We call it a shepherd heart, which is beyond human love. They could do so because they know that they were loved by God even when they were enemies of God. With the love of God in Christ, they could love others and were willing to share their lives with them.

In order to share their lives with them, what did they do? **Look at verse 9, “Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardships; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we were preaching the gospel of God to you.”** In Thessalonica, they worked hard in order not to be a burden to others but to provide for themselves while preaching the gospel. Moreover, they wanted to share what they had with the believers. By living together, everything about what kind of life they lived was exposed—whether or not they lived holy, righteous and blameless lives. (Verse 10) Holy means set aside for God. Probably, Paul set himself aside for God through prayer and meditating on the word of God. Righteous means to have a right relationship with God. They had lived blameless lives that people could not blame for anything illegal or immoral before people. It does not mean that they lived a perfect life but they set a good example for the Thessalonian Christians of how to have right relationship with God and with others.

Look at verse 11-12, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” Interestingly, they raised the Thessalonian Christians not only like a mother but also like father. What does a father do? When a mother cares for children, a father disciplines. The analogy was given as a mother for spiritually young people so a father for grown-ups who needs discipline. As spiritual fathers, they encouraged, comforted and urged. How did they encourage, comfort and urge. We encourage to inject courage into a weak person who needs courage. We usually comfort

those who are sorrowful. Dictionary.com says “urge” means “to push or force along or impel with force or vigor”. Paul, Silas and Timothy probably comforted Thessalonian Christians when they were sorrowful or in trouble. They encouraged them to preach the gospel in the midst of hardships and persecutions. They urged them to live holy, righteous and blameless lives, living lives worthy of God.

How can we live lives worthy of God, who calls us into his kingdom and glory? In other letters, Paul mentioned in a similar way, living lives worthy of his kingdom or worthy of the gospel. This shows that he urged them to live lives fitting to God’s kingdom and glory. How can we live lives fitting to the kingdom of God? If we count our actions, who is worthy to enter into the kingdom of God? The Bible declares that no one is righteous, not even one. Here is a parable Jesus gave in Matthew 22. In the parable of the great banquet, the king invited many who rejected to come. So he told his servant to invite anyone on the street, so many came in. Yet, there was one who came to the banquet with improper clothes and was kicked out of it. What are the clothes we should wear then in order to fit in the kingdom of God? **Galatians 3:27 says, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** Therefore, it is the clothes washed by the blood of Jesus. It means Christians must live as a forgiven sinners who have nothing to boast about by which we deserve to enter into the kingdom of God, but only by faith in the love of God. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) Thus we should give thanks for the grace of God and his forgiveness to the end of our lives. Then, we may live lives worthy of God’s kingdom. This is the reason why Paul mentioned the grace of God in all of his letters and shared his testimony again, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” May God help us remember the grace of God always, so that we may be able to live lives worthy of God’s kingdom and take care of God’s flock with the heart of mother and/or father. Amen!

Then, Paul, Silas and Timothy remembered more thanksgiving topics. **Look at verse 13, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”** Simply speaking, the Thessalonians received the word of God as the word of God. The word of God was spoken by Paul, Silas and Timothy, but they took it as the word of God, not as a human word. When they received the word of God as God’s word, something was working in their hearts. Their value system was changed and their lives were changed. It was evident that the word of God was at work.

What were the evidences of their change? **Look at verse 14. “For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews.”** They were changed in two major ways. **First, they became humble imitators.** At that time, Greeks were proud because their culture was honored and adopted by the Romans who spread their culture all over the Roman world. They were the doctors and philosophers of the time, and we still feel their influence to these days. To them, it was almost impossible to accept the strange philosophy so called the gospel from a third world country, from Jewish people. But when they accepted the gospel, they were changed. They became humble learners. They became imitators of God’s churches in Judea. The churches in Judea were going through persecutions. The persecution was so severe that the Christians in Judea had to run for their lives. Even many family members were scattered to all over the world. So they learned how to endure persecutions and hardships. When they imitated other Christians in Judea, they could overcome their situations.

Secondly, they were willing to suffer for Christ. Who likes to suffer? Who like to suffer for other's name sake? It is probably our human nature that we hate suffering, but they were willing to suffer not for themselves but for the name of Jesus. How could they? They could because they accepted Jesus who suffered for them while they were enemies of God. Jesus not only suffered but also died for their sins. In addition, they also heard many good examples from other brothers and sisters in Judea who endured suffering for Christ.

When I attended the World Mission Conference in Korea, I heard a lot of testimonies from all over the world. Especially when I heard how much our missionaries suffer and endure hardships in Africa, I was very much encouraged and at the same time ashamed of my small sufferings. Some of them are robbed by their Bible students not only once but many times. Many sheep come and grow to be disciples but run away like the wind again and again. How many nights they had to cry with tears for God's work and also wonder how to educate their children. Through all these sufferings, however, they say that their hope in the kingdom of God become more and more clear. In the meantime, they grow in the image of Jesus Christ. Even though we do not have the same sufferings they go through in America, God has been working in my life, directing me to the ultimate hope and helping me to grow in the image of Jesus through and through. May God help me to continue to help me invite students in the hope of raising them to be disciples of Jesus, to care for them with the love of Christ, and to endure with the hope of the kingdom of God. Amen.

Through today's passage, we learned how Paul, Silas and Timothy served Thessalonian Christians. In the midst of hardships and persecution, they could serve them like a mother and father with the help of God. God approved their work, bringing people to Christ. They also gave thanks for the evident work of God in them, being imitators of others' life of faith and being willing to suffer for Christ. May God help us to remember the grace of God and serve others with the heart of a mother and father accordingly.