

# THREE THESSALONIAN SONGS

## 2. "PASS IT ON"

*Readings: Deuteronomy 34:1-12, Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Matthew 22:34-46*  
Preached at First Presbyterian Church, Baldwin, NY on October 23rd 2011

I'm continuing this morning to look at Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. Last week we saw how in the first chapter Paul gave thanks for the perseverance of the Thessalonian Church during a difficult time. He praised them for responding to God's Call. He was pleased to see their concern for spiritual growth. He was delighted by the way they were allowing Christ to transform their lives.

In this second chapter He remains thankful for their faithfulness, and continues to encourage them in their walk with God. He had ignited the spark that started the fire of the gospel amongst them. It was now up to them to pass it on.

Before looking at chapter 2 it is helpful to read what happened the first time Paul brought them the gospel message. We are given that story at the start of Acts Chapter 17. (1-10).

"After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus." The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this. And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea."

The Thessalonian church was born in the midst of trouble! Jason, at whose home Paul and Silas were welcomed, was hauled before the courts and accused of disloyalty to Rome. Paul and Silas have to leave the town undercover of the night such is the strength of the antagonism against them. No wonder Paul started off his letter praising them for their perseverance.

The troublemakers are continuing to create trouble. Much of 1 Thessalonians Chapter Two answers accusations that were being made against Paul and Silas by those who were hostile towards the church. The fact that Paul and Silas escaped under cover of the night has laid them open to the charge that they were up to no good and being deliberately deceitful.

Some are accusing them of perpetrating some kind of scam, as though the apostles were only in it for the money. Others have accused the disciples of using fancy words and false doctrines that had 'brainwashed' their hearers into accepting their message.

The accusations made against Paul have upset the congregation in Thessalonica enough that in Chapter 2 he feels a need to defend himself. The only defense he has is the example of his own life. He reminds them of how he came to them and of how he acted whilst he was with them. He wants to teach them how they could keep the fire burning and so pass on the gospel message to others. So he offers the following defense.

### **1) The Way he lived backed up the Word he preached**

Although Paul was only with the Thessalonians for a short time he left a deep impression on those he stayed with. So much of an impression that within a short time they were prepared to risk their lives to defend him and see to it that he could continue on his missionary journeys.

They witnessed his boldness in the face of opposition. They witnessed, as day after day, he counseled with people and on the Sabbath entered into debate with them, that here was a man who truly believed in his words and showed evidence of having his own life transformed by Jesus Christ.

The content of his message was clear. Jesus Christ was the one the Old Testament scriptures pointed to as the Messiah. In accordance with what the scriptures proclaimed He suffered and died, and was raised from death. Paul, the one time enemy of Christ, was now a witness to the resurrection and sought for others to know God's love in Christ -through the Holy Spirit working in their lives.

He is quite clear that what he had done amongst them was not for greed or personal gain. If that were the case he could have made much of the fact that, here he was, an apostle of God, deserving of support. In verse 6 he explains; "*We could have made demands as apostles of Christ*". But no such demands are made. His mission was in no way a pretext for greed or for him to in some way advance his worldly status.

The most pressing evidence for the genuineness of his mission was the fact that he didn't have to be there for any other reason than he felt God had entrusted him with the task of preaching the gospel.

Which leads us to a second thing,

## **2) He was more concerned about being accepted by God than being approved of by people.**

In verse 4 he says, "*We speak not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts.*"

Maybe this is the most challenging statement of all to consider in this passage. Whose standards are we seeking to meet in our walk with God? The standards set by our church, or our culture, or our friends, or our family; or are we seeking to live a life that is being recreated and renewed and evaluated by God's standards?

We can go through our whole life as people pleasers. Always concerned about what so and so may think or what such a person may make of us. There are times when it is a legitimate concern. If we go for a job interview, we try to make the best impression that we can, for we seek to be approved for the position we are applying for.

But living our whole life as though we were attending an interview is not advisable. In verse 6 Paul says, "*we did not seek praise from men, whether from you or from others*". He's crystal clear about whom he's trying to be acceptable to. The desire for his life was to live life the way God wanted him to live. He didn't care what people thought of that!

Now you could say, "Well I'm not Paul, I'm not on a mission from God to some strange city, I'm not a preacher, this is not my concern." Fine. You are not all preachers, but you are all priests! One of the

things that the Reformation rediscovered for the church is a doctrine known as the ‘Priesthood of all Believers’.

The plus side of the “Priesthood of all believers’ is that we don’t need to go through any body such as a priest or holy man in order to commune with God. We have a ‘direct prayer connection’ to God in Jesus Christ. The other side of the coin is that with that privilege comes a corresponding responsibility, which is to live as priests and ministers before God. It’s great being a star on the team, but guess what? If you are on the team, you have to play the game.

Paul knew that. The Thessalonians were getting the idea as well. If they were to ‘Pass it on’ to others they had to take on the responsibility of being people of God, shining as light in a dark world. They needed to be ambassadors for the Kingdom, torch carriers for the cause of Christ.

No doubt they had heard such a message before. But when Paul told them, they sat up and took notice. Why? Because of a third thing we see in this letter.

### **3) Paul had genuine love and concern for those He shared the gospel with.**

They cared about what Paul said because they knew he cared about them. Paul cared about them, because he knew that God cared about him. It’s all about relationship. Our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. It all fits in with what Jesus said were the two most important commandments of all, “Love God” and “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

Paul tells them in verse 8 *“Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”*

True evangelism begins with people who realize that they are greatly loved by God. Anything less is not enough of a motivation to inspire us to “Pass It On”. But as we realize that we are chosen to be ambassadors of Gods love then our hearts cannot remain the same. As we begin to understand what the Holy Spirit can do in us and through us, we can’t help ourselves but share the love that is changing us.

As we consider the gospel message, the Cross of Jesus Christ, His life and message, His empty tomb, the dedication and lives of the apostles, and the witness of Christian people across the centuries, it can light a spark in our imaginations. Paul, through the example of his own life, offers us guidelines as to how we can go forward in mission. I’ve picked out three of those from our reading this morning.

- 1. Let the life you live enforce the words you speak.**
- 2. Be more concerned about being accepted by God than for the approval of people.**
- 3. Let your love be genuine.**

That’s how we get the fire going.

‘Pass it On’

*‘It only takes a spark to get a fire going*

*And soon all those around can warm up in it’s glowing’*

AMEN

*Rev Adrian Pratt*