

Jesus once told a story about a bloke who found a treasure hidden in a field. So he covered it back up, and he went and sold everything that he owned, so that he could scrape together enough cash, to go and buy the paddock for himself...

Now of course, He was talking about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is something which is so valuable/wonderful – the blessings are so great, that any wise person, when they discover it, would give up **everything**, to be a part of the Kingdom.

That's what I thought of, when I read today's Bible reading.

In Chapter 1, Paul has been giving thanks to God, for his brothers & sisters in Thessalonica.

- They **used** to be caught up in idolatry, but they no longer worship dead idols (false gods), they now worship the one true living God.
- And they are remaining **faithful** to God. They now await the return of the Risen Lord Jesus;
- And when Jesus comes, He's going to deliver us from the wrath that comes...

And there will be "wrath". Some folk are embarrassed to even mention "The wrath of God", but it's actually a good thing. Our God is a God of Justice. And so He will not allow evil to go unpunished (that wouldn't be right). Sin/evil/wickedness,

have no part in the Kingdom of God (that's a good thing)...
The only way to enter the Kingdom of God, is to be set free of these things, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so Paul has been giving thanks for the faith of the Thessalonians. And they didn't just believe in any old thing / story... They believed in the truth of God...

And the truth of God is timeless. It does not change.

What if...

What if:

- there **is** only one true God;
- the only true God, wants to be in relationship with us;
- the only way to make that relationship possible, was for God's only Son to die (for you and me), so that we could be brought in?
- this God is a God of Truth – that this God will not tolerate any, following a lie (and them giving to a false god, the glory that belongs to Him)???
- the message from this God, is
 - “Come, follow me.”
 - Leave behind your miserable strivings for earthly fulfillment...
 - Repent of Sin;
 - Receive Me as Lord;
 - Live for Me; and
 - We'll spend eternity together...

- those who reject this gracious plan of God, will be subject to judgment for our sins, and to the wrath of God???

What if this were true? Would you not give up **everything** to get ahold of that?

And it's also a message that is so wonderful, it's **worth** telling. When Paul and Silas (P&S) took this message to Thessalonica, it was the same message that they had just taken to Philippi... And there in Philippi, they had suffered terribly. I mentioned last week, they'd been put in prison, but it was more than that.

They were:

- stripped;
- beaten (with rods);
- locked up in prison;
- had their feet fastened in the stocks... (very painful/uncomfortable)

And yet, even though they had gone through that, they still dared to preach the same message in Thessalonica...

Why would they do that? Because it's **true**, and because it means **everything** to those who believe it...

Avowed atheists (a-theists – a = “no” ; theist = “god” – those who firmly believe that there is no god), would have us believe that the Apostles made up the story of the resurrection of Jesus, and they went from city to city, spreading their lies...

But there is a very big problem with that theory:::

Why did not one of the disciples ever recant their claim that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, even at the threat of death??? Why did every one of them remain faithful to Jesus, right through until the day they died? And you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was only the Apostle John who got to die of old age – every other one was executed. Why? Because they believed in Jesus, and they wouldn't stop preaching the Gospel...

Maybe one "nutter" might be willing to die for what he knew was not true... But 11 godly men????? Can anyone honestly believe, that they would suffer torture and execution, for the sake of what they knew to be a lie???? Never...

And the hundreds; thousands; tens of thousands; **more...** who have refused to renounce Jesus and have been tortured and executed, when all it would take, is for them to renounce Jesus... But they remained faithful... Why? Because it was not a lie they were spreading, but the truth that brings life, even to those who die...

This is the treasure, that's worth giving up everything to obtain...

Righto:

So, when they came to Thessalonica, P&S dared to preach the Gospel, in the midst of what he calls "much conflict". In the Greek, the word for "conflict" is ἀγῶνι (agōni). And yes, our word "agony" might give you a bit of a sense of the meaning. But it's also a word which could be used for the bitter competition experienced in the ancient sporting arena... We

are talking Olympic-level opposition that they faced, when they came to Thessalonica...

And yet, they dared to preach the Gospel. And the Gospel they proclaimed, was the true gospel...

Sadly, there **are** many false gospels out there. There always has been. Jesus warned us, that there would be false teachers... There always has been. There are many of them today...

And today, we're going to get a bit of a picture of the true treasure... *If you're going to give up everything for the treasure, don't get caught out with "fools gold"...*

In V3, Paul talks about the "appeal" they made. He said:

³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive

When the word of God is proclaimed, an appeal **is** being made. As you hear the word of God today, you are being forced, to make a decision: to receive the Word of God; or to reject it... And when a person hears the word of God, they cannot remain the same.

