

4/30/23 Christ Fellowship

“Why Testify?” – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

I saw it on Facebook so it has to be true. It said there are three things in this world that tell the truth. Little kids, drunks and spandex. Many years ago, I was with a bunch of my family for a special Christmas musical program at a local church. My parents and sisters and their families, along with some cousins and their families were all there. It was a big deal and we were all sitting pretty close to the front with most of the little kids sitting in front of their parents in the rows.

It was all going pretty well until a rather large woman came out to do a solo. The auditorium was completely silent when she walked up to the microphone and that’s when my nephew, Lael, who was 5 or 6 at the time, turned around to his mother and loudly said, “*Mama, she’s fat!*” His mother was mortified and swatted at him and shushed him but he said it again. “*But Mama, she’s fat!*” Like this was some important information that only he was privy to. Then my cousin, his mom, who was exasperated at this point said, “*I know it but be quiet!*”

I’m pretty sure the whole auditorium heard the conversation, including the soloist. Leave it to a little kid to tell the truth at the worst possible time, right? I will say it again that I believe everybody wants to know the truth. Nobody wants to go through life following a lie. But they really want the truth to be what they believe it is. And it’s hard to make people believe something that goes against what they already believe, especially when it comes to something that might make them have to change their behavior.

That is where the Gospel comes in. Somebody tell me what the Gospel is. What is the Good News of Jesus Christ? How would you describe it? The Gospel of Jesus is simply that Jesus was born, he lived a sinless life and was crucified and died on the cross to pay the price for your sins that the Father said was due. But then He rose again after being dead for three days and He is alive today in Heaven and wants to have a relationship with you. And all you have to do to get to Heaven is believe in that Gospel and the proof of your belief is a changed life and a life that is being continually changed to look more and more like Jesus.

The Gospel isn’t difficult to understand. It’s not complicated. It’s not going to cost you money to tell it or accept it. So, why don’t we tell it to more people? Jesus told His disciples in **Luke 9** to go proclaim the Gospel to all creation. He told them again in **Matthew 28**, “*Make disciples of all nations.*” All through the books we call “the Gospels”, which are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Jesus says to preach, teach, proclaim the Gospel. Everybody knows we are expected by Jesus to tell His story. So, why is it that so few people do?

I have read in several places that 98% of people that call themselves Christians live their whole life without ever telling another person outside the walls of the church about the Gospel. 98%. Now, I don't know how they come up with statistics like that. I've never been polled. Have you? But let's just say the real stat is 75%. Or even 50%. We have to do better than that.

I don't think the Apostle Paul would approve of the majority of church members going through life without sharing the Gospel. But I know what you're thinking when I bring up the Apostle Paul. Paul was a fanatic. He was a Jesus freak, a crazy person when it comes to God. You could never be like Paul. That's just not you. That's not your personality. I hear ya. I feel the same way sometimes, but I want to be more like Paul. I want to be thought of as a Jesus freak. What a compliment! I want to hear Jesus say to me, *"Well done you good and crazy freak! Get in here!"*

But that Paul! That Paul was a superhero, wasn't he? Yes, he was and he tells us in **1 Thessalonians 2** what his super power was. Turn there now, if you would, and let's see what it was that made Paul the preacher and evangelist that he was. He starts off telling us all the wrong reasons why some people preach and teach and then he tells us why he did it. He gives all the bad examples to let the church in Thessalonica know what to look for in false teachers. Paul tells them in **Acts chapter 20**, *"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."* So, he is telling them what to watch out for and contrasting those people's motives with his own.

Let's read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**. *For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the help of our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. 3For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4but just as 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. 5For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— 6nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. 7But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. We loved you so much, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.*

I've always wondered what it was like for Paul on his missionary journeys. I've gone with Jody and Trisha Kennedy several times on mission trips and a few times with others and we always know where we are going to stay. We always know where we are going to eat. We know a little bit about what to expect, whether we are teaching English or building pews for the church

building or whatever. We have a pretty good idea of what to expect and we also know we can expect the people there to be warm and inviting. Paul had none of that.

Evidently, Paul just walked into a town, usually found the nearest Jewish temple and started there. They didn't usually care for what he had to say so he would leave (or get thrown out) and go find some Gentiles to preach to. They were probably more receptive but not always. And as you know, he was beaten up, put in jail, stoned, run over by a truck, stabbed and shot and killed several times. Well, not quite, but close.

We know from the book of **Acts, chapter 16** that he and Silas were put in jail and beaten in Philippi. Paul calls it "being insulted" but, okay. I guess he had had it worse but that had just happened to him before he got to Thessalonica. Do you ever think about how you would have handled that? If this story were told about me and I had just been put in prison and whipped for no good reason, I think the next part of the story would tell about how Todd then took a long, long vacation and reassessed whether God was really calling him to move on to another place. I think Todd would have just stuck to making tents or something.

But evidently, Paul barely broke stride. He just walked on into Thessalonica and started all over again. At least this time he was well-received, at least for a short time. But after only three weeks, he was run out of town again by some Jews who were following him around making trouble for him.

