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A1049 – December 5, 2010 – 1 Thess 2:3-12
The Motive Of Paul's Ministry

We are in 1 Thessalonians 2. Last time we said there was a preparation necessary for Paul and Silas in order to accomplish their ministry at Thessalonica. Thessalonica was a hostile territory and they had to give the gospel to a hostile audience. So in order to prepare Paul and Silas for this hostile environment God had ordered the events in their lives at Philippi. At Philippi they were going about ministering when they came across a girl that was demon possessed and was making a lot of profit for certain businessmen. She started following them around and annoying them so Paul cast the demon out of her. This generated friction with the local businessman who took it upon themselves to make accusations against Paul and Silas. And out of this the Roman magistrates, who were supposed to be the great example of law and order, very stupidly had them publicly stripped and beaten and then thrown in prison, fastened in the stocks. Now, it's things like this in our lives, maybe not as severe, but certainly Christians in other places in the world are facing things that severe, but when these things occur they occur because God plans them for our lives. You say God plans these things? Yes, there are number of reasons, let's enumerate a few. This will just be a sampling. One reason is so that we know who we are. God already knows who we are and what He has worked in our lives through His word. But we don't always know who we are; we don't know how much we've grown. And so God will often put us through certain trials and tribulations in order that we find out who we are, in order to draw out of us that which is already there so that we become aware of what He has been doing in our lives. So, number one reason that God sends us trials and tribulations is so that we discover what He has accomplished in our life up to that point. In the Greek language there's a word for this called *dokimazo*, and that's the word to test something to show that it is approved. God does test believers. He does not tempt believers to sin. But he does test believers to approve them. That is, to draw out of us

what He has built into us. And what he drew out of Paul and Silas was that they had grown tremendously. For they were able, even fastened in the stocks in prison, and perhaps sitting in their own feces, to remain occupied with Christ. The very fact that they were singing psalms and spiritual songs and worshipping God who sovereignly orchestrated this situation demonstrates *dokimazo*. A second reason God sends us trials and tribulations is that we might be an example to others, a demonstration of the gospel and its sufficiency. In other words, for the evangelization of unbelievers. The example we have with Paul and Silas at Philippi is the evangelization of the Philippian jailer and his family. Their occupation with Christ in the midst of terrible circumstances was such a testimony to the Philippian jailer that he wanted to know how he could have what they had. He had never seen any prisoners respond to the stocks this way. And he wanted to know what they had that he didn't have and so he asked, "what must I do to be saved?" And so the second reason God sends us trials and tribulations is to give us opportunity to evangelize unbelievers. The third reason God sends us trials and tribulations is to prepare us for the future. God has a plan for our lives and we can't plan the future. But He can because He wrote the plan. And therefore, having written the plan, he knows what we need in order to be ready for the next thing. And therefore he will send trials and tribulations to develop the character and endurance in us so that we are able to stand up under greater pressures of life. This is a part of our experiential sanctification or growth, the maturing process. And obviously, Paul and Silas in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 is cognizant of this reason. He says, "for you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain," that is, we didn't come to you for no reason! It wasn't just chance, it wasn't meaningless, there's an order to history, there is a plan to history and behind that plan is a planner. And that planner in verse 2 sent us suffering and mistreatment in Philippi, as you know, and the result of that suffering and mistreatment is that when we came to you, "we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition." So, there are three reasons God gives us trials and tribulations; to approve us, to evangelize unbelievers, and to develop our character and endurance in preparation for the future. There are other reasons God sends us trials and tribulations, this is not an exhaustive list, but we just wanted to note, by way of review a few of the reasons.

The key truth of verses 1-2 being that Paul and Silas suffered in Philippi so they would be prepared to minister at Thessalonica. Now we want to press on to verses 3-12, and here is where we come to the motive of Paul in ministry. Did Paul have genuine motives in coming to them? What were Paul's motives? There had been a challenge to Paul's motive after he departed. Remember, in Thessalonica Paul preached to a hostile audience. And though several believed there were many that did not believe; and after Paul and Silas were forced to depart those who did not believe continued in their hostility toward Paul and his gospel. And one of the things they attacked was Paul's motives. They claimed three things, First, that Paul's exhortation came from a demonic source, second, that Paul was a charlatan roaming the ancient world preaching for money and third, that Paul desired human accolade and honor, all very serious charges, to which Paul now gives a defense, an *apologia*.

