

Service Transcript

18th October 2020

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You in Jesus' name with shouts of joy, we worship You with gladness that fills our hearts and with songs of joy before the Lord. Father, we declare today that the Lord is God and that we are Yours; we give You praise because we know that we are Your people and the sheep of Your pasture. Father, we enter Your gates with thanksgiving and Your courts with praise, we give thanks to You God and we praise Your name. Father, we Your people declare today that the Lord is good, and His love endures forever. We praise You because Your faithfulness continues through all generations. - Amen"

Philippians 3:13-14

In Philippians 3:13-14 it says this: But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus". Once we have trusted Jesus as our Saviour, we embark on a race through life to the finishing post. When we are born again, we grow in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As believers we are called to run the race that God has set before us. Every Christian has a specific purpose that God Himself has called us to achieve. We each have our own unique goal to attain and that goal is already laid out and planned by our Father in heaven, for it is God who works in each of us to do that which pleases God. No two life-journeys are the same for we all face our own particular problems, disappointments and challenges and we are all equipped with our own unique God-given abilities, gifts and graces. But the call of God for all His children is a life that is being shaped into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ; a life that is seeking to live godly in Christ Jesus, until it is no longer we who live, but Christ Who lives in us; and the life which we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved us and gave Himself for us. For we trust in the Lord as he is our refuge and he is our strength to get us through the race he has set before us.

Response for call to Worship

From everlasting to everlasting, you are Lord

Rejoice for he has me Glad!

God is Good we sing & shout it

Rejoice for he has me Glad!

This is the day the Lord has Made

Rejoice for he has me Glad!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that we are your children. Help us to live our lives the way according to your will and run the race that you have set before us. Help us to press on towards the goal of your calling, trusting in you to overcome every problem, disappointment and challenge we may face, thank You for empowering us to pick up from this temporary place and help us move forward towards the dreams and goals you set out before us” - Amen

Poem

By Deborah Ann– Keep Pressing On

Look not to the past,
don't stop and turn your head
instead look to the future
with Jesus up ahead.

Don't reminisce,
on that which is already done
rather let your heart
to Jesus be eternally drawn.

Look not to the past,
remember not your regrets
instead look to the future
and the soon coming events.

Don't agonize,
over what once gave you pleasure
rather let your mind
dwell on your heavenly treasure.

Look not to the past,
don't look to where you've been
instead look onto the cross . . .
and the washing of your sin!

HEBA (Heart Of England Baptist Association)

As part of prayers for our nation and community this week I'd like to share a short video on the mission work being completed by HEBA, HEBA stands for the Heart Of England Baptist Association and HEBA is an association of around 170 Baptist churches in the heart of England consisting of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, The Black Country, Staffordshire, Birmingham, Coventry and Warwickshire; their five core values include Companionship, Generosity, Diversity, Learning and Innovation. Together these core values drive HEBA's purpose to grow healthy churches across the Association in the Heart of

England as they engage in God's mission. In the following short video, we will get to hear about the work of Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church by the Rev Neil Roberts.

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Sermon

Last week we saw how Jews of the Diaspora started to follow Jesus. These were Jews that had migrated and established themselves in other parts of the Mediterranean – particularly Greek speaking countries - and so were usually native Greek speakers. They led the way in taking the Good News to Gentiles, without requiring them to convert to Judaism as well. The Holy Spirit came on Gentile believers and changed them as they followed Christ, in the same way He'd done with Jews, without any reference to the Jewish tradition. We found that this first met with some resistance from the Apostles in Jerusalem, who later became convinced that this was the way the Holy Spirit was leading and endorsed it at the Council of Jerusalem. You can read about that in Acts chapter 15.

Even though this was something that was discerned by the Apostles as being of God, there were some who just couldn't accept this, and went around rubbishing Paul's ministry in particular as he became the most prominent advocate.

PAUL IN THESSALONICA

More troublesome for Paul were other Jews who lived in towns Paul visited, who were appalled at what he was doing and sought ways by fair means or foul – mostly foul – to thwart his ministry. Paul refers to his run-in with Jews at Philippi and at Thessalonica at the beginning of the passage we just read, and you can all read about it in Acts 16 and 17. The main problem for the Thessalonians were Jews in Thessalonica who continued to try to destroy Paul's work and proselytise the church to Judaism instead. Paul addresses this in the second chapter of his first letter to the Thessalonians.

FAITH UNDER ATTACK

How do we deal with people who criticise us, who try to belittle others and behave in a way that doesn't appear to be in accord with God's word, who discourage Christians, maybe discourage us? How should we respond?

In one sense, our generation is no different to every other in the last 2000 years, our faith is under attack from all angles; and it always will be the case until Jesus returns. Satan will always use whatever or whoever is around to try to thwart the word of God. There will always be critics from outside the church and within the church, driven by self and worldly values rather than by the Holy Spirit.

