**Paul’s love for, and life lived for, the Thessalonians** 6/8/23

Read: 1Thessalonians 2, 1Peter 1:13-25

Text: 1Thessalonians 2:6-12

Psalms: 23old, 65:1-5, 49:7-15, 116:12-19, 72old

Some years ago we were privileged to visit Myanmar where we had three groups of Christian friends. The first were students who came to India and sat in my class. The second were folk in a Reformed church who invited me to preach. The third was an Australian missionary. Despite knowing all these people, we never got invited to eat in anyone’s home, let alone stay in their home. I was told that in Myanmar no foreign visitor was allowed to stay in anyone’s home.

What a contrast this was to our time in India. We lived in an old house on a college campus and practiced what is called, ‘an open home’ as part of our student ministry. Students felt free to visit our home, especially when they knew that Elizabeth had cooked a chocolate cake! They came to watch TV, to play board games, for counsel, and for fellowship and prayer meetings. We had fellow missionaries come and stay, such that people now tell me they stayed at my house but I can’t remember; they may have stayed when I was not home because students stayed when we went away on holidays. There wasn’t much that these students did not see in our family life, and to this day they tell us so!

The apostle Paul does not seem to have had his own home, but if he did I am sure it would have been like our home in India. In fact Paul stayed with people like Lydia in Philippi, and Jason here in Thessalonica, believers who seem to have had open homes. He shared the gospel with them but also shared his life because they were so dear to him (2:8). This verse is actually one the Lord put on my heart when we went to India.

Paul came to Thessalonica with Silas and Timothy, and was there for only 3-4 weeks. He preached the gospel in the synagogue and saw many, especially God-fearing Gentiles, believe in Jesus Christ. At the same time he saw violent opposition from Jews and was secretly escorted out of the city by the new believers (Acts 17:10). He was pleased to hear from Timothy that these new believers in Thessalonica were continuing in the faith despite ongoing opposition, opposition aimed at discrediting Paul and the gospel he preached. They called him a charlatan and a hypocrite, a man preaching for profit and for his own glory.

In defending himself and the gospel in this letter written to the church in Thessalonica, Paul urges them to recall not only what he preached but also how he lived among them. He says again and again, ‘As you know’ (2:2, 5, 11). Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and his colleagues practiced what they preached. As we read what Paul wrote we learn so much about how we should be living today as ministers or elders or deacons or as members of this church and a Christian home? Our first subheading is, ‘A mother’s love’ and our second, ‘A father’s guidance’ and our third, ‘The kingdom of God’.

**1. A mother’s love**

Paul assured the Thessalonian believers that he was approved by God and entrusted with the gospel that he preached, and that he preached with all integrity and sincerity. He preached to please God not man, and gave all praise and glory to God (2:4-6). He reminded them of his status as an apostle of Christ, but that he did not demand from them the things he might have as an apostle (2:6). ‘Apostle’ simply means ‘sent one’ but when Paul used this term he was referring to the Twelve who were commissioned by Christ himself, with Paul claiming to be commissioned by the risen Christ. The ‘but’ that begins verse 7 draws a strong contrast between how he might have acted as an apostle and how he actually acted when with them.

Maybe Paul recalled the words he wrote to the Philippians about Jesus, ‘Who being in the form of God’, or being the very Son of God, ‘made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant’ (Phil 2:6, 7). Jesus himself said, ‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve’, and this was the attitude of the apostle Paul- unlike some preachers of the past, and even today. What would you think of a minister who boasts of knowing more than anyone else in the church, other ministers included?

‘But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children’ (2:7). What an amazing thing for the apostle Paul to write! He was as gentle as a nursing mother among the people of the church. Many of you know from experience what is like to be a nursing mother; others like me know from observation! I think a newborn is fed every 3-4 hours, 24hrs a day. Mothers get exhausted, longing for a good night’s sleep, but they so cherish this new life that they press on. They hold their baby close and sing softly to him/her, often in ‘baby language’. They find joy in seeing this baby grow and develop. The word ‘cherish’ carries the idea of warmth.

Continuing this picture of a mother, Paul writes of ‘affectionately longing for you’ (2:8). He was very concerned about these new believers remaining faithful to the gospel, so was thankful to hear from Timothy they were continuing in the faith. Apparently some Jews were telling them that Paul did not care about them because he left town in a hurry and had not come back. Paul assured them of his ongoing affection and his desire to come back, ‘but Satan hindered us’ (2:17, 18).

Paul asked them to remember how he lived among them during the short time he was present in Thessalonica. He was pleased to impart to them the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth that every person needs to hear and believe above everything else. But the gospel does not simply come as a set of rules to be followed; it comes as a life-changing belief in Jesus Christ. And Paul was concerned to impart knowledge of how they were to live as a new creation in Christ Jesus. He did this by example, by living a holy life among them, as he goes on to say (2:10).

