

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

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[0:00] Well, if you're new to coming along to church or to Cornerstone, just as we open up the passage that was read for us earlier on, if you want to turn to that in the Bible or in your app, there may be a few things that are just helpful to know how we approach the Bible.

You know, the word Bible actually means the books. It's a kind of plural. So the Bible, if you like, is like a library of different books of different types of, you know, there's histories, there's songs, there's wisdom, there's letters, there's the gospel accounts and records of Jesus and so on. And so what we do at Cornerstone, we just, we take one of the books, if you like, and we just kind of work our way through it. So at the moment, we've taken one of the letters that Paul wrote to a church and we're working our way through it.

So at the time of writing, Christianity is exploding on this scene in the Middle East, in Western Asia, and as we'll see here, into parts of Europe.

This letter that we've been looking at, it was written to a group of believers, the church in a place called Thessalonica, which still exists in Northern Greece today. It's called Thessaloniki.

[1:16] And Paul's been preaching the gospel in that place for the very first time. Nobody has ever heard it before. And as he preaches it, we were seeing the effect of that last week. And the effect was extraordinary.

As people heard about Jesus, the Holy Spirit got to work in their lives in saving power. They believed and their lives were being absolutely transformed from the inside out.

They were encountering God and their lives were being changed. And in a sense, it was completely inexplicable, apart from the fact that it was a powerful move of God happening as the gospel was being preached in these different places, not least here in Thessalonica.

And that powerful transformation in the life of those who put their trust in Jesus is described in many different ways.

In the Bible, it's described in one place like being born a new deep in your soul that in a sense you're still the same person, but something, everything internally seems to have changed as the life of God by the Spirit of God explodes in their lives.

[2:25] And of course, that can happen in different ways. And we're hearing about those in the 60-second-ish stories that we're playing through the weeks. For some, it's like a quiet whisper.

For others, it's much more dramatic experience. But it doesn't matter what way you come. It's the authenticity of the experiences you experience God in that moment, as he transforms your life as you put your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

There's an interesting counter-dynamic also going on in Thessalonica and all the other places that Paul is going, is that some folks are absolutely loving what they're hearing and respond to it, but other folks absolutely hate it.

And we see something of that here in verse 2, as he speaks about that they dared, with the help of God, to proclaim the gospel in the face of strong opposition.

And again, we learned all about that last week. Where bizarrely, you see folks rounding up a mob to kind of counter what's going on. And the new believers are kind of ushering Paul and Silas thinking, yeah, maybe time to move on, but keep in touch.

[3:35] Maybe come back. Of course, that kind of violent opposition and so on doesn't always happen. But Jesus did say, don't be surprised if it does.

If you're finding yourself kind of hated on because of the gospel. Because he said, remember, that's what they did to me first. And of course, that reaction, that strong reaction, can happen for various reasons.

That people may not like the change that's happening in you. People might not like the change that the gospel calls for them in their lives. And so, you know, that kind of reaction can happen for many different reasons in different places.

And of course, the Christian mustn't get a persecution complex. But if there is a strong reaction to the gospel and the Christian faith, you know, keep in mind, don't be, Jesus said, don't be surprised. So, Paul is writing to these young believers there in northern Greece, helping them to kind of figure out what's going on to navigate, you know, partly the hassle that they're still getting, answer some of the objections that are being raised to their newfound faith.

[4:52] And as he does that, he's also modelling a sort of Christian leadership for us. And by implication, not just Christian leadership, but what the Christian life looks like in the midst of all that kind of hassle that can sometimes be going on.

But what was happening in Thessalonica in those days and in Philippi, you know, that if you're in Acts 16, in the book of Acts and you read all about what was happening before Paul arrived in Thessalonica and what happened after, as people's lives are being transformed as they respond to the gospel, that phenomenon that was happening then wasn't just then.

It continued to happen beyond the time that the Bible was writing, right throughout the whole of human history, and it's happening still today. Today, there's a powerful work of God happening in Africa, where there is exponential growth of people responding to the gospel.

Even in China, there are more Christians in China than there are people in the whole of the UK. Even though the government has had that strong opposition to the gospel, people are still yielding their lives to Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

And it's not just there. It also appears that something is happening in the Western world as well.