CORONAVIRUS

From outside the church right now there is the global pandemic which has pulled the rug from under what has been church for generations. Do we mourn what has been taken from us, or seize the opportunity to focus afresh on God and do something new? We were reminded last week that it was the turmoil of persecution that drove Cypriot and Cyrenian

Jewish believers out of Judea to Antioch and in obedience to God started a church there which effectively started world mission as Gentiles came to Christ. God turns minuses to pluses, problems to opportunities.

DO NOT CROSS

The church is also being challenged from within, particularly by those who have conflated worldly political values with the word of God. We see that most sharply focussed at the moment in the way in which many influential evangelicals in the USA have identified with right wing politics to the point where Christian leaders seem to be ignoring the basic moral principles of God in relation to truth, love, grace, righteousness and justice in order to achieve a narrow agenda of their choosing.

It's an issue that's tearing evangelicals in the US apart, which is where my concern is because it brings the name of Jesus into disrepute when Christians violently disagree, which reflects over here where evangelicalism has a much different character.

THESSALONICA PICTURE

It's the sort of situation Paul addressed at the church he founded in Thessalonica. There were forces from outside the church that sought to question their faith and the right they had to follow Jesus. Jews from Thessalonica and beyond were telling them that their faith, taught them by Paul and into which they had come, was all a big con. They were told that they needed to become Jewish proselytes. They also tried to trash Paul's character and motives. We know from this passage that they implied Paul was using flattery, lies, threats and dirty tricks to coerce them into believing for his own financial gain and to promote his self-importance.

What could Paul say to the Thessalonians that would convince them that the Good News he brought and the Saviour in whom they trusted was of God? This is important for us to know right now because our faith is being questioned from outside and within the church in ways I've just outlined. (and they are only two of the current issues.) Paul's response should be ours too.

Paul appealed to the Thessalonians on the basis of openness and integrity. For the church at Thessalonica to grow, the people didn't just need sound teaching, but the example of those bringing it, and a living faith that would thrive even when Paul was gone and through all situations of life. Paul and his team needed to be transparent in word and deed.

WYSIWYG - if you are over 40 and have been using computers since the 1980s, you'll remember this acronym: "WYSIWYG – what you see is what you get." KDENLIVE What you see on this video, or PowerPoint, or read in the transcript was written on editors that allow me to see exactly what the output looks like: what you see is what you get.

Go back to the 80s and 90s when computers had poor graphics, you never saw your finished product until you printed it out. LOCOSCRIPT Here is the editing screen of the first computer I ever had, and compared to today it was complex to do what's now simple. And that was a friendly piece of software! You never saw exactly what you got until it ran off the printer.

That was a lot easier than the generation before when all you got was A> when you turned your computer on. Whatever was in that box of tricks on your desk was well hidden! (Incidentally, your age may well determine what your answer is to this – what would the first thing I should do when faced with A>).

It's a shame that people aren't WYSIWYG – what you see is what you get. What happens to relationships when we are not transparent in our motives, words and actions? It destroys trust. It destroys integrity. It destroys relationships. To come back what I said earlier; today it's reflected in the devalued politics and church on the other side of the pond as well as here.

NOW CORONAVIRUS HITS WESTMINSTER

Why is it that politicians aren't being believed by many in the population in a time of pandemic? Because there's a credibility gap between the words and actions of political leaders. It leads to mistrust, conspiracy theories, cynicism, unwillingness to comply with guidelines and laws. Speaking truth and acting truly are characteristics I believe our generation needs to recover and that doesn't just apply to the present emergency.

In truth, OUR WORLD NEEDS JESUS! Because He's the way, the truth and the life.

It starts with the church of God. We should be the example to others. As we grow as the people of God, we need to be people who are transparent with one another – others should get what they see. It's difficult to have a proper relationship with anyone if we are not open and honest with one another in the church. How might that work in practice? Let's see what Paul had to say to the Thessalonians.

Transparent Motives vv3-7

First of all, we should be transparent in our motives in verses 3 to 7.

Paul and his team were being accused of all sorts of stuff – his answer to that was simple. He appealed to the fact that they knew *him* and they could see clearly what his motives were. *You know we never used flattery etc.*

Do our words and behaviour match? Can people see and understand our motives? Our credibility depends on our transparency. If we want to speak to others about Jesus, or encourage one another about the Lord and try to impart some wisdom or experience we have, we need to be credible, and that comes from the integrity of others seeing what we are about. Ultimately, the people witnessed that Paul wasn't a people pleaser, a flatterer, or a self-seeker, or after their money, or trying to pressurise them. He did what he said he was there to do: speak good news and bring them to Christ.

In verse 7 Paul said they acted as small children among them. What did he mean? The interesting thing about small children is how predictable they are. What you see is usually what you get with them. Experienced parents and grandparents aren't fooled by them. What a pity that as they get older, they learn how to become devious! That's the way of sin and the way of the world. Not surprisingly, those who accused Paul of false motives, had the exact same motives behind their attempts to bring him down, as they accused him of.

