

Ferndale Baptist Church
Motto Text 2007

**Walking
the Walk**



and



**Talking
the Talk**

“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”

1 Thessalonians 2 v 8

[It might help to read 1 Thessalonians 2, as this sermon makes reference to other parts of the chapter.]

Well, I suppose I should start by saying “Happy New Year” (to anyone I haven’t spoken to yet). And a new year means a new motto verse. I’ll admit to you now, I’ve never actually heard a motto verse sermon before, for reasons I won’t bore you with now. So I can’t be sure what you think the point of a motto verse is. But here’s what I want the point of the motto verse to be...

I want to try to set the tone for the coming twelve months. And I want to do that not with a challenge.

So this is a New Year (although it’s been going a week already). You’ve probably been reflecting on everything that happened in 2006, and what 2007 might hold. So let me ask you: what do you think is the biggest challenge facing us as individuals and as a church this coming year?

- Maybe the biggest challenge will be the financial one, trying to make ends meet?
- Maybe we’ve got challenges in our personal lives to deal with, and to help each other to deal with?
- Maybe it seems like it will be a challenge just to keep going as Christians?

All of these are important – I’m not trying to say they aren’t for one minute. But our biggest challenge is that there are hundreds of people living around the church who don’t know Jesus, and who are therefore heading for an eternity separated from God. And they don’t even realise it. Our next-door neighbours, our colleagues, our friends, our families. Hundreds of people who desperately need to know Jesus, to be forgiven, and to be brought back to God, but don’t.

How does that make you feel? If I’m honest, I find it more than a little bit daunting! The size of the task is so immense that I find it difficult to get my head around. In fact, if I think about it too long, it makes me want to go back to bed and hide. But then if you think about it even longer, the stakes are quite literally life and death. It’s a huge challenge, and it’s scary.

The consolation is, it isn’t a new situation. Paul, Silas and Timothy faced a situation which was just as daunting, and just as critical.

Their letter is written to the church in Thessalonica, one of two letters to them that we have (that’s why it starts with a 1!) We can read about Paul’s activities there in Acts 17, where Paul and co arrived and preached the gospel. We’re told that some Jews and lots of Greeks became Christians as a result of their preaching – so the Thessalonian church was born. But they aren’t there long, maybe only a few weeks, before they’re run out of town. So there’s no time to teach this baby church, to prepare it so it will manage on its own. And Paul writes this letter to give them some support.

In chapter 2, which we read, Paul is reminiscing about the time he spent there, reminding the Thessalonians what they were doing there, and how they did it. In particular, it sounds as if he’s trying to set the record straight on a few counts.

It sounds like people had different suspicions about Paul and his gang – maybe these were the people who’d run them out of town the first time. But Paul denies all of them. If you look at verses 3 to 5, he says their appeal wasn’t based on error – what they were saying wasn’t wrong. They didn’t have

impure motives, and they weren't trying to trick people into following them for their own benefit. They weren't trying to win respect from people.

We can well imagine there were people around who were doing this – dishonest people, greedy people, or people who were just plain wrong.

Paul says that when he arrived with Silas and Timothy, they weren't like that. In fact, that was what caused all the trouble. It would've been a lot easier to change their message a bit so it didn't upset people. But they didn't.

And after he describes what they *didn't* do, Paul goes on to remind them what they *did* do. And that including verse 8, which is our motto text this year. [*I've preambled a bit, because it's really important that we know where this verse comes from – otherwise we could pluck it out and make it mean all kinds of things.*]

“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”

In this verse, Paul says that he shared two things with the Thessalonians. Can you see what they are?

1. **“the gospel of God”**
2. **“our lives as well”**

He's saying “we talked the talk” and “we walked the walk”. Not either/or – they did both.

So I want to spend a few minutes thinking about “the gospel of God”, and about “our lives as well.” But hopefully you'll notice that he mentions something else as well. He mentions it at the beginning of the verse, and again at the end, like brackets or bookends. He describes their **love** for the Thessalonians. At the beginning he says “We loved you so much that...” and at the end he says “... because you had become so dear to us.”

So this was the reason they shared the “gospel of God” and “their lives as well” in the way they did. They were motivated by love, so that they were **delighted** to share these things with them.

Not from any of those impure motives he's mentioned

Not from a sense of duty – “God's going to be really mad if we don't.”

Not even because the Thessalonians had done anything to earn it – they hadn't know them very long!

It was because of love.

“Talking the Talk”

The first thing Paul & co shared with the Thessalonians (because they loved them) was “the gospel of God.” Paul loved the gospel, and he shared it with people he loved. We get some idea of the things he told them as he reminds them of some of the things he said in this letter and in others. There's a fantastic section at the end of chapter 4 which talks about the return of Christ. Paul describes the fact that Jesus is coming back. He reminds them that those who don't know Jesus will face eternity without Him. But he doesn't see the return of Christ as scary for himself, because he knows that all those who have put their faith in Christ, whether they're alive or dead, will rise to spend forever with their Saviour. Verses 9 and 10 say:

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.”

The gospel they shared with the Thessalonians was “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1v16). Christ lived a perfect life and died a perfect death for everyone, including them. Instead of seeing them as sinful and deserving of punishment, God could look upon them as righteous. In Romans 3v22-25, Paul explains...