And you might be here because you've sensed the Spirit of God at work in your life.

[6:18] You've not necessarily come from a Christian background, but you've felt the Spirit of God sort of drawing you to kind of seek God and ask questions. Is God real? Is He there? Who is He?

What does it mean to encounter Him? Can I find Him in Jesus Christ? What does it mean to follow Him? What did He teach? And so on. And maybe you're here because you're responding to the card, you know, or you're watching us online because of that.

And that particular explosion seems to be happening particularly amongst younger generations in the West. And how do I know that that's not happening? I'm just not hyping it up because I keep hearing the same story wherever I go.

Something similar to what we're experiencing here. People are walking into churches saying, I've been reading my Bible and I want to start to go to church. Can you please help me to kind of figure all this out?

In fact, some friends were down in London. They were having some drinks and chatting about this very phenomenon of sort of younger generations coming, exploring the Bible.

[7:21] Two young lads happened to be earwigging their conversation and came over to them and said, you know, we are the people that you're talking about. You know, we're of the younger generation.

We started reading the Bible recently and we've just started going to church and we have a ton of questions. And so they were there till two o'clock in the morning just sort of unpacking these things. There is something happening. It may not be a sort of giant tidal wave, but there's a stream of folks who are finding their way into churches who are just sensing themselves having to seek the Lord. So, you know, these guys were in a similar kind of situation. Let's see if as we unpack this passage, as we get a sort of look through the windows, as it were, of this kind of them reading the letter from Paul and their circumstances, whether, you know, by the Spirit of God, it is also, we'll discover it's applicable to us, which it is.

And again, just a slight sidebar. If you're new to looking at the Bible, one of the key sort of things to help sort of interpret the Bible is to make sure that we sort of think about, firstly, what it meant, what was the context that the Bible was being written in, what questions, therefore, was it answering, what it meant to the people who first received it, and then think about how it applies to us.

[8:46] If we skip that kind of first part of thinking about the context that it was written, what it meant to them, then we can end up with some very strange things. Because the Bible talks about things like male circumcision. And you look at that and think, then, you know, and don't do this sort of bit of hard work on what did it mean then and what does it mean now.

Get into all sorts of bother, as you can imagine. Mercifully, that was for then, not for now. Also, I think another error that folks can find themselves are just sort of slipping into is a sort of a common mistake.

When you're looking into Christianity, thinking about these things, it is to mistake old Christian things as equating to or equal to the authentic gospel or authentic Christianity.

People are drifting into old church buildings that are drifting into them and finding that they're pretty much empty and it's a little bit confusing. Or they're thinking, well, you know, surely it's something like the King James.

That's the version of the Bible of these and that. That's much more authentic, original than some of the translation, the newer translations that are around today. The truth is that just because it is a little bit old doesn't necessarily mean that it is completely authentic.

[10:00] Most churches only date back to the 1800s or older churches. And the King James Bible only dates back to the 1600s. So there's, you know, there's 1600 years of Christianity that go before that.

So authentic Christianity is not found in the old trappings, but actually it's found in the old, old story that is found in the Bible.

That is the place to look for authentic Christianity and the authentic gospel. Not in just things that look old, but in the old, old story itself. And it's interesting, you think, well, actually, should I be looking at this kind of modern translation?

Surely the older ones are a little bit better. Well, it's interesting to note that when the New Testament, for example, was written, it was written not, there were two types of Greek at the time. There was the kind of Greek of the scholars, the classical Greek. And then there was the Greek that was spoken by everyday people. So which of those did Paul, for example, choose to write in? He chose to write in the Greek of the everyday people so that the language was supposed to be comprehensible.

[11:03] Not sort of classical, but comprehensible. Comprehensible. And so therefore, it's entirely valid to look at a newer translation of the Bible because that is written in sort of the language of the time and the idioms of the time to help us to kind of get a grip on what the Bible was truly saying.

And so don't look, you know, for authentic Christianity and the authentic gospel, don't look at old crusty buildings or sort of necessarily the traditional stuff. Here, in the old, old story, is where authentic Christianity and the authentic gospel is to be found.

And that's why churches like Cornerstone work their way through the Bible because this is the authentic stuff. And so we're going to the firsthand documents, the eyewitnesses of all that happened and drawing from them.