When dealing with those who are not yet Christians, and with one another, be transparent in who you are.

There's a couple of phrases here that should challenge us as we reflect on this - *God, who tests our hearts, God is our witness*. Remember whose servant we are, whose children we are – act with integrity because as His people, we are all answerable to Him.

Transparent Actions vv 8-12

Leading on from motives, there's deeds in verses 8 to 12.

There's an old saying: *"I do what I say and I say what I do."* The second thing about Paul and his fellow workers that showed they were transparent, was their actions, their care for the church at Thessalonica, the effort they went to, the way that they were never a burden to them. *"You are witnesses"* he said. *"So's God."* The Thessalonians saw the people they were and experienced first-hand that they did what they said. Their actions bore witness to their faith. They knew the truth.

In these strange and difficult times, uncertain times, we should be a people marked out by the integrity of our lives. I've said this many times and I'll repeat it today – people become fascinated by the Christian faith when they can see something different in our lives; something positive, something new, something that gives them hope, something that encourages them. The radical message of 2020 may well be TRUTH. These times give us an opportunity to discover God in new ways, not in loads of teaching necessarily, but in asking God to build up the assurance of our faith, that others are attracted to us like a magnet. Make the most of it.

Transparent Witness vv 13-15

The real clincher comes in verses 13-15. What will really show the integrity of our faith, sink all critics, bring people to Christ and help others to grow and allow us to grow ourselves is in by the power of God in us?

The Thessalonians found the presence and power of God for themselves as they believed. They knew Paul was no fraud preacher – their lives were changed as they received the word of God. And the presence of God in their lives, was of course the biggest defining feature of the reality of their faith. That's what really impresses others when we speak Good News, people see God in us. It doesn't matter what people say about Christianity – we have proved it true and real because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I know that many would say we get a faith lift when we see God work in power, or when we have great worship, or receive God's blessings. What did the Thessalonians get? Persecution! They got the same persecution as the church in Jerusalem. Not even the "super spiritual" apostles in Jerusalem were immune from persecution. Why does God allow all sorts of problems of life to land on us – why doesn't He just flood us with blessings?

Because how we respond to problems in life truly tests our faith; our trust in God and builds up our trust and relationship with Him. How do we cope when life is crashing down around us? We have to trust God and find him in our sufferings and when we do, we find Him in

the most unexpected places. Most significantly, it's at these points that others see God in us. Out of adversity comes faith.

What also defines us as church is how we minister to one another in such times. It hones our prayer life. It helps us how to discover God in the sadness, the darkest moments, the deepest pits of despair because He's with us there too. It helps us to lean on others in our vulnerability, to be there for one another, to trust one another – because truly transparency and integrity are most important when we need one another – to trust and be trusted. And through it we discover more about the God who is able to bear all our pain and sickness. Others see that too and see God in us as we trust Him and trust one another.

We are here to be an example, particularly in these times of uncertainty and fear. Trust and be trusted. God calls us to His kingdom and glory, lets encourage one another, bear one another up and grow together, and through it be His witnesses to a world that doesn't have our hope.

Prayer

Father, these are strange times. For some of us they are difficult times. For the church it's also a time to reflect on who we are in Christ. Help us to lean on you. May we know the presence of Your Spirit. Draw us together, stop us falling apart. Help us to be transparent in our motives, words and actions. May we trust one another and be trusted. May we trust you, because in you is hope others don't have, and lead us forward, to grow together in you, and draw others to yourself through us, that you may build your kingdom in these troubled times.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen.

Prayer & Blessing before we close

Heavenly Father, thank you that we belong to a family in Christ. Help us Lord to share your love with everyone we encounter. May your spirit, come and equip us in our homes, our workplace, our school life, and in our local community. May we be your hands and feet to the needy, your words of affirmation to the oppressed and your arms of comfort to the lonely. Thank you for choosing to use us to bring your kingdom here on earth. - Amen

Blessing

May the love of the Lord Jesus Christ draw you to himself; the power of the Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you in his service; the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts; and the blessings of God almighty be amongst you and remain with you always – Amen

For Reflection & Discussion

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

1. This passage involved Paul responding to the criticisms and opposition of Jews to the Gentile church in Thessalonica. What opposition and criticisms does the church have today in our land?
2. Why is being transparent and acting with integrity so important in our relationships, in the church and in our dealing with the world at large?
3. Paul talked about being transparent in three respects; in our motives, in our actions and in our witness? Why are these so important when we face criticisms? Could we say the same as Paul when others criticise us – can we say “you know me”, or point to your actions, or know that the Holy Spirit shines through you?
4. We all go through difficulties in life. We have a God who is with us through the hard times. How much do we ever think that as a means of witness to others?
5. Do you have someone who you can trust at times when you are most vulnerable? How trustworthy are you with others’ vulnerabilities?

Pray that God to challenge you as you your transparency and integrity, and how much you can trust and be trusted.