So, my point is, Paul had known these people in Thessalonica a whole three weeks and here he is saying that he loves them dearly. Is he maybe exaggerating a little? Is he laying it on a little thick to make them feel good? Maybe Paul had been drinking when he wrote this. You know. "*I love you, man!*" I don't think so.

Let me tell you my theory of how Paul loved so much by asking you to turn to **Luke chapter 7** for a minute. Paul tells the Thessalonians here that he came to them with pure motives. He wasn't trying to trick them or make any money off them or make himself look good. He just wanted to tell them the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus. That was his only motive for coming to them. And in doing so, he fell in love with this church.

Are you there in **Luke 7** yet? I want you to see this. You know the story. Jesus was invited to dinner at a Jewish leader's house. And evidently it was the social event of the season since Jesus was there so other folks wandered in who weren't necessarily invited. And one of those who wandered in was a woman. Now that was a red flag right there because women weren't usually part of dinners like this unless they were serving the food. But this lady wasn't serving food.

We don't know for sure but "lady" might not have been the word they would have called this woman. Luke describes her as a sinful woman and I'm sure your imagination is not far off about her but it doesn't matter. It certainly didn't matter by the time dinner was over. Let me read just a little bit of this story. **Luke 7, verse 39** says the Jewish leader was thinking in his mind about what kind of woman this was so Jesus reads his mind and tells him a story. Let's pick it up in **verse 40**.

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. 44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

Whoever has been forgiven little, loves little. Whoever has been forgiven much, loves much. Paul had been forgiven of a whole lot. Do you remember his story when he was still Saul? He was persecuting Christians and putting them in jail and even killing them. He was angry. He was mean. He was a terrible person but God called him, forgave him and changed him. God forgave ALL of that and used Paul like nobody else.

But because Paul had been forgiven much, he loved much. He loved God and he loved people so much that he could do what God had called him to do even in the middle of suffering. That's what love looks like. Look back at **verse 7** of our text today in **1 Thessalonians 2**. **Verse 7** says, *"we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children."* Is there a better picture of true agape love than the kind of love a mother has for her child?

Speaking of "picture", my niece, Blair, sends me pictures of her two young boys pretty often. But earlier this week, I realized she hadn't sent me any in a while and so I texted her and said, *"It's too bad you don't take pics of your boys anymore."* About two seconds later she sent me a dozen pictures of Rome and Titus, her sons. They were pictures of them laughing, standing, sitting, breathing, whatever. She loves to take pictures of those kids. She has a million of them. She loves those boys with a mother's love.

And I don't get it. Oh, I love those boys too but they are related to me so I'm pretty biased. But I still don't love them like their mother does. To me it just seems like a lot of work. Babies have

to be changed and fed and burped and cleaned. And what do they do to deserve it? Nothing. They don't contribute anything financially. They don't have jobs. They don't even cook or clean for years. So, why does a mother love them so much?

I've heard even unbelievers say that those maternal instincts are God-given. How else could somebody love somebody else so much? How could somebody love someone that doesn't do anything to be loved? They don't deserve love. They don't even know that they are loved. All they know is when they cry, mama helps them.

I hope you see where I'm going with this. This message is not about a mother's love but it is about your love. Maybe you have not been forgiven of all that much. Maybe to you, the death of Jesus on the cross to pay for your sins isn't as big of a deal as it is to some. Maybe you don't feel all that indebted to Him for that and so you don't love people enough to tell them the Gospel. Is that it?

I know I've told you before about the great magician, Penn Jillette, who is a staunch atheist. He was witnessed to by a guy and he said later he appreciated the guy's effort because, *"How bad do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"* How bad do you have to hate people not to tell them the Good News?

I know. I know. You're no great speaker. You don't know all the answers. You aren't smart enough or bold enough or whatever. Blah, blah, blah. Do you love people? That's the question. And if not, it's time to pray about that. Paul said here in **verse 2** that *"with the help of God we dared to tell you His Gospel."* The first description of the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5** is love. Love is the fruit or the proof of the Spirit of God living inside of you. If you are a true believer, then the Holy Spirit lives inside of you and will give you, like He gave Paul, the ability to love people and will give you the ability to tell them the Gospel. All you have to do is be ready. Just be willing. Be watchful for every opportunity that God gives you, every "divine encounter."

Now, here's the thing. Loving your fellow church members is easy. Most of y'all are a bunch of hoodlums but you're pretty easy to love. What about those people even right here in the community that are a little more difficult to love? What about people that think differently than you do, vote differently, love differently, live differently? Can you love a racist? Can you love a murderer? Can you love...your spouse? (You didn't see that one coming, did ya?)

Jesus said in **John 13**, *"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* The world is starving for love. Show people you love them. Prove it by telling them the simple story of the Good News of Jesus Christ and what He has done for you. Who are you going to tell this week?

Have you accepted and believed the Gospel? Do you have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus? You can. All you have to do is believe that Jesus, who is God, is the only way to Heaven. The Father said that where there is sin, something had to die. God is just but He is also merciful and so He sent His Son to die on the cross for your sins and all you have to do is believe. Then allow God's Spirit to come into your life and change you and make you more like Jesus every day. Ask God right now to forgive you of all your sins and He will. Do it right now as the music plays.