And so we work our way through it so we don't miss out any of the stuff from that time. So if you knew what's been going on, well, it's probably round about four or five months later on from Paul and his pal Silas having visited Thessalonica that in the interim, Paul has sent Timothy, which we discover if you look at chapter three, verse six, to kind of find out how they're getting on because he wants to keep in contact with them.

Timothy brings back, so we'll discover next week, again, chapter three, verse six, a good report. But it's probably shared some of the difficulties they're experiencing, some of the questions and objections that are being raised.

[12:32] And so the apostle Paul is writing just a couple of several months down the line to encourage them and to answer some of the questions that have been floating around and to sort of help them navigate this new life that they're wanting to live faithfully before the Lord.

So last week in the first chapter, Phil helped us to see how Paul encouraged them by showing them that they were doing well, encouraging them, sort of saying, in fact, you are, chapter one, verse seven, a sort of model to the other churches roundabout of kind of how these things can work out, how to live faithfully before the Lord.

And so Paul writes, and as he does that in chapter one, it's a sense, you know, he's sort of showing them the marks of, or showing us the marks of authentic church. But as he moves into chapter two, we see something of the marks, and Ryan's reacted really well in her prayer, the marks of authentic Christian leadership.

So as he does that, he's sort of, we see that authentic leadership preaches or teaches the authentic gospel in chapters one, verses one to 12, and then produces authentic responses in verses 13 to 16.

So first of all, preaches or teaches the authentic gospel verses one to 12. And the first thing that you see out of the pen here in this chapter is that authentic gospel leadership preaches the gospel boldly.

[13:59] You see verse two, that there can be, in a sense, like a sort of pain barrier, often when we're communicating the gospel, but then that can be to varying degrees. But we see, you know, Paul's prepared to preach and continue to do that boldly, even when it is not kind of well received.

So verse two talks about the pain barrier that was pretty severe in Philippi, but there were amazing results. You can read all about that in Acts chapter 16. And then Paul is reminding them in Thessalonica that the same was true there.

That actually, you're not alone in what you're experiencing, in experiencing hardships, but also changed hearts as you somewhat boldly are prepared to kind of share something of the gospel. And so he says, verse one, you guys know what was happening, brothers and sisters. Our visit to you was not without results or was not in vain. Even though it was hard, we continued to preach it and actually we were seeing as the gospel went out, people were hearing and lives were transformed.

And when we're, you know, again, if you're new to all this, when you're reading the letters, reading a letter is a little bit like hearing half a phone call conversation, isn't it? That kind of, we can hear what Paul's, what Paul is saying to them, but we can't hear what they are saying to Paul.

[15:21] And so we have to do a little bit of kind of work to figure it out. Although, though I think as you look through it, you see it becomes really clear. But it's clear then that they're still getting a little bit hassle for sharing the gospel, living their Christian lives and needing a little bit of help to navigate it, a little bit of help with some of the kind of reassurance of when some of the answers to the objections that they're experiencing and a little bit of modelling about how to kind of, how to answer them and how to engage with folks around about you.

So you can see the kind of things that the objections that are being raised, that they are experiencing from verse 3, for example, there are three things there. He says, for the appeal that we made did not spring from error or impure motives, nor were we trying to trick you.

So you can imagine folks saying, you know, Paul hasn't got a clue what he's talking about. He's just plain wrong. Acts chapter 17 tells us the kind of opposition they were getting and where it was coming from.

It was coming in part from people from the same background as Paul himself came from, from a Jewish background. that they were saying, oh no, Paul's completely near Jesus. He's definitely not the promised Messiah.

And if you're true believers, then you'd be, you'd be obedient to the Old Testament scriptures. You would be getting circumcised. You would be keeping the Sabbath in the synagogue and the festivals in the Old Testament and so on.

[16:48] Or coming from the other direction, if their friends were from Roman or Greek backgrounds, objecting to the gospel which says, well, Jesus actually is uniquely the only way to God's.

They would object and say, well, surely our worship of our ancestors or the Roman gods and the sacrifices that we make at the temples to appease the gods and so on are not a demonic deception like Paul was saying.