They will either be:

- a little bit softer
- a little bit more encouraged
- a little bit closer to receiving Jesus....

Or they'll be:

- a little bit harder;
- a little bit more defensive

- a little bit more determined to reject Jesus...

When the Word of God is proclaimed, we cannot remain the same....

There is an appeal being made – a decision **must** be reached... because if I decide “**not** to decide where I stand with Jesus”, by default I stand against Him...

Anyway, what Paul proclaimed, didn't spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive

Now, when he talks about “error”, I don't think it's about “Oh, I accidentally made a mistake here...”

In the **second** letter he wrote to the Thessalonians: 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, he talks about Satanic activity, and the wicked deception of Satan, and how those who are perishing (reject God), refuse to love the truth, and so be saved... And he says in ² Thessalonians 2: (ESV) ¹¹ *Therefore God sends them a strong delusion (error), so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Let me put legs on that:

When it comes to Jesus (and the Gospel of Jesus Christ), if a person rejects what is true, they have rejected God – They have hardened their heart against God... And so God allows a

strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false

Now, why would God do that???? It's so that there can be no argument. It's not because they're not able to believe – we all have the capacity to believe... They just don't want to believe the truth...

And we see this all the time...

People who:

- refuse to believe in Jesus, but “I'll believe in crystals – they'll improve my life”...; or
- reject the command to repent of sin; believe in Jesus; and be filled with the Holy Spirit, but “You know what – I'll go and buy myself a Yoga mat and become one with the universe”... People get into that.
- will not follow Jesus, but they will traipse the mountains of Tibet to visit monasteries and monks who will “enlighten them”... They'll go to the ends of the earth for that...
- will not believe that God has the power to create the universe and every living creature out of nothing... but they **do** believe that somehow something as complex as a human being, somehow just managed to come into being without any forethought or design...

And yet today, even our most complex laboratories cannot take a substance that has never lived, and

somehow generate even the lowliest lifeform...

It's not that people don't have the capacity to believe... They choose **not** to believe in the truth, and so God allows them to encounter a lie – a ridiculous lie, and they receive it; and they believe it... Their condemnation is just...

But what Paul is saying, is the message he proclaimed, isn't that kind of error – it's not a delusion. It didn't spring from impurity... What he's saying, is they didn't have false motives.

When it comes to leaders in the church, we are very aware of the three biggest things – the temptations the devil uses to bring down leaders in the church:

The 3 G's:

- Gold;
- Glory;
- Girls

And in this section, Paul touches on all three of these:

And he says, "We weren't motivated by impurity..." There was no sex scandals following Paul. *But even today (I don't need to name them) – you've probably heard of them – big name preachers, who have been caught out in sex scandals – using their position to satisfy their lustful desires... Not Paul...*

The Gold. In V5, he says that they didn't have a motive/pretext for "greed" (continual quest for more)...

For some who preach the Gospel, it is a vocation that keeps them in poverty. *When I went into the ministry, I was well aware I wasn't doing it for the money. I left a well-paying job (with a big promotion about to happen) to earn nothing for 3 years while I trained for the ministry. And then I went on a stipend that was less than where I began (and no possibility of promotion)... But thanks to God and thanks to those who give regularly to Bush Disciples, I'm now paid 4 days a week, and I am very grateful...*

So some are kept in poverty; Some are supported by their churches and are blessed with enough income to keep them going, but never become rich... And that's where we're at...

But some preachers (I believe, who are not men of God), put the hard word on their listeners, and they feed off of those who are desperate, because their private jet is getting a bit old and needs replacing... And they live in mansions; drive luxury cars; and indulge in lavish lifestyles...

These are not godly men... The true Gospel, is proclaimed by people like Paul – people who are not in it for the Gold...

And the third temptation is "the glory" – those who are in it for the honour/fame... And in Christian circles, the celebrity pastors & worship leaders & Christian singers, tend to get put up on a pedestal. Some remain very humble, but some: this is what they seek...

Paul said: We did not **seek** glory

In a way they were entitled to it – they were Apostles – they were in a position of religious authority... But they didn't want glory for themselves. The only glory they ever looked for, was glory for God, and for the risen Lord Jesus....

Anyway, we've gotten a bit ahead of ourselves here. I'm into V6 and we haven't finished V3 yet...

