

Week 6 | “Paul’s Defense Pt.1”

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Suffering, maltreatment, and pressures are hard to walk through in life. Having your name, and your good intentions drug through the mud publicly, defaming both you and your character are things society today fears greatest. Nobody wants to end up on the other side of popular opinion. Companies spend millions of dollars to protect their “social” image.
- B. For Jesus, for Jesus’ disciples like Paul, like us, this was and is a common experience. Paul’s call as an Apostle, and Shepherd of God’s family brought him into the center of some of the most hostile city cultures in human history. And when there, like Jeremiah, he was compelled by the Spirit to preach and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of life-threatening hostility. Thessalonica was no exception.
- C. After just 3 weeks of preaching in the local synagogue, a significant mob formed of disgruntled Jews and Gentiles that were opposed to his preaching, seeing it as a threat to their Christ-free community. This mob became so great, that a financial payment from Jason, who was housing Paul during his time in Thessalonica had to be paid to appease both the government and those incited in the mob.
- D. But this payment also came with the guarantee that Paul would leave town now, suddenly, in the dead of night, unable to say goodbye to the many disciples that had been made through the apostolic team. Paul would have to entirely entrust these new disciples into the hands of Christ, whom he had taught them to love.
- E. But as always, in the absence of leadership, people will listen to anyone who steps up to the mic;
 - 1. Paul tells the Church of Ephesus upon his exit from them in **Acts 20:29-32** “For I know this, that after my departure Savage Wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore, watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
- F. After a period of about 3-4 months of Paul’s absence, he could take it no more, desperately wondering how this new Church in Thessalonica was faring. So, he sent Timothy to them, to strengthen them, and see how they were getting along. And solely upon Timothy’s return and response to Paul, Paul writes **1st and 2nd Thessalonians**.
- G. Timothy’s report of life in Thessalonica was partly a good report; the Church was growing, disciples were being made, the Gospel was spreading even outside of Thessalonica to the surrounding regions, but there was also challenges. Timothy made clear to Paul, there was also a mountain of accusation against Him and his ministry. Your work in Thessalonica is being questioned.
- H. In Paul’s absence, these disgruntled Jews and Gentiles stepped up to the preverbal mic, and began to malign, defame and discredit Paul’s ministry among them. Their accusation might’ve sounded something like this;

1. *“He’s insincere, compelled by selfish motives, he ran away, he hasn’t been seen or heard from. He’s just like those phony teachers who tramp down, he’s a charlatan. In danger he took to his heels and ran away, he’s doesn’t care. Some shepherd he is. He’s abandoned you.”*

I. Now, the tenor of Paul’s letter takes a significant turn here in Chapter 2, as Paul moves from celebration of the Thessalonians faith, to a defense of his character among them, to counter the accusation against him.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN CHRIST?

A. It’s easy to look at Paul and place him on a pedestal in our own lives, and even among Church history. But the reality is, Paul is a sinner, saved by God’s grace, who simply submitted his life to the grace of God through the grace of God.

B. So, what’s driving Paul? What’s motivating Paul? What’s causing him to live the way he’s living? He really doesn’t have to live this way; he’s smart, he’s educated, was powerful, but he’s taken all that and put it under the subjection of the Lord Jesus Christ. What’s driving him to live this way, so much so that he feels it necessary to defend his upright way among the Thessalonians?

C. Paul’s living the way he’s living, even able to make a full defense of the quality of character among the Thessalonians because his life is hidden in Christ, he’s been approved by God, he’s loved, and he’s experiencing this love in real time;

1. **Colossians 3:1-4** *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

D. Beloved, in this pandemic, or other pandemics to come, in trouble now, or trouble in the future, like Paul, we are to be a people who are working from our seated position in Christ, from the affections we ALREADY HAVE in Christ, from our APPROVAL IN GOD, never for. Our identity in Christ must continue to become more and more secure in our experience of it, because it’s already finished in Christ. But we need that finished work, that reality to bear down upon the present so that we FEEL IT, and it’s experiential through the whole of our lives.

1. **Ephesians 3:14-20** *“For this reason I bow my knee to the Father...that...Christ May dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the Saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...”* This is experiential faith, faith, feeling that surpasses knowledge

E. Like Paul, we are also in a strange place, a hard place, an unprecedented place, and it’s in this place that the Church, like Paul, must work FROM OUR identity in Christ, never for it.