And then, of course, they possibly received objection because of the new lives that they were living. Sort of changed lives, maybe cleaner lives because, you know, certainly for many in the Roman Empire, the lives that the Christians were leading were repugnant because they weren't prepared to have what was common a mistress and maybe a boy and so on, treat women the way that women were being treated.

And so they find it repugnant. And so, he says, you know, you know, is that error? Or it certainly wasn't impure motives.

We weren't trying to trick you. And of course, there were plenty of, you know, snake oil salesmen around who were punting all manner of things at the time. You know, charmed amulets, incantations, ointments for this and for that, say this, whatever, and you'll get whatever you want, the blessing or the good fortune or whatever it is that they were seeking.

[18:19] And of course, they were not acting out of necessarily, you know, altruistic motives, were they? The motives often of these were from one of the big three. Money, usually primarily, or sex, or power.

As they, people often preyed on the vulnerable, those who were in need and in desperate situations. They said, you know we didn't act like that. Then there's a couple more things you see probably that the objections you can imagine that were saying, if you like, on the other side of the phone, verses four and five, that Paul was just a people pleaser, saying whatever they wanted to hear, and that he used flattery and false pretense in verse five.

And as Paul replies, he's helping these young believers, and us, and every generation of believers, to kind of work out our discipleship, flesh out our understanding of kind of some of the objectives, you know, be prepared that their objections will come and think through, you know, how, you know, truthfully, we can answer some of those things, you know, go away, ponder what they said, and come back and say, you know, I've been thinking about that, I don't have an answer right now, but I will think about it, here's some of the things that I find.

So we, you know, we engage in dialogue, we're prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us. But as he encourages them, he models for them, what Christian leadership looks like, and, you know, by inference, what Christian living looks like.

And there is an encouragement there, isn't there, to a bit of boldness first, not brashness. And that boldness, it's a mark of Christian leadership, to have courage to keep preaching, teaching, head above the, put your head above the parapet, even when things are tough, living out and for the glory of the gospel in one way or another.

[20 : 15] And crucially, Paul gives a hint on how to do that, because that is hard. But he says, I was able to do it, verse two, with God's help, with God's help.

And of course, there was wisdom to know when to stop and to move on, but as he did it, he's saying, I was probably cowering, and yet God helped me to continue to faithfully proclaim the gospel, even in the face of severe hardship.

But as he sort of gives us that key bit of information with God's help, our spirits acknowledge that is what we need, isn't it? You know, I am cowardly, I can be bold up here, but you know, when I'm down at the gym, I'm not necessarily so bold in sharing the gospel.

In fact, somewhat timid. But here's a reminder, I need to lean on the Lord a little bit more as we were singing, on his help. That's how I can do it.

You know, today there are all manner of objections to the gospel. Some of them are somewhat valid because Christian leaders have done exactly the things that Paul is wrongly accused of.

[21 : 25] Some parts of the world have said if you want to become rich, become a pastor. Others will object for similar reasons because of the morality of the Christian life or the exclusivity of the gospel.

Jesus is the only way to be saved and so on. And that can be hard, that can be discouraging when folks object in that way like it was for them. But here's the truth.

Here's the wider thing to kind of step back and see what was going on. God was at work in that city, wasn't he? As the gospel was proclaimed. You know, falteringly, stutteringly, somewhat timidly, but with, you know, increasingly with God's help, but it was being proclaimed and God was at work in that city.

And God is at work today in our cities, in this city. It's interesting that Paul says, as you know, again and again, he repeats that through the thing, you know the things that were happening.

So you know that what they're saying isn't true. God is at work in our cities, in villages, on campuses, amongst the addicted community, amongst the youth, and is inviting us to join with him in that work of gospel seed planting, of gospel seed watering, and just sitting back and letting him do the work that only he can do, which is open blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, bring dead and souls alive, born again, to new life in him.

[22 : 54] As they yield their lives to Jesus Christ as King, as Saviour, and as Lord. that communication of that dynamic is key.

As that message is put out, people are responding, they need to hear in order to respond to it, don't they? But that message about Jesus is at the heart of what we're proclaiming, and is at the heart of what we saw last week, Paul was proclaiming in Thessalonica.

He was asking, you know, as people were turning, we learned that they turned to Jesus as King, and so the objection was, oh, they're turning to another King other than Caesar. And so at the heart of the Gospel is the question, who actually is number one over your life?