Ultimately, we said last week these charges were satanically inspired, Satan felt threatened by Paul's boldness at Thessalonica and the inroads the gospel had made at Thessalonica and therefore he was trying to stop the Great Commission from making deeper inroads into Europe. One way to stop Paul and the Great Commission was to attack Paul's motives; this would destroy his credibility in the eyes of the Thessalonians

Now for Paul's *apologia*, verse 3, **For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit**; in other words he's rejecting the first charge, that his exhortation was sourced in demonism. And three words are used to describe a demonic source. First, Paul's **exhortation**, and the word for **exhortation** in verse three is the term for emboldening. When the word of God is preached in all of its authority with boldness do you know what it accomplishes for you? It emboldens you. Have you ever had that when you walk out of this room? I know some of you have. I've had people walk out and tell me that week in and week out they have confidence, absolute confidence that the word of God is true. That's exactly what strong preaching of the word of God produces in its hearers. It emboldens you to be able to live the Christian life and tell others about Christ. That's what it means when Paul says for our **exhortation**, our emboldening **does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit**. The charge was that ultimately it was demonically inspired, Paul's defense is that it was not, it was divinely inspired. Three things characterize demonic inspiration; first, **error**, it comes

from **error**. But the Christian worldview is sourced in truth. It is the true meaning of all facts and the interpretation of the facts and the interrelatedness of the facts. From the creation of the world by the God of the Bible, to the fall of man, to the judgment salvation of the Noahic flood, to the contractual stability in the universe, to the Call of Abraham, to the Exodus from Egypt, to mount Sinai and the giving of the law, to the conquest and settlement of the promised land in the Middle East, to the rise and reign of King David, to the golden era of Solomon and the greatest culture ever produced, to the division of the kingdom, and the decline of the kingdom, to the exile of the kingdoms in partial restoration... All of us look forward to the birth, life, and death of the King with David's genes. The gospel is the conclusion and logical center of the entire Christian worldview. It is not sourced in error. It is sourced in truth.

Second, it **does not come from impurity**. If you're unfamiliar with the ancient world this may sound strange to you, but most of the cults used prostitution as a way of attracting converts. You can imagine these cults were pretty popular with the masses. Paul says we didn't use any form of impurity to seduce you to convert to Christianity. So the source of our message is not impurity.

Third, it **does not come by way of deceit**, that is, it did not come in the atmosphere of deception. When Paul preached the message it did not require him to use techniques of trickery or deception. It was simply telling them the truth. So Paul's truth was not sourced in demons.

Verse 4, **but** strong adversative, rather than being sourced in demons, Paul says **we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts**. In other words the source of Paul's message is God. The verb **approved**, we have been **approved by God**, is in the perfect tense, meaning a past completed action with ongoing results. They were standing in a state of approval by God. How did they come to be approved by God? The answer is that they had been faithful throughout the entire second missionary expedition, which began in Acts 15 where they left Antioch and traveled north into Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Then they went west and in Galatia they picked up Timothy. They continued west intending to go into Asia but were prohibited by the Holy Spirit, so they obeyed the

Spirit and went north. At Troas Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," and they obeyed and immediately went to Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the gospel in Europe. When they went to Philippi and had their confrontation with certain Roman businessman and political rulers, they kept themselves occupied with Christ. And finally they had come to Thessalonica standing in a state of **approval by God** because they had been faithful over and over and over again on this journey. And thus they were **entrusted with the gospel**, the sense of which means they had a duty to preach the gospel, not just the privilege to preach the gospel or the freedom to preach the gospel, but the duty to preach the gospel being approved by God. And notice how they did it, **Not as pleasing men**, the content of the gospel Paul preached was enough to prove that they did not seek to please men. If Paul had done this he would have preached that man is basically good and if he does enough good works he can earn merit with God and please God. But Paul preached the message that man is a sinner and in absolute and total need of Christ to die on behalf of him, as a substitutionary sacrifice for man's sin on the cross, and that the cross work must be appropriated by faith in order for man to be pleasing to God. This is a message of offense. Paul says that the gospel is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. It did not please men; it offended men, because it said that men are not good enough. Only Christ is good enough. We are offensive to God. And when Paul preached the gospel it was offensive to those who were in rebellion against God. Paul himself was not offensive and we should not be offensive, though people may take offense at the gospel. But we must preach the gospel because this pleases God and the gospel is the means by which God calls forth His elect into history. It is by preaching a stumbling message that is foolish to many that God demonstrates His power in bringing forth men to salvation. And such was the ministry of Paul and Silas. He says we were entrusted with the gospel, so we speak to please **God who examines our hearts**. Since it is God who approves us and not men, then it is God who they sought to please and not men. God is the one who **examines our hearts**, our motives. And the godly believer will say like David, in his famous Psalm 139, "Search my heart, O God, and know me, Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me." This is the attitude of a man who wishes to please God and not men.

The only thing that matters in life is pleasing God, and if anything we do in life is not for that express motive then the motive is illegitimate. We are always, in everything, whether it be our job, our home, a business transaction, our study of some subject area, all to be done with the motive to please God.

