

Gospel Motive

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks so much, Elisa. Yeah, I'm looking forward to that. That's one of those fun things that getting out in the park together, you may think like, man, shouldn't we be here? Like, you know, worshiping God together. And you know what?

When God looks down and sees his people fellowshiping and enjoying one another, it glorifies him just as much as us lifting up songs of praise as well. And so, you know, we get to use that beautiful time of the year.

Hopefully pray for no rain for that October 5th moment. That would be great. But yeah, we're looking forward to that. If you got your Bible, go ahead and turn to 1 Thessalonians. And we're in chapter two today.

And while you get there, just thought I would relay this little story from this week. So we were sitting down and having dinner and I was talking with the kids about like asking them questions about like Thessalonica.

And it's like, hey, did you know what the name of that Roman road was by Thessalonica? And Rory, he's like quick witted. He just jumps in and he's like, what is it called? Vatican Way or something?

[0 : 5 9] So that's kind of the stuff we were dealing with. So Rory's adding to the copious amounts of rigorous academic commentary that is on this amazing letter.

So there you go. But anyways, as we look at this passage, it's an interesting shift away from Paul spending his time encouraging the people in Thessalonica with regard to their faith and the evidence of their faith and all that God has done and is doing with them.

Remember, it was kind of this amazing thing of Paul saying, gosh, we know the gospel has come to you with power and conviction and in the Holy Spirit because your life's changed in such a way that your faith has resounded out.

You become an example to all the believers, not just in Macedonia, but in Achaia as well. And your message rang out. You guys turned from idols to the serving, the one true and living God.

And so we see this amazing evidence of Paul giving glory to God for what the Thessalonian believers are doing. But now he shifts and he spends some time talking himself up and his ministry and what they did among them when they first came to Thessalonica.

[2 : 1 0] But Paul isn't the, he isn't like the master of the humble brag, right? He's not like, hey guys, you know, I have strengths, but I have weaknesses too. One of them is just, I care too much. You know, I just, I just spend too much time in prayer.

He's not doing that. But he is, it can come across this way. It seems that he is commending himself and their conduct amongst the people in Thessalonica and then we're there with them.

But he does that and he does that for specific reasons. He does that in other places like he did to the Corinthian believers where he keeps saying things like, hey man, consider my way of life.

I know some things that you maybe don't know when my calling as an apostle and he goes on to say like, he talks about those things. He said, you know what? I'm saying this. I must be out of my mind. I know I shouldn't be doing this.

Sounds totally wrong. I must be out of my mind and still he had to do it and there was times he needed to defend himself. There was times that Paul needed to defend his ministry and quite possibly this may have been one of those times because if Satan can't get us to doubt the truth of the gospel, he'll get us to doubt the messenger.

[3 : 14] Right? Guilt by association. He goes after their character. He goes after, so that we look at somebody and said, man, if that person is God's guy, if that's a gospel ambassador and that's the best that God can do, what kind of God is that?

And what kind of truth is that then? Hey, no thank you. Let's be honest, sometimes it works. There's plenty of scandals of celebrity pastors and ministries in the 20th and 21st centuries.

You can go back even further. We have heroes like Jonathan Edwards, that man I love and I love to read his sermons and what he added theologically was amazing. He was a major part of the first great awakening here in the United States during the 1700s and yet he was also a guy who owned slaves.

Martin Luther of Reformation fame, right? He was quite anti-Semitic. People who have had positive influence on Christianity over the generations often had parts of their lives that kind of make us blush.

They're parts of our lives that were like, man, we wish those parts of their lives just didn't exist. Recent histories, evangelical fallouts are often one of three moral failures.

[4 : 23] It's over sex or abuse of power and influence or it's over money. And when this happens, it feels like the gospel takes a hit and makes everyone a bit more cynical toward it and also cynical about the church, let's be honest.

And so Paul is kind of diving into defending his gospel ministry and showing a compelling reason for why, hey, we came with good motives not bad motives. And it gets us to ask this question when it comes to the gospel and being ministers of the gospel, what we are in it for.

And you and I, we can easily dissociate from a message like this because we don't see ourselves as apostles or preachers or out there being gospel ministers, but as disciples of Jesus, that is exactly what you and I are.

If you are saved by Jesus Christ, you are called into gospel ministry. Ministry isn't limited to the stage on a Sunday. The gospel doesn't need this platform to go forward.

Every place that you and I move into, every place that you encounter, every table, every dining room is a possible gospel opportunity. Your life is the platform that God needs for the gospel to go forward.

[5 : 34] So for followers of Jesus, you and I today and those who are looking into like this idea of Christianity and what it is all about, the question being asked is as gospel ministers, what is your motive?

What are you in it for? Verse one, the first Thessalonians chapter two, for you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive. But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak.

Not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery as you know, nor with a pretext for greed. God is witness.

Nor did we see glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. This is God's word.

[6 : 45] So back in the day, when I was much, much younger, in my teenage years, there was this company called Columbia House. You all remember Columbia House? And they would pray on naive people like me.

And they would send you something in the mail that you would read it and it would promise you 12 CDs for free or something like a cent, right? And you could pick out any 12 albums you want.