Who wears the crown? And at whose feet have you placed your crown, as we were singing earlier? Can you? Could you? Do you?

Trust Jesus to be saviour, yes, and Lord over your lives? You know, to make sense of life, to have a sort of profound sense of meaning and value and purpose, you need to have several things, don't you?

[24:14] You need to have an origin story, you need to know kind of where you came from, to understand who you are. We need to know why we're here, and where we're going, a sense of kind of what is our purpose, and so on.

And so you need a sort of sense of history, a theology, a philosophy to be able to kind of navigate that, and maybe a songbook accompanying that for every occasion to kind of help you bring expression to the circumstances you face.

And for a long time in the West, the Bible and the Judeo-Christian worldview that came from it, if you were like, provided that foundation for not only Western civilizations, but for individuals' lives. That God was the originator of life. That the teaching that was drawn from the scriptures, its histories, its predictions, its diagnosis and prognosis of the human condition, even its songbook and its wisdom books, gave soul food for generations, sufficient for every circumstance.

That this gospel was transforming people's hearts and lives, but also nations. As Christians committed their lives to Christ, yielding the crown of their lives to him, placing it at the feet of his throne and saying, Lord, lead me.

[25:42] Lord, show me the way. And so his lives were being transformed, communities were transformed, family lives were being transformed, but also individuals.

And one of the things I'm telling everybody about is, if you're ever in London, go book into the Christian heritage tours, where you'll learn all about the things I'm about to tell you.

It is spine-tinglingly good and just utterly wonderful and will do good to your soul. But, you know, as you walk around just a small part of London, the guy who leads you will be able to tell you about the different individuals whom God used, whose lives are first of all transformed by the gospel, and then went on to bring transformation in the nation.

The Earl of Shastby, for example. You know, despite his privilege and position, had a heart for the poor, had a heart to see the education free for all, and it was him and his life that transformed education in England, giving, prompted free education for all.

It's said that when the Earl of Shastby died, the whole of London mourned, that children lined the thing with little placards saying, I was naked and he clothed me, and so on.

[26:59] Just the impact of one life. We also went into John Newton's church. Where he'd met with William Wilberforce, went into the vestry where he told William Wilberforce, don't go into the ministry, stray in politics.

And of course, Wilberforce was one of the folks who were influential in changing the attitudes to the slave trade and the abolition of slavery. And all of those guys followed on from a massive revival of the gospel, at the preaching of the Wesleys, John and Charles Wesley, as well as William Wilberforce.

And again, you can just go around to, you can see just along the road where John Wesley was converted. And this is all within just a very short, you know, a very small area of London.

And go to the place where George Whitefield started preaching and lives were being utterly transformed. And, you know, the Church of England began to object to his teaching.

Yet, despite the fact that many, many people's lives were being transformed and changed, and actually, even secular historians would look back on those days and those men and the sort of what was going on to say that actually that was probably what was solely responsible for the revolution that was happening in France, not happening in the UK in the way that it happened, that actually there was a revolution in the UK, things where, you know, society was turned right.

[28:29] But it was a bloodless revolution in comparison with France, built on a spiritual revolution, a transformation of the nation that happened as people turned to Christ in great numbers, as the great revivals were happening right across the UK at the preaching of the gospel.

You know, in recent decades, people have removed the crown. I will get back to the passage eventually, all right? In recent years, people have removed the crown, if you like, from the feet of Jesus, as we were singing earlier on, and placed it firmly and squarely back on their own heads, saying, nope, I am the ruler of my own destiny.

I will draw together my own playbook for life, if you like, in terms of origins, whether that's science and philosophy, the existentialist, deconstructionist philosophies for explanations of things, and

understanding of meaning and value and purpose.

The songbooks come from Spotify playlists and so on, giving air to the angst and aspirations. And you can understand why folks do that if they abandon God. But actually, in that, unknowingly, in the end, the only authentic thing that people can find is our own feelings.

That's all that ultimately that we have to go on, as we become radically individualistic because of the philosophies that we're listening to. Not realizing that whilst that all sounds fine to, in one extent, what if I feel like a certain person's skin color is not welcome in our community?

[30:04] And what if a lot of people think that and feel that? What if I feel that nationalistic patriotism should be a driving force in our society? Who is to say that that is wrong and right?