III. PAUL'S DEFENSE (1ST THESSALONIANS 2:1-2)

- A. In Paul's defense of his time among them, he stresses two specific things; their openness to his ministry among them, and his willingness to suffer for the Gospel's sake. Paul states four times between 1st Thessalonians 1:5-2:5 that they knew how he lived among them while he was there;
1. **1st Thessalonians 2:1** *"For you yourselves know brethren, that are coming to you was not in vain."*
- B. Paul starts out of the gate in his defense, that they KNOW, that THEY should testify to the genuineness of his faith and his ministry among them. But look at his humility still, in his defense, referring to them as brethren (*not Apostle, not father, not overseer*).
- C. It Wasn't In Vain—Without effect, without results. Paul was saying, *"Guys, seriously, are you questioning this? Are you assuming that our work among you was for nothing? Well, even if nothing happened, you were born again. Your eternity was changed from death to life, is that a coming in vain? I think not."*
- D. It's easy for me in life and ministry to become discouraged, assuming that much of my labor, much of my effort is or has been in vain, because I don't often see it's reward upon completion. Sometimes it's years before that reward bears upon the present. This is why working in Alaska was so satisfying.
1. Do you feel that your work in life is in vain? As a parent? As an employee? As a follower of Jesus?
- E. Paul, seated in Christ, takes his cues from the Great Shepherd, looking upon Jesus' suffering on Calvary, came to the same conclusion, what looked like it was in vain, wasn't in vain!
1. **1st Thessalonians 2:2** *"But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict."*
- F. Philippi is only about 100 miles/3 days journey from Thessalonica. Paul says in **Acts 16:19-24** that when they were in Philippi they were beat (*beat repeatedly*) with rods, laid stripes on their back (*bare back*) and fastened their feet into stocks (*for imprisonment, and for torture*).
- G. Paul is in Thessalonica only 3 days removed from Philippi, still bearing the marks of this beating, wounds still healing to which he says, "you know." Maybe they seen his grimace as he walked, saw the blood bleeding through his clothing, or physically seen the wounds.
1. One commentator, Neil rightly says, *"Paul may have been especially sensitive to bodily pain, so that he recalled it with something akin to horror."*
- H. Paul was saying, *"friends, my actions, my coming to you is a testimony in itself about my commitment to both Jesus and His Church. You think if I was in this for the money, or the influence, or popularity I would've done this? Does this make sense to you that I have suffered on behalf of the Lord Jesus and you? I get that many of you are new in faith, and your questions are youthful, but think through what you are agreeing with, and the accusations against me as a hireling, or a charlatan based on what the others are saying."*

1. **Colossians 1:24-25** *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of his body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God...”*
- I. Paul’s saying, *“Not only were we not a failure (coming in vain) among you, we taught in the midst of suffering and much conflict, and we were bold in our God.”*
- J. **We Were Bold In Our God**—*This speaks of having courage in the face of fear, in the face of opposition or danger. The idea is that Paul was given courage, or that the source of his courage, was God Himself, “...we were bold in our God.”* It’s the same thing as David fighting against Goliath, Moses against Pharaoh, Joshua against Jericho, the four leprous men who walked into the camp of the Syrians, and the Proverb that says, the horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the Lord (**1st Samuel 17; Exodus 5; Joshua 6; 2nd Kings 7; Proverbs 21:31**).
- K. Faithfulness in difficult times, in adverse circumstances are one proof of genuine calling. It’s not the only proof, but typically in the midst of adversity and trouble, we see what people are really made of, what’s on the inside shows up on the outside;
 1. **John 10:11-15** *“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But a hireling, who is not the Shepherd...sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and he does not care about the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd...and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*
- L. We become defeated when we interpret the gospel in light of our struggle. If we do that, we assume that we’ve done something wrong, or the Gospel has failed because we’re struggling or in the midst of trouble.
- M. But when we look at our struggles in light of the Gospel, we see that God is working out our salvation, and though we suffer, like Christ, we aren’t without hope in our suffering, in our adversity, because we have confidence that our labor in Christ isn’t in vain.
- N. This isn’t a humanistic defense, or a humanistic testimony from Paul. It’s a testimony to the glory of God, a testimony that’s God centered. He’s not being bold because he’s cavalier, he’s being bold because God is with Him, because his life is hidden in Christ, because God is leading him and helping him.
- O. My question to you is, how is your position in Christ informing your response to the crisis around us, to the confusion, and panic, and fear? As a follower of Jesus, in the midst of adversity, we get to work FROM something, never FOR something.