Paul rejected any suggestion of deceit in his preaching, or in his life. He might have said, ‘What you see is what you get’, or more to the point, ‘What you see is what Christ expects’. No mother tries to deceive her child; in likening himself to such a mother, Paul assures these believers he had no intention of deceiving them because, ‘You had become dear to us’ (2:8).

Referring to them as ‘brethren’, Paul asked them to remember how he laboured and toiled, night and day, in order to sustain himself while in Thessalonica (2:9). He went on to do the same in Corinth, where he joined Aquila and Priscilla in working with leather and making tents (Acts 18:3). Paul did this tough and dirty manual labour when he was not out evangelising or teaching the new believers. As a minister of the word of God, he had the right to remuneration from members of the church, but this was an infant church and he did not want to burden them financially (2Thess 3:8). Besides, he did not want his opponents accusing him of profiting from his preaching, an accusation they made anyway (2:5, 1Cor 9:14, 15, 2Cor 11:7-9). Whatever help Paul received came from the church in Philippi (Phil 4:16).

**2. Father’s guidance**

Paul continues asking the believers in Thessalonica to remember the devout or holy life he lived among them, and how he acted with justice or righteousness at all times (2:10). Indeed, he claimed to have behaved in a blameless manner, he and his fellow missionaries. He calls upon them, and God also, as his witnesses. ‘Blameless’ does not mean without sin; it means ‘above reproach’, a life that is pleasing to God.

Paul was no bludger, no lazy or idle person evading his responsibilities. In his second letter he condemned a ‘disorderly’ lifestyle saying, ‘If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat’ (2Thess 3:7-9). Ministering the word of God is not for men looking for an easy life! I remember a mission leader saying to prospective missionaries that if they were not contented and hard working in their present job then do not bother applying to be a missionary. It is the same with ministry in the church, and indeed for any Christian. Slothful, lazy or idle Christians are not living in a way worthy of their Master.

The apostle Peter challenges believers with words from Scripture: ‘Be holy for I am holy’ (1Peter 1:16). He goes on to remind them that God judges without partiality. Unholy living and injustice or partiality were features of the lives of these people before they were converted. When, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they accepted the gospel preached by Paul, their hearts were changed and they learned a whole new way of living. The example of the apostle was instrumental in this change of conduct. He could say to them, ‘Imitate me, even as I imitate Christ’.

The picture of a mother gently nursing her baby becomes the picture of a father guiding his own children in verse 11. He loves his children just like the mother, but his love is expressed in a different way as the child grows up. Sometimes the father is urging them on, sometimes he is comforting them, and even at times exercising discipline (Heb 12:6-9). A loving father will teach his children and urge them to obey what they are taught; when they need help he will help them obey. He will also correct them when they go wrong and discipline any rebellion. Jesus tells us to call God our Father in heaven.

A father’s aim is for his child to grow up imitating him. Is this a challenge to you as a father? I pray you take it as such. Is there anything in your life you do not want your son to imitate? Then change your life right now! If you tend to be lazy or neglectful of the things of God then change your life now because your children are learning from your example. Paul could say to his spiritual children, ‘Imitate me’. This is a challenge for all of us a believers because unbelievers are observing our lives even as they listen to the gospel we preach.

**3. The kingdom of God**

The apostle was not defending his conduct simply because some were accusing him of misconduct. He was living to please God, living by God’s rules not his own rules or the rules of men. He was walking in a way worthy of his calling in Christ Jesus, ‘worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory’ (2:12, Eph 4:1). When Paul was called by the risen Jesus on the Damascus road his life totally changed, the persecutor of Christ became a preacher of Christ’s death and resurrection. We spoke about God’s calling and election back in chapter 1:4. Here in verse 12 we read, ‘God who calls you’, not ‘has called you’. God calls and justifies us through the cross of Jesus Christ, but he also calls and sanctifies us by his same grace.

We are on a journey or pilgrimage, not to some place on earth but to heaven itself, to the kingdom of God and his glory. This kingdom is not just a realm but God’s rule in action. Jesus is the king of this kingdom and he inaugurated his rule when he died and rose again. In fact, when he began preaching he proclaimed, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Mat 4:17). As believers we belong to this kingdom already, and the king expects us to be living by his rules and giving him all the praise and glory. Do people know that you belong to the kingdom of God or do they think you belong to the kingdom of this world as they do?

Paul was a new man, and the believers at Thessalonica were also new people in Jesus Christ, and the people of this city noticed! They were being oppressed and persecuted by the Jews and others. Quite often opposition arises from within the church. The history of the Reformation is one of opposition and persecution from within the church, false church that it was. What do we say about a minister recently expelled from a church because he could not agree with the church’s stand on homosexuality; can this be a true church. Opposition may also come from within our own hearts, from the lusts of the flesh and of the eyes, or simply from a willingness to compromise with wickedness. This was not the way of the apostle Paul, or of the believers at Thessalonica, and I pray will not be your way either.