There's no God out there to tell me what is wrong and right. It's just what I feel, isn't it? We abandon right and wrong when we give in to radical individualism. And therein, ultimately, lies madness and actually an open door to the tyrant.

Of course, you know, we can talk about that. It's just my humble opinion. But I think that is observable in our society as we give up and we take back the throne, if you like. But, interestingly, more recently, as we've been saying at the beginning of the service, people have been discovering that actually life without God is not all that it's cracked up to be.

That there is a sense of kind of, it doesn't satisfy, give quick answers that satisfy a sense of meaning and purpose and value. As we consider ourselves just on this globe that's sort of randomly, by chance, floating around this sort of vacuum of space.

We live, we die, and that's it. No one remembers us. We have what Blaise Pascal in the 17th century, he was a mathematician and philosopher, and we have the God-shaped vacuum at the heart of every person.

[31:29] We discover that, that God-shaped hole. And because of that sense that he had, he also started to seek the Lord.

But those who have kind of abandoned in more recent years, beginning also to seek the Lord, having removed the crown from their own head and saying, I am not a sufficient answer to my own questions.

I am not a sufficient creator of my own story or origin or history or song. I need something else. I need a savior. It might not be how they particularly articulate, but that's how they feel.

I need something greater than I am. One who possesses wisdom sufficient, all knowledge and all power sufficient to satisfy the great questions that I have and the great need in me that I feel.

To begin to help me construct a value, a meaning and purpose that actually are robust and stand up to the realities of life. You know, Blaise Pascal was a genius in his own time.

[32:31] He wrestled with these very issues. And when he died in 1662, his servant found a small piece of parchment sewn into his coat, describing the knight in a sense that he took the crown from his own head and yielded it at the feet of Jesus.

He said at the top of the paper was a cross and underneath the cross were these words. I don't know if it's up on, can I put it on the screen? Is it there? Yeah. This is it, part of it.

And he said this, in the year of the Lord, 1654, Monday, November 23rd, from half past 10 in the evening till half past 12, so two hours, he said this, fire.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers or of the scholars. Certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace.

God of Christ Jesus, my God and thy God. Thy God shall be my God. Forgetfulness of the world and of everything except God. He is to be found only by the ways taught in the gospel.

[33:38] Greatness of the soul of man. Righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. By Jesus Christ, I have fallen away.

I have fled from him, denied him, crucified him. May I not fall away forever. We keep hold of him only by the ways taught in the gospel. Renunciation, he wrote, total and sweet, total submission to Jesus Christ and to my director, to king of my life.

Eternally in joy for a day's exercise on earth, I forget not thy words. Amen. Blaise Pascal recorded that, that kind of intense two hours of an experience of God as he yielded the crown of his life at the feet of Jesus.

It was an experience of God that gripped his soul and changed the course of his life. He stored the record of that in the lining of every jacket that he owned. He would sew it into the lining.

And when he got a new jacket, he would unsew it and stick it back in. And that's how his kind of servant found it after he had died. For him, Christ was his king.

[34 : 49] This great philosopher, and you know, philosophy means love of wisdom. This great lover of wisdom surrendered to the one who is the wisdom of the ages, who contains all wisdom.

And of course, his surrendering was dramatic and it may not be as dramatic for us. It may even be a whisper, even a whimper like C.S. Lewis said as he recorded his giving his life to Christ.

He said, I was in the top level of a double-decker bus. I surrendered to Jesus as king as what could only be described as the most reluctant convert in all England.

And it is an age-old problem, isn't it? It's in our day. It was in Pascal's day. It was in Paul's day. And Paul pointed to the one who is all-wise, who is the wonderful king, who is able to transform, who is able to save, who is able to lead, who is worthy of our affection, worthy of our following.

And as he did that, people gladly surrendered their lives to him, taking the crown from their heads, laying it at the feet of Jesus, taking it off the crown of the heads of the idols that they worship, the idols of their heart, to give it gladly to him.

[36 : 03] And that all happened because of the spirit of God, yes, but also because of the boldness of Paul. Not brashness, verse 2. It was a mark of authentic Christian leadership to keep preaching, teaching, living out the gospel, even when it's hard.