What they proclaimed, was not an attempt to deceive. And the Greek word he uses there, is like "Putting bait on a hook"... *A fish sees a worm on a hook, and goes, "Oh yummy. Dinner." ... But it's not dinner at all... It's a deception/hook that's going to lead to **them** becoming dinner...*

And that, is a really good picture of a false gospel. Some, are not content with the simple, true word of God – they are **not** convinced by the simple Gospel... So they are enticed, by something that is more appealing to them, but it is false. And because it is false, it promises life, but can only lead to death...

P&S, however, were entrusted by God, with the truth/Gospel/good news... **so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.**

As a preacher, something I am very aware of, is that Teachers of the Word, are held **more** accountable, than anybody else – we will be judged **more** harshly... (a sobering thought) **James**

3:1 (ESV) Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

That's a sobering thought... God tests the heart of the preacher, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Probably the greatest temptation for a preacher (it's a temptation which is ever before me), is to feed the congregation what they want to hear... It's so much nicer having the congregation nodding along with what you say, rather than having them scowling at you... But you know what??? My job, is not to tell you what you want to hear. My job, is to preach the word of God.

And the Word of God, is something that is going to challenge me, as much as it challenges you. It's the sort of thing that's going to make me squirm, as you squirm... (I've already done my squirming during the week {hypocrite}).

As we hear the Word of God, we will realise that the Lord **demand**s our righteousness/loyalty/faithfulness... And the Word of God **demol**ishes our worldly priorities/hopes/dreams,,,,, as it introduces us to the new way of living for the eternal Kingdom of Christ...

But the temptation for the preacher, is to speak words that appeal to that innate worldliness that is inside of us.

Some:

- are drawn to a message that pleases their passions;
- are drawn to wealth, and the message that says “God wants you to be rich and be comfortable”. Basically it’s a message that affirms a selfish lifestyle, as something that pleases God... What an abomination.
- want to hear a message that affirms them in their sexual temptations, and tells them, “God created these desires in you”...

Now, words like that may please man, but they do not please God. And they are not loving, because they entice those who are struggling, to embrace sin, and to commit to it, for life...

- want to hear a message that affirms their selfishness – “I’m living the blessing of God”, and they keep what they have for themselves, rather than giving generously to the poor, and generously supporting the ministry and mission of the church.
- want to be affirmed in their self-righteousness. They want to be told how wonderful they are, and at the same time, they look down on others, who have different temptations to them, and see them as the scum of the earth...
- want to be affirmed in their:
 - prejudices;
 - politics;
 - their version of truth...

You know what:

When Paul and Silas preached, they did not aim to please their hearers. The words they spoke, were to please God and God alone.

And how can this not challenge us? (in the way that we live)....

Am I living, to please God? or to please man????

Anyway, the fact that P&S did what they did to please God, and didn't give a message to try and please man, is also evident in their style/method as well... There was something Paul said that he never, ever did...

Do you know what that was?

- Never picked his nose during a sermon?
- Never looked over the top of his glasses at them?
- Never went over 20min perhaps????

⁵ For we never came with words of flattery....

You're probably well aware, that some segments of the Christian church are well-known for doing what I call, "The pump-me-up"... Do you know what I mean???

I'll give it a go:

- Oh Chappy Andrew, you're so wonderful;
- you are so awesome.
- such a wonderful man of God.
- I really want to honour you – because you are just so faithful and such a strong man of prayer....

Sort of like hooking an air-compressor up to one's spiritual ego and pumping it up...

How often did Paul and Silas do that? Never!!!

Proverbs 29:5 (ESV)

**⁵ A man who flatters his neighbour
spreads a net for his feet.
(setting a trap).**

And yet in some branches of the church, flattery comes under “Church Growth Methods 1.0.1.” You do the pump-me-up. You make the person feel like they are the most important person in the whole world, and they are so wonderful, and they belong in your company because you make them feel really good about themselves...

That is so shallow. And Paul said, “You can’t accuse me of doing that. With God as my witness, I never did.”

Godly connections are made, not with words / not with the pump-me-up... Paul’s method, was genuine sacrificial servanthood. He gave of himself.

*When I was at Bible college, they told us that
Ministers/pastors are professionals:*

- *Don’t get too close to your people;*
- *Don’t give too much of yourself;*
- *Don’t get too involved...*
- *you’ll have to have friends outside the church, because you can’t get too close to those inside;*
- *And they even went as far as to say, “If you live in a country town, the whole community will see you as a*

*person of spiritual authority, because you're a pastor,
So, you'll have to find friends in another town...
(I kid you, not. That's what they taught us. And being a
country lad, I found it really hard to keep a straight face
as they said that...)*

The message from P&S, is we are **not** professionals... Paul's method, was genuine sacrificial servanthood. He gave of himself, totally....

He said, “⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.”