Then he explains how it is made manifest that we are pleasing God and not man and he answers the second charge. What was the second charge? That Paul was a charlatan roaming around the ancient world preaching for money. Verse 5, **For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed – God is witness – nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.** Three things they never did. First, **we never came with flattering speech**, the charlatans of the ancient world would utilize flattering speech. By flattering speech they didn't mean buttering up so much as the use of rhetorical devices, skilled speech to influence men to their position. They had schools where you could train in persuasive speaking. It wasn't about the content of the message; it was all about a technique. And Paul says we didn't come with the slick techniques of the rhetoricians. In fact Paul says, as far as a speaker is concerned, I'm not a persuasive speaker. Paul was pretty dry as a speaker, so dry that in Acts 19 at Ephesus a guy falls asleep in Bible class and drops out the window. That's why were having a taller glass put in across the balcony up there, so you guys don't fall down if you go to sleep. Apparently Paul didn't entertain his audience to keep them awake. He trusted that if a person was interested in the truth they would stay awake. Granted, sometimes you're just totally worn out. I've been reviewing my sermons and fallen asleep. So I don't blame you if you fall asleep in my sermons. But the point is that Paul says I'm not a persuasive speaker, I don't use special techniques and the reason I don't is because the gospel is a demonstration of the Spirit and His power, not my wisdom. And I don't want your faith to rest on my wisdom, I want it to rest on God's power. In another NT passage it says Paul's "letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." That's another thing about Paul, if he were to stand in front of you here today he would not appear impressive. The only description we have a Paul was the basically he was a short, stocky gangly thing. Somewhat repelling. And when he spoke it was contemptible, meaning basically he got under people's skin. Martin Luther says he was like this. And a number of

the finest preachers have basically been contemptible in speech. They were like a sharp stone upon which men were cleaved. It may be a rough message but it got through. And in another place Paul says, "but even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge;" Paul again did not use flattering speech, but had tremendous knowledge of theology and its application to every area of life as he demonstrates with philosophy, art, sports, food, drink, every area of life Paul thought God's thoughts after him. But basically he was a bore to listen to. He didn't use the techniques of the rhetoricians of his day so he could pull the wool over people's eyes. He basically told you the truth and left the results up to God.

Second answer to the charge that Paul was a charlatan who used a technique to make money, Paul says, **we never came with a pretext for greed**, that is, desiring more than ones' due. Something is due the preacher of the word. Shall we who have benefited in spiritual things not provide for those who have given us spiritual things? But desiring more than one is due is unspiritual and was never the practice of Paul. In fact, if there were any question about Paul's motives he would work rather than receive any contributions. And such was the case at Thessalonica. While he was at Thessalonica he did not receive any contributions from the Thessalonians. Though while he was there he worked and received the contributions from the Philippians. One reason he did not receive from the Thessalonians was because they were new converts and Paul never, never took money from new converts because Paul wanted them, first and foremost, to understand grace. And once a believer understood grace then Paul would receive a contribution from him. But Paul never wanted anyone to think that he received the benefits of the cross because of money. So it was very evident in Thessalonica that they did not come with a pretext for making money. They accepted no money from the Thessalonians.

The third charge is answered in verse 6, **nor did we seek glory from men**. The charge being that Paul desired human accolade and honor. Paul says this was not our objective; we were not aiming or striving to get special attention from people. And every preacher of the word of God should follow this procedure. If he is seeking accolade from men what will he have to do? Alter the word of God to fit the desires of men. There have been so many times in my study and I'm digging into the text and when I thought, I say, boy so-and-so isn't going to like this and then you have the dilemma, "Am I going to

teach this? How am I going to teach this? Is there some way to lessen the blow of this so that so and so doesn't notice?" Every preacher faces that. And I can assure you I have, to my knowledge, never done that. You just have to keep coming back to the question, who am I here to please? Men or God? And because I've always answered the question the same way I know people have been offended and I know people have left this church. And I'm not excited when people leave, but I'm not grabbing at them to keep them. And in that respect I can't say that this ministry is any different than the ministry of the OT prophets, the NT Christ and apostles or the great men of the church who have sought to please and give glory only to God and not men. No great ministry, great in God's eyes, is seeking the glory and accolades of men. And the warning of the NT is never to seek glory from men. What did Paul warn Timothy would happen in the last times? People would seek teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. The sobering imperative Paul gives to the preacher when that happens is "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." If people leave...people leave...but the preacher can't leave the truth. Only preaching the truth will please God.

So Paul defends against this charge and concludes verse 6, **even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.** In other words, we could have thrown our weight around, we could have said, we're apostles of Christ and you better do what we say or else, but Paul says we didn't do that even though we had the right to. We could have said that because we were apostles. An apostle was a messenger sent in the full authority of the sender. Since Christ was the sender who sent Paul then when Paul was in their presence it was as if Christ was in their presence. And so yeah, they could have thrown their weight around but they didn't, instead in verse 7 he begins to go into the positives of how they did come to them and their true motives. So he's given the negative, how they did not come, now he gives the positive, how they did come.

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