Ultimately, verse 2, with God's help. Remember when Isaac Shaw came and visited from India, he said this. Remember when he asked us to pray? He said this. Pray this every day.

Lord, use me. Lord, use me. It's an exciting prayer and an invitation to let us follow in Paul's footsteps, ultimately in the footsteps of Christ.

That's a very long point. The next points are really short. So just in case you're worrying. Okay. So he did it faithfully. He did it, verses 4 and 5, with God's approval. We speak, he says, as those approved by God.

Paul, of course, was an apostle. He was commissioned specifically by God as an apostle to the Gentiles, entrusted with the gospel to preach it and keep it faithfully. And so that's why we, if we want to follow the authentic gospel, we stick to the authentic gospel as preached and proclaimed, the apostolic gospel, which was learned at the feet of Jesus.

[37 : 27] And so he rightly knew that it wasn't his to jigger around with, and it is not ours to jigger around with either, giving in to the whims of passing cultures and philosophies.

That we do, as we learned in the last chapter of Revelation, that we do not take away from it, and we do not add to it, but seek to present it faithfully.

And as we do that, God is able to do amazing things. So boldly, faithfully, thirdly, servant-heartedly, with parental tenderness or with integrity.

Extremely briefly, here we get to sort of the nub of what I think Christian leadership is characterized. As he describes, this is how we didn't do it, verses 1 to 6, and then how we did do it in verses 6 to 11.

Verse 6, he says that though we had authority, and they had, we did not abuse that authority in the way that we handled it. You know, our culture is very wary of authority today, and for good reason, because of the abuses that have been in the workplace, as well as in churches and other organizations.

[38 : 35] But the problem is not authority itself. It is how we use it. Authority can be a good thing. We give authority to the governments to help lead us, and if they use that wisely, that is a good thing.

But when it is abused, that is not a good thing. And he says, you know how we acted amongst you. Verse 1, verse 3, verse 9. Remember how we did it.

Verse 10. You are witnesses to what we did. He said, this is how we were. Verse 7. And, you know, rather than abusing our power, he said, we were gentle.

We were like young children, or better translated, gentle among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children. So we cared for you. You used the most kind of intimate and, you know, kind of strongest bond to illustrate the kind of leadership that he exercised that was selfless and self-sacrificial like a nursing mother.

I changed the illustration. I remember hearing of a wildfire sweeping through very fast by a driving wind across a farm yard where there was keeping hens. And after the fire had passed, those who were looking around the charred remains, saw the charred remains of a mother hen.

[39:53] As they picked up the mother hen, what emerged was the chicks beneath her wing. Unharmful, selfless, sacrificial. That's what Paul is talking about.

We loved you so much, he said, that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well. Not just an open Bible, but an open life. How they handled the stresses and the successes and everything else in between.

As we lead our groups, as we're involved in different ministries, whether it's the kids work, our community groups, our NAVs, our Christians in Sport, the Christian Union, our Friends International, and the prisons, and Hope for Addiction Hub that we hope to start up, or wherever it is, or in our workplaces.

Open Bibles, open lives. Letting the gospel, seeking to let the gospel into every corner of our lives declare there, Christ is King. So he says, verse 9, surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil, our hardship, we work day and night.

It are not to be a burden to anyone while we preach the gospel of God to you. He was accused of being with these snake oil salesmen acting out of greed.

[41:05] But he said, what he's saying there, actually, is that we didn't take any money from you. Rather, they work day and night. We know that Paul was also a tent maker, and would make money from that, and to support his own ministry, so that it wouldn't be a burden.

He couldn't be accused of being greedy. He said another way, we didn't want your money. We did want to give you our message. It was really common in the old days where churches and communities would have different sales of things of work to help with the roof funds.

And it communicated the wrong message to the community. We want your money, rather than we'd love you to hear our message. And Paul knows that, and so he's working towards ensuring that there wasn't a burden to them.

See, authentic Christian leaders' leadership does not feed off the flock, propping up a fragile ego, filling its pockets, delighting and exerting authority and power over people.

But rather, authentic Christian leadership should feed the flock, feed the people, pointing continually to Christ, saying, he's the one. Look to him.

[42:11] Follow him. Know his love. Love him in return. Let him lead you. He is the one who rightly and well exercises power and authority.

