

Prayers

To God

Pray that God will act in judgement on the sins of this world. Pray that He will expose the darkness of human greed, especially financial greed, and do what is just for the poor.

For myself

Lord Jesus, thank You for the precious gift of this day. Lead me, I pray, through its joys and its troubles, and may I continue to praise You throughout the whole day. May I grow stronger in faith as You teach me more about how to deal in a loving and godly way with the many different things that happen to me. I praise You, Lord Jesus Christ:
AMEN

For others

Weekly theme: Exploration of the universe

Pray for engineers working on how to clean up the rubbish accumulating in space just above our atmosphere, where there is much debris from past launched satellites etc. Pray that international agreement will aid the responsible use of our immediate 'space' resource.

Meditation

Come, my friend, and worship the Lord:

For He will accept you just as you are.

Bring your life and confess all your sins:

For the Lord will hear your heart and forgive.

Bring your hopes and your precious dreams:

For the Lord will fulfil His purpose in You.

Bring your songs and be released in praise:

For the Lord receives this glory in His heaven.

Bring your ears to attend to His Word:

For the Lord will then lead You into all truth.

Bring your prayers for yourself and for others:

For the Lord will give you His answers in love.

Bring your desire to follow in His ways:

For the Lord will bless each step you take.

Go, my friend, having worshipped the Lord:

And He will be with you wherever you go.

Bible Passage

1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

⁹ Fellow believers, you remember our hard work and hardship, and that we worked day and night so we might not become a burden to any of you while we proclaimed the Gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, that to you who became believers, we were devout, righteous, and blameless. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you as a father would with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and appealing to you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own Kingdom and glory.

Review

It would be easy to read these words and simply carry on, without stopping to realise what they have to say to us, especially about evangelism. I have had the privilege of preaching evangelistically and seen people respond and consequently receive Christ by faith, and the dynamic of what happens at such moments is very important. This is what Paul is speaking about here.

Paul had come only briefly to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and yet his preaching yielded a valuable harvest for the Kingdom. However, some in Thessalonica doubted Paul's message and integrity, and he needed to defend his words and deeds. He says here that he was successful because he worked hard at evangelism, but he also worked hard to prove himself an honest worker in God's Kingdom, a true devout worshipper and someone who cared. The same is true for those who preach God's Word today, for unless they demonstrate these and similar qualities, then their message is quickly compromised.

The burden of declaring the Gospel (2:9)

When Paul emphasises the '*hard work*' of the Gospel (2:9), the picture we may have is of endless preaching through '*night and day*', but is this really what is said here about Paul's evangelism? He doubtless worked hard at preaching, but generations of evangelists have known that there can be a danger of overstepping the mark. If an evangelist pursues someone too long, they may make a response simply to bring the pressure of preaching to an end! This certainly happens today, and the result can be people who are less persuaded of Christian faith as cajoled into the church, which is neither wise nor helpful.

Now, after speaking of this '*hard work and hardship*' of preaching, Paul says that he '*worked day and night so that we might not become a burden on any of you while we proclaimed the Gospel ...*' (2:9). This second comment about hard work is probably not about preaching itself, but about Paul's personal circumstances in Thessalonica. On coming to the city, he and his companions had immediately gone to the synagogue (Acts 17:1-3), but there is no

hint in Acts of them staying with the Jews there. We must presume they paid their way by working at their trade, tent-making (as we find later on in Acts 18:3) and selling their wares in the local markets. This would be hard work for an 'outsider' in the chaotic trading conditions of the city, but Paul knew it was important for the success of his mission. Being independent of personal favours, Paul ensured that his motives for preaching the Gospel were kept pure. No one could accuse him of unscrupulously gaining a living from those he persuaded.

The integrity of the preachers (2:10)

Paul could speak in this way because he was confident that the church at Thessalonica knew the truth of his words. So Paul is able to say *'you are witnesses, and so is God, that to you who became believers we were devout, righteous, and blameless'* (2:10).

Now if we look deeper at what Paul says, we gain further interesting insights. He says that they could see the evangelists were *'devout'*, but this was not because they appeared to be so from their preaching. Anyone who has a skill with words can persuade others that they are wonderful and good. No, it is almost certain that while Paul was in Thessalonica, he worshipped with other Jews in the synagogue (Acts 17:2), and so those he sought to persuade about the faith were able to see for themselves the devotion with which he worshipped God. They could see the nature of Paul's relationship with God, that is, his *'righteousness'*, to use the language people would have then understood

Together with his claim to blameless living (see above), Paul's personal witness of faith was a powerful factor in his preaching of the Gospel. It remains true that the most effective preachers of the Gospel are probably those who can be seen doing what is right before God; worshipping, doing good works and demonstrating faith in God throughout life.

