



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

REDEEMED

FEBRUARY 1-7, 2015

MAIN POINT

Sharing our good news (the gospel) helps people see how it could be their good news.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What is the best news a family member or friend shared with you recently? What made it so good in their eyes?

2. Are you always happy for other people when they share good news with you? Why or why not?

Leader: When we think of the gospel primarily as good news for other people, we miss the point of the gospel. In Romans 2, Paul rebuked the Jews harshly because they had become so puffed up in their knowledge of the law that they failed to recognize their need for Christ. Paul called them hypocrites because despite their vast knowledge, they still failed to keep the law perfectly. Their pride kept them from seeing that a true relationship with God does not depend on who we are outwardly but who we are inwardly. “A person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Rom. 2:29). While many of the Jews understood the gospel, they did not embrace it, because in their pride, it had not become good news to them. We all do something similar when we hear God’s Word preached and think to ourselves, “I really wish my spouse or friend or coworker could hear this message because they really need it.”

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12.

Leader: In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul reminds the Church at Thessalonica of his ministry among them in order to encourage them, in the face of opposition, to continue the work of ministry he had initiated. Having been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi just prior to arriving in Thessalonica, Paul likely was still a mass of cuts and bruises when he arrived in Thessalonica. The great opposition he faced there was from “the Jews” and eventually resulted in a city riot (Acts 17:5). Yet Paul had spoken the gospel of God there and developed a deep spiritual relationship with the believers in this new church.

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3. Focusing on verses 7-12, what do these verses tell us about Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and his relationship with the believers there? What can we learn from his example in terms of how we share the good news about Jesus?

4. What does the imagery of the nursing mother communicate? What does gentleness look like within the context of sharing the gospel? Why is this trait important for us to exhibit as we share Christ with others?

5. Other than the gospel, what else did Paul share with the Thessalonians (v. 8)? How might we make room for more lost people in our day to day life? What might our church look like if we made unchurched people welcome?

6. On Sunday George said, "When we share the Good News without sharing how good it was for us to personally hear it, we put ourselves on the teacher's pedestal rather than the pilgrim's path." What did he mean by that? In his ministry among the Thessalonians, how did Paul demonstrate that the gospel was good news to him?

Leader: In his refusal to receive payment from them, his patient suffering alongside them, and his fervent teaching, Paul not only demonstrated that he loved the Thessalonians, he also demonstrated his love for the gospel. Paul demonstrated that the gospel was precious to him personally. When we share the gospel, it isn't enough to get the facts right, we must also share the difference it has made in our lives. Paul did this both in his words and his deeds. Paul's ministry balanced truth (sharing the facts of Christianity) and love (involvement in people's lives). We are not to be content with merely communicating the facts of the faith; rather, we should let our love for Christ compel us to share our hearts and lives with those we wish to reach.

[HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16.](#)

7. According to these verses, what was the result of Paul's preaching and example among the Thessalonians?

8. When the Thessalonians heard the gospel preached, they received it as it really is “the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (v. 13). What’s wrong with thinking of the gospel merely as a message that you heard one time and accepted? Why is it important to remember that the gospel “is at work in all who believe”?

Leader: While the gospel is the message of salvation by God’s grace through faith in Christ, it is also a message with the power to change our everyday living. Paul emphasized that the time they first received the good news about Christ, they had treated it as a message of God. People were being transformed because the truth works effectively, a reference to the ongoing result of the gospel in the lives of people. Paul thanked God both for the Thessalonians’ past conversion and for their present Christian living. In other words, the Thessalonians received the gospel as good news and continued trusting in it and treasuring it as good news. The gospel was much more than a collection of facts, it was their ultimate source of hope, security, and joy. Because the gospel was good news to them, the church at Thessalonica was able to follow Paul’s example and continue making disciples in the midst of great opposition. The same is true of us. If we hope to make disciples in Okotoks, we must do whatever it takes to continue trusting, applying, and delighting in the gospel.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. What can we learn from 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 about an appropriate way to share our story of God’s story (the Gospel) and what that kind of ‘witnessing’ (Acts 1:8) looks like?