He is the one who's king over your life. His kindness itself. His love itself. His goodness itself. His mercy itself. His compassion itself. He is utterly true.

Utterly fair. Utterly just. Utterly what we need for every occasion. That's where authentic Christian leadership points. Not to self, but a way to Christ.

Verse 10. Your witnesses. And so is God of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. And these are, in those verses, if you like, the relational currencies that we deal in as we seek to lead in whatever, whether we're a Christian in the workplace or in the church or in any ministry we're involved in.

And those currencies are holiness, righteousness and blamelessness. Now it's not that there's no room for fancy H. Spurgeon, who was a godly man who plumbed the depth and the height and the breadth of scripture, worked it out in his life.

[43:25] You know, was once rebuked by a woman in his congregation for having too much humour in his sermons, to which he replied, well, madam, if only you knew the number of things that I refrain from saying, you'd give me much more credit than you do.

That's not what Paul is saying, that it's just, it's sort of glum Christianity. It is beautiful, Christ-like, Christ-centered Christianity that we're seeking to work out in our lives.

Words, lives shaped by the gospel. Words that seek to build one another up, not just tear down. Words that are spoken in truth, but in love.

Not in idols, speculation, not in gossip. Words that seek to build one another up, not in worship, edifying words, spiritual words, as well as social things to discuss. Quick to apologise when spoken out of anger or in an inappropriate way.

Do you know what I mean? These are the, that's the currency that we deal in. Shaped by the gospel. And of course it's not room that, there's not saying, there's not room for hard things to be said at times.

[44:24] You can see, just look at the letter to the Galatians. Paul, you know, spoke directly to them, but always in love. To ultimately guide, build up, gently correct and point to Jesus.

Verse 11, for you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, a father seeking to train his kids in wise choices, encouraging, comforting, urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom.

These are the standards, he's setting the model for us to aspire to as we seek to lead in different spheres, whether that's within the church or with the church in our homes, in our workplaces, in the various ministries that we're involved in.

You know, some leaders will justify wrong behaviour or treatment of others or dodgy dealings because somehow they think that the ends justify the means. Oh, look how fruitful I've been despite all the things that I've been doing.

That is not the way that we work. That is not the way that we operate. It's interesting that, you know, Paul qualifies as I was fatherly among you. You know, maybe the experience of fatherliness, you know, we tend to be grumpy and short-temper.

[45:40] He's saying, no, that's not how fatherliness looks like. It's encouraging, it's comforting, it's urging to live lives worthy of God. It's interesting in his book, Powerful Leaders by Marcus Hunniset, where he's sort of looking to tackle abuses of leadership.

He says abuses of leadership happen in church and elsewhere when we deviate from the biblical servant leadership model. The model here in this scripture. And use manipulation, control, self-interest.

We lack accountability, we lack transparency and genuine care. Ultimately harming the gospel and gospel community. And here in these scriptures is the antidote to that.

That helps us to see, no, this is the way. Walk in it. And as you do that, actually, and time has gone on, you'll see that it produces authentic responses to the gospel in verses 13 onwards.

Where people receive the gospel. They believe the gospel. And they live out the gospel in verse 13. I'm going to skip over just, but I just want to say in closing, and as the band comes up, how do we respond to this?

[46:53] What is God speaking to us this morning? We've come, we opened our hearts at the beginning of the service to be still, know that he is God in our lives, over our lives, wanting him to speak. What has he been saying to us in the service?

Maybe as we've looked at the scriptures, maybe another part of the service, but as we looked at the scriptures, as he has modeled what it looks like to be in Christ, to walk closely with him, to keep in step with the Spirit, finding ourselves being changed by this wonderful gospel where Christ is not only Savior, he is Lord, he is King over our lives, we have surrendered our crown at the feet of Jesus.

Or is it that we just, we do, feel that sort of encouragement to be a little bit bolder in sharing, ensuring that we're faithful, ensuring that we're Christ-like in our leadership, in whatever area it is in our lives, in our homes or in our church ministries or other ministries or in our workplace.

Surrendering him to King each day, asking him, Lord, would you use me today? Surrendering to that love divine, that love's all excelling, to which we say, Lord, lead us.

Lord, transform us. Amen.