Did you get that: a “**nursing** mother” in the sense of “feeding the baby”... And particularly when a baby is just learning to suck, a mum can sit there for hours, selflessly nursing their baby, gently, patiently encouraging it to feed (getting up at all hours of the night)... It cannot get more personal than that...

Are you seeing the difference in method / the heart? One gives the quick pump-me-up, and then moves on to the next person to give them the quick pump-me-up.... The other is genuine sacrificial servanthood – a giving of one's self...

V⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you (a warm inward attachment), we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

... These were no fly-by-night preachers who came in; did their thing; and then caught the next plane out of town. They gave of themselves.

They worked night and day. They had to. Paul was a tent maker by trade. And so he used to sew up a tent or two wherever he went, to cover his living costs. And their manner of living was above reproach. They never took advantage of the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians knew that.

And what I find amazing, is Paul was only in Thessalonica for about 3 weeks. And in that time, he didn't only make new converts – he took them to the next step – to what we call “Discipleship”.

Sometimes we Christians might want to focus on “Getting someone saved”. And when a bunch of pastors get together, do you know what they want to talk about? *Oh, we had 39 salvations last month... And 21 again last week....* And you start doing the maths, and you begin to wonder “Then why are there only 26 people in the church???”

When a person makes a commitment to Jesus, this is not a time for the preaching and teaching to end. If anything, it becomes all the more intentional.

If becoming a Christian, is as Jesus describes (being born again), we are born again, into a whole new way of living. And we are given here, an image of a mother gently nursing and patiently feeding an infant,,, And we're **also** given an image of a father...

I want to talk to the Dad's here for a moment. When it comes to a Theological education (learning about God), I reckon I have learned more about God by becoming a Dad, than I would have learned in a whole year of Bible college... And that's why I'm talking to the Dad's now. The Lord has given you valuable insight into what it means for God to be our Heavenly Father, but He's given you insight into more than that. He's given us insight into "Discipleship"...

Just as a Father brings up their child and teaches them to socialise and teaches them how to live and love, with respect and honour (in their community),,,, Just like that, more mature Christians, disciple new believers... Baby Christians (new believers) do not all of a sudden, miraculously know all there is about Christian living.

P&S had to disciple each one of them.

They:

- **exhorted** them. That means, they strongly encouraged them / urged them on;
- **encouraged** them. And in the Greek, that word can also mean "admonish" (tell them off for doing the wrong thing), or "comfort" them... I mean, we don't only encourage our children by doing the pump-me-up... *"Good work little Johnny, you only punched 3 other kids today. Good on you for learning to control your anger"*... Sometimes it involves discipline...
- **charged** them. In other words, "You **must** do this". What were these new believers charged to do?

charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

To become a Christian, is not merely a mind conversion. It's a walk conversion.

What we believe, must translate to what we do.

In the Christian church, we often talk about the Kingdom of God, hey...

And I wonder, how many of us truly grasp, what the Kingdom of God really is... Because, it's not a place. The Kingdom of God, is the active rule and reign of God...

The Kingdom of God, does not have borders – it is not defined by geographical boundaries. The Kingdom is defined by the presence of the King, and the faithful subjects **of** the King.

And so, when one becomes a Christian, they enter the Kingdom. They become subjects of the King. And because we are now part of this new rule and reign of our Holy God, the way we live, **must** be different to how we used to live / the way the rest of the world lives. We are **to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.**

That isn't a burden, is it. I have not met yet, a genuine Christian / Disciple of Jesus, who does not want to walk in a manner worthy of God, and worthy of His glory...

The hidden treasure, is something we would give up everything, to obtain.

And the Kingdom of God, is something we would give up everything, to be a part of. Jesus doesn't want empty promises of devotion. He wants Disciples. He wants Disciples, who will give up everything to follow Him, and to faithfully walk with Him, in the ways of His Kingdom, and for His glory.

Have you discovered, the hidden treasure, of the Kingdom of God? Do you forsake everything, to attain that treasure, and to live for Jesus???

I invite you to pray with me now.

Lord Jesus,

I use that word "Lord", as a title that means something.

You are Lord/Master.

I forsake all else, and kneel before You.

You are my king.

I surrender myself totally to You.

I confess that for too long,

I have put "self" before you.

I have looked for the admiration of men,
rather than to please you.

I have believed a little,

but I have also believed lies...

God forgive me.

Take me as Your humble servant

By Your Holy Spirit, renew me;

and use me for Your glory,

and help me to walk in a way

which is worthy of You;

and worthy of Your Kingdom,

For Your glory,

Amen.