10. When sharing the gospel, why is it important to demonstrate how the gospel was and is good news to us personally? How might our witness to and relationships with non-Christians suffer if we neglect to do so?

11. Our fourth practice of a disciple at Okotoks is “sharing our story of God’s story.” Ask those who are comfortable doing so to share their story of God’s story and how the gospel was and is good news to them.

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Leader: Encourage your group members, if they can, to stick around after your meeting to share their stories. This is an important discussion for our group in terms of fulfilling our mission as a church and group, so don't rush this question. You might even consider moving it up to an earlier point in the study or making a note to discuss it further next week.

PRAYER

Thank God for the gloriously good news of the gospel. Pray that He would help us to always remember that the gospel is good and that Christ saved us, is saving us, and will save us in the end. Pray that God would use the members of your group to make an impact for Christ in Okotoks by sharing their story of God's story with the lost people in their workplaces, neighborhoods, and homes.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What are some practical ways you could preach the gospel to yourself this week? How could you go about reminding yourself that the gospel is good news for you personally?
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-16

2:1. The second chapter of Thessalonians begins with Paul's reassurance that our visit to you was not a failure. Considering the tumult that erupted shortly after their arrival, such a statement could be made only by a person who measured success differently than society's standards. Despite the tumult that surrounded their visit despite the misunderstandings and rumors, despite the mob violence and threats, Paul stated that their visit was not a failure. Jews and Greeks had turned to Christ.

2:2. As he did at the beginning of the letter, Paul again looked back to the time he spent with these new Thessalonian believers—the fledgling church. He recalled his visit in the wider context of his missionary travels, mentioning his stay in Philippi: We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi. Paul reminded his friends that, despite everything, he still did not alter the message: we dared to tell you His gospel. How easy to adopt the cultural attitudes of the time, tweaking the

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message to make it more palatable. How safe to sound less threatening by presenting Jesus as just another possibility. But Paul did not. Do not miss the qualifying statement that explains, in part, why he did not buckle to social pressure, bad experiences, or others' opinions. The reason was because of the help of our God. It is the partnership between God and His servants that enables success. Paul did not just suck up his courage and march on; God did not magically dissolve all fear or concern. But with Paul's unwavering conviction of who Jesus is, together with God's enabling power, the Thessalonian church was established.

2:3. The reasons for their courage are continued in this verse. These men had no hidden agenda. They were not peddling opinion or theory. Their appeal did not spring from error. They knew deep within their souls that what they were saying was absolute truth. Paul, Silas, and Timothy knew their appeal did not spring from impure motives. They had examined their motives; the people had observed their actions (v. 5); it was clear that their intentions were pure. They were not trying to con anyone.

2:4. They were approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. The word approve is translated from the Greek word dokimazo, a word which was used in reference to metal purifying. It was a testing of the metals to prove their genuineness. The implication is that Paul, Silas, and Timothy bore the approval and commission of God because they had been proved through divine testing. God had stamped their lives as trustworthy because their faith had been proved genuine. We are not trying to please men. Their entire focus was on pleasing God. They believed in God's existence, His judgment, His rewards, His presence, His empowerment, His attentiveness, His love. The word translated "test" is the same word, dokimazo, used previously. It is a probing which is done with the full expectation that whatever is under scrutiny will be approved. This is not a sweaty-palm event, wondering whether God will be pleased or angry. Paul was content and certain of God's approval. It did not matter what others might think.

2:5. Flattery uses words in the service of self interest. Flattery never has the well-being of others in mind. It is a case of heaping nice-sounding phrases and compliments upon a person in order to obtain some personal gain—personal advancement, admiration, or favors. Paul never trafficked in such deceit. But deceit can come in many disguises. One that was popular in Paul's day as well as our own, was preaching for financial benefit— saying attractive words, stirring up religious zeal, then pocketing the cash and moving on. Paul denied using such tactics and called God as his witness.

2:6. Paul emphasized again that they were not looking for praise from men. The charge to all believers, and to the church, is to be vigilant in examining what we truly believe (message), and in exposing our actions and thoughts (motives) to the scrutiny of God's Spirit. Paul first made it clear that leadership—those with authority (apostleship in his case)—can make some claims upon those they lead. We could have been a burden to you, he declared. The "burden" he referred to was the demands that power can make. The missionaries could have pressed this congregation to do certain things, putting upon them the obligations of obedience out of the sheer weight of apostolic authority.