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”

We're made right with God by grace and grace alone. We desperately need it, but we don't deserve it. Yet God loves us enough to save us through the death of his only Son.

I've mentioned a couple of things Paul says about the gospel. There are plenty more. But they can only be snippets and summaries, and none of them can ever really do justice to the gospel. The gospel isn't just a statement, or even a list of statements. It's the reality that we committed the ultimate crime, requiring the ultimate punishment, but Christ paid the ultimate price so that we could gain the ultimate reward – knowing God as our friend and spending eternity with Him!

It can never, ever be just an add-on to make life more comfortable (an attitude which a preacher called Mike Cain describes as “spiritual air-conditioning”). It isn't something we can manage without, but will make life a bit nicer if we have it. It's more like a “spiritual oxygen tank”. Without an oxygen tank, if a deep-sea diver stays under too long, he won't come back up again. Without the gospel, **people are dead!**

Is that what you believe about the gospel? Do you just treat it as spiritual air-conditioning?

If you're here and you haven't accepted that for yourself, if those statements Paul makes don't apply to you yet, maybe the New Year is a good chance for a New Start...?

The gospel is mind-boggling. But when we even begin to take on board the reality of the gospel, it will affect us deeply. And once we see the reality of where people who don't know Christ are headed, that will affect us too.

But Paul goes on to say that they shared “not only the gospel of God, *but our lives as well.*”

Before I go on to say a couple things about “Walking the Walk”, I just want to point out the relationship between the walking and talking. There's a huge temptation to do one and not the other. I think Paul is emphasising that he wasn't just talking, but that he was practising what he preached. His message was reinforced by his actions. I think we usually suffer from the reverse. We do nice things for people, but we don't explain why. And so you get situations where people think that making toast will affect someone's salvation (that's a student-y example, there are plenty more). It's

understandable. People like toast, but they don't like the gospel. They like having their washing up done, but they don't like being told they are a sinner who needs to be rescued.

For Paul, the message was the obvious bit. "...not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well." That he shared the gospel almost went without saying. It was his actions he had to remind them of. We need to make sure that we share the gospel, otherwise it's just toast!!

Walking the Walk

They shared their "lives as well." They didn't just share their message. Paul's motives were apparently being questioned. So Paul explains to them that he was aiming to please God, not men, and the message came from God, not men. But to back it up, he reminds the Thessalonians about their lives. In verse 9, he reminds them how hard they worked – instead of sponging, they earned their keep. Their lifestyle was "holy, righteous and blameless" (v10).

In sharing their lives, the Thessalonians got to see the gospel at work in Paul, Silas and Timothy. As they lived their lives, it was easy to see the Holy Spirit making them more like Jesus day-by-day. Their honesty and passion would have shown through. You can't communicate that from a pulpit, or in a Bible study. I could tell you about my life, but it's just words until you see me actually living it (I'm on thin ice, as I've lived with various people in the room...).

Have any of you have been watching Celebrity Big Brother? I won't ask you to admit it, but have you ever wondered why programmes like that are so popular? Or why Waterstone's was full of autobiographies at Christmas?

Maybe it's because we're nosy. But I think it's also because we want to know what famous people are like under the surface. Does Leo Sayer really talk with a voice as high-pitched as his singing voice? Is Cleo as funny in real life as the characters she played on the Kenny Everett show? We like to know what people are really like, and we hate hypocrisy.

When we share our lives with people, it's like being on Big Brother. They can see the reality of what it's like to live as disciples of Christ, and what difference it makes. They can see how we react to situations and people. Of course, for that to work, it has to make a difference, and our lives have to show the reality of being Christians...

If we **love** the gospel, we will **live** the gospel. It should be obvious as we live alongside people that Christ is Lord of our lives. It should be obvious from what we say. What we do. How we use our time or our money. How we make decisions. Christ is Lord of the entire universe including every aspect of our lives.

And, of course for this to work, we need to be sharing our lives with people who don't know Christ. We need to actually end up in situations where people can see the gospel at work in us (and we need to explain it when we get chance).

I was challenged about this even as I was writing this sermon. I stopped and thought "can I say this?", because I need to listen as much as anyone. I regularly come into contact with very few non-Christians. This year I need to find ways of meeting more people who don't know Jesus. I need to

find people with whom I can share not only the gospel of God, but my life as well. And I need to make sure my life matches what I say when I say it.

How can you share your life in 2007? Who are you going to share it with?
What will your life look like to people you share it with?

I said this was going to be a challenge. The challenge I'm setting is simply to do this. This time next year, it would be great if there were people who had become Christians through our witness, to whom we could say "we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

But remember the brackets. Paul started with love, and he ends with it. Paul wasn't interested in the size of his church, or his reputation. He was motivated by love. And we need to be motivated by love too. We need to love the lost, as Christ first loved us, so that doing this will be a delight!

Let's pray...

Father God, thank You for the gospel. Thank You that, though we do not deserve it and cannot earn it, You rescue us and welcome us into Your family.

As we look forward to what You have in store for us in 2007, we pray that You would help us to love those who don't know You. Help us to share with them the good news of Jesus Christ. And help us to live lives which display Your gospel at work in us.

Bless us this year, but we pray that you will bless those who live around us who don't know you. Have mercy on them, open their eyes, that they might see your glory and trust you with their lives.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Address given by Gareth Leaney on 7th January 2007
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