Relationships and pastoral care (2:11)

As we began to find yesterday, Paul's evangelism was effective partly because of the genuine fellowship existing at Thessalonica, but this fellowship was the by product of Paul's own attitude towards his converts. He was not a preacher who delivered the Gospel and left the rest to others, believing that while evangelism was his gift, the job of pastoring a church belonged to others. This unfortunate division of labour does not help the church today although it is unfortunately common. Paul says of those converted under him, *'we dealt with each one of you as a father would with his children'* (2:11).

Of course, these were not merely touching words of paternalism, an idea found within a scholarly commentary on Thessalonians which comes from a modern cynical mind. For Paul, these words reflect not just the care of God for His Son Jesus, but the words of Jesus Himself, who said *'the Father loves the Son and has placed all things in His hands'* (John 3:35) and *'as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you ...'* (John 15:9). So Paul's words declare that the Gospel fulfils Jesus' ministry amongst His people!

The appeal to live a worthy life ... (2:12)

The consequence of receiving the Gospel is always a changed life, and there are many descriptions of this changed life within Scripture. Jesus, for example, says it is like being *'born again'* (John 3:3f.). Here, Paul describes the Christian life as one lived *'worthy of God, who calls you into His own Kingdom and glory'* (2:12). No evangelist can or should determine how another should live the life of faith, and there is no scriptural sanction for creating such dependency between evangelist and follower that the one who is saved sees little more of practical Christian faith than copying what an evangelist does. Paul Himself identifies more spiritual *'gifts; and 'graces'* than this (e.g. Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:11f.).

As Paul says here for our benefit, the measure of all practical Christian faith is God, as we see Him through the person of Jesus Christ. Each Christian and each church has its own life

within the Kingdom of God, and it is the Lord's intention that each fulfil their calling and strive to be '*worthy of God*'.

Discipleship

Application

Effective evangelism

In this passage, Paul confirms yet again that evangelism works when people are respected, and dealt with respectfully and in all honesty. It is not too hard for us to see the evidence today that a shallow harvest is reaped when people are manipulated into faith, especially if the one who delivers the message is presented as superior to others.

Unfortunately, it is sometimes true that those who conduct missions present an evangelist as someone who is not accessible to those to whom they preach, who walks on another planet and carefully avoids all contact with the people to whom they preach. I know why such practices have developed, but they need to be challenged so that God's people as a whole can be effective in evangelism and not prevented from doing the work of the Gospel by ideas about evangelism that are ineffective and unscriptural!

Honesty and integrity

All circumstances can be misunderstood, of course, but the truth is that we all perceive honesty and integrity where it can be found within the people we meet. Paul was confident that he could not be accused of acting with anything less than the highest standards of Christian fellowship and personal human conduct; as the presentation of the Gospel always requires. We should seek to ensure that we can say the same about ourselves, whoever we may be in the service of the Kingdom!

The church is wrong to copy the culture of celebrity found in the world, and when our leaders, preachers and evangelists employ the techniques and styles of celebrity, then the nature of the Gospel is compromised. This is not a comment so much about method, but the attitudes, manner, bearing and personal conduct of leaders. The Lord looks for honest Christians who will do the hard work of the Kingdom; he does not look for celebrities who are trying to make a good living from the Gospel.

Ideas for what to do

- How can the Gospel be shared today in ways that demonstrate integrity, and how can we promote forms of evangelism that avoid the charge of being 'elitist' or of 'spiritual arrogance'?
- Pray for all those who seek to spread the Gospel through evangelism, and ask the Lord to help you understand how you can share your faith in ways that are appropriate to the people you meet.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss the different evangelists you have seen or heard. From your observation, do they measure up to Paul's standards here?

2. What part does honesty and integrity play in the communication of the Gospel?
3. How important are 'mentors' in Christian faith; Christians who are older in the faith and can assist those who are growing in faith?

Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how to live in a way that reflects truth and integrity before others; not so that I might claim any virtue myself, but so that I might demonstrate the benefits of doing what is right according to Your will. I ask this in Jesus' name, AMEN