2:7. Instead, Paul and Silas chose to be gentle. There is no tenderness quite like a mother's, and Paul dared to identify with maternal love and care. Greek writers used the term gentleness to describe those who dealt patiently and with a mild manner toward those who were difficult—obstinate children, unmanageable students, those who had not reached maturity and were experiencing the inconsistencies and struggles of development. Whatever difficulties the Thessalonians may have presented, Paul and Silas recognized that these new Christians were not yet "grown up." So rather than dealing with these people in an authoritarian manner, they chose to be patient—like a mother.

2:8. Here is a classic understanding of biblical love. To Paul, love is always a verb, it is doing. Feelings may accompany love, but they do not define it. Instead, the commitment of acting in the best interest of another opens the way for feelings: We loved you so much that we were delighted to share . . . our lives. It is easier to teach theology than to love, easier to share lists than time. Paul gave not only the message of the gospel, but the example of it as well. He spent time. He shared joys and headaches. Parents and teachers, coaches and mentors, pastors and leaders know what it means to give part of their heart away to others. Love is not just a job. It is a way of life. But note

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that Paul did share the gospel of God. He was balanced. He gave his life and love. He gave content as well. It is not enough to visit people in the hospital or prison, or to show compassion to the poor or those new in the faith. Somewhere, carefully and candidly, they must also hear the truth of the cross and what it means to trust and follow Christ.

2:9. As an apostle, Paul could have expected, perhaps insisted, that he and Silas be paid or cared for while in Thessalonica. At that time, when philosophers traveled from place to place teaching, they were usually paid by their followers. Paul could have taken advantage of that cultural practice. The interesting point is that the choice of going without a salary was not the vote of the congregation but the decision of the leaders. Paul's intention was to provide an example of what this particular church needed, not to establish a precedent for how churches in general should limit their provisions for their pastors. To this church, which had a problem with laziness (1 Thess. 3:7-13), these men were examples of hard work—toil and hardship. They worked night and day—these were long and tedious hours. They modeled sacrificial love and giving for the sake of this new church.

2:13. Paul applauded the Thessalonians again by expressing thanks to God for their spiritual development. He was concerned, perhaps, that his forced and abrupt departure from Thessalonica might have left them weak and floundering, making the church unstable. But after Timothy's report, Paul gave thanks because these young believers were proving to be genuine followers of Christ. They received the word preached to them as the word of God. The proof was in their changed lives, which is at work in you. The power of God is released through faith in His Word; it becomes an active, spiritual energy, cutting like a scalpel to the depths of the soul (Heb. 4:12).

2:14. The Thessalonians identified with Christ and the Judean church through their suffering. They became imitators of God's churches in Judea . . . in Christ Jesus. No one sets out to suffer, but when suffering comes it reveals those with whom we identify. As the Thessalonians began feeling the anger and suspicions of their countrymen, they stood firm in their faith. They sided with all others who remain faithful . . . just like the Christians had done in Judea.

2:15-16. All persecutors are of the same mentality; they are part of the war between good and evil that fills every page of history. Those who were persecuting the Thessalonians were following in the path of those who had previously killed the prophets as well as the Lord Jesus. The Thessalonians were receiving from their own countrymen the same treatment the Judean Christians had received from the Jews. Obviously the antagonism of persecutors toward Christ and His message displeases God, but how can this be seen as hostility to all men? By trying to suppress the truth, they are agents of destruction to all humankind. By trying to prevent the spread of God's saving grace, they become enemies of all people. Those who attack the gospel and Christ's church always heap up their sins to the limit. They fill up the cup of God's wrath. Their guilt results in God's wrath—His just vengeance. It is not an angry outburst, but the settled nature of God's judgment. Those who reject the grace of God suffer His righteous indignation and punishment. The good news is that it does not have to be that way. Those who rely upon Christ's death and resurrection to remove their sin are transformed from enemies of God to children of God. The accusations against those who believe are removed by faith in Jesus Christ. The charges are nailed to the cross and canceled (Col. 2:14).