And then you had to fill in your information and your address and then lo and behold 12 CDs would show up in a couple of weeks. And so I did it once and it worked. Boom, 12 albums for free.

It was quite an amazing thing. And then in a month's time, I got a CD that I didn't order nor a CD that I wanted at all. It was like Bonnie Raitt or something, right?

So Columbia House wasn't aware that I wasn't a woman in her midlife crisis. It was, they were just sending stuff willy-nilly. And along with that very disappointing album showing up in the mail was also a bill that said, guess what?

[7 : 46] You need to pay for that thing we just sent you. Ah, the fine print, right? Now whether you're talking about free CDs or free vacations from timeshare companies, we quickly learn there is no such thing as a free lunch.

Anything too good to be true is just that. And so, let's be honest, life grooms us to be cynics about that kind of stuff. And so it is with the gospel of grace. We come to it and man, the message seems too good to be true.

Believe in Jesus, we say, and your sins will be forgiven and you get eternal life in heaven. And that is everything that you would want life on this earth to be and just even better than that.

More than you can imagine. Naturally, our response is, uh-huh, so where's the fine print? What do I gotta do? Just believe, that's it. We just think, okay, alright, mm-hmm, what's the catch here?

Where's the fine print? Tell me, where's that hook gonna happen? And I just wanna say, cynicism was just as ripe in Paul's days as it is in ours.

[8 : 52] Listen to N.T. Wright's commentary on this same passage. The ancient world had its fair share of wandering salesmen, traveling teachers, people who tried to make a living by offering their hearers fresh wisdom or insight, some kind of magic, a new philosophy or whatever.

When Paul and his companions arrived in a city and began to tell their strange story, many people must have thought, that's the sort of people they were. The knowing ones in the crowd, the experienced ones, would be waiting for the moment when the speakers produced a money bag and requested contributions or invited people to pay to hear more in private.

The cynical ones among them would be waiting for darker events still, for the speakers to single out special private instructions for those who were physically more attractive.

At the very least, it would be expected that newly arrived teachers would want to make a good name for themselves to be well known and well liked around the town. That was a legitimate thing.

That was happening back in the day. That's why Paul's got to be like, hey, we know these are the people you're used to. We ain't like those guys. And I just want to say to you in the room today, beware of preachers and teachers who give you a little bit up front and then offer the full thing behind a paywall.

[10 : 12] Just be cautious. I'm not saying everybody's at like doing that is bad but like, man, just be cautious about that. And sometimes they offer a secret truth that only they know.

They'll say things like, man, everybody else is getting this wrong today but I got it figured out. Or maybe they're offering you healing or a prophecy to give you or a surefire way to a better marriage or if you give me this much money, God's going to promise to answer that prayer that you've been wanting answered.

Here's the thing, people have used religion to get rich and powerful. It's not unique to our day. It's been going on for a long, long, long, long time. And that idea too wasn't new to the Thessalonians.

There was pagan religions that were also, people were optimizing that to become rich and powerful as well. It wasn't something that was just unique to Christianity. Now, I want to say this when it comes to like money and the gospel and all of that as Paul says like, hey, greed and all that isn't good but he also says in other places like 1 Corinthians 9 that there is wisdom and gospel virtue of feeding the ox who treads out the grain, right?

He's kind of talking about like, man, those who give full-time attention to gospel ministry, they have, it's okay for them to be supported financially for that. But then Paul goes on to say, he says that and then he goes on and pivots the argument to be like, but in fact, I don't even take up that right because I want my gospel message which is about the free gift of God's grace, of salvation, I want it to be based on grace.

[11 : 52] If you want to give me, if you want to fund and help support my ministry, go for it but I'm not going to demand it of you. And Paul never gave a little taste of the gospel and then suddenly turn and say like, and if you want to know the full thing, come tomorrow night and by the way, tickets cost 20 bucks.

He didn't do that. He knows that if he used that kind of grift, it would undermine the very message of the gospel because it would seem that it's just another way to make money and improve one's quality of life at the expense of others and instead of that, Paul displayed something very different both in his message and in his life and the way he did ministry and he brings his attention to that in verses 1 and 2.

You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain but though we have already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

Nothing tests our faith and our motives like suffering. That's what Paul's getting at. Suffering, that's a natural part of life. We don't want it but it's gonna come to us and I just wanna say this, when Paul is talking about suffering here, you know, not every suffering we endure is a test of our faith or directly related to our faith in Jesus Christ.

When I first moved to North Carolina in 2009, I gained 20 pounds and I did that for my poor eating choices and my health suffered, my back hurt a lot. That was not a test of my faith or an attack of the enemy.

[13 : 26] It was just a natural consequence of my attack on a package of Oreos. That's what was going on, right? And let me just tell you, I was winning every single time. And when we turn to idols and functional saviors, whether that be sex or food or money or drugs and alcohol, they are going to betray us and they're going to use us and we will suffer for it in various ways.

But the good news is that God can use those consequences to show us that he is better and way more satisfying in the very thing that our souls are actually crying out for.

He can use those bad things to bring about good. And that's a bit of what suffering might look like, turning from those things that promise comfort and security and control and turning to trust in the one true and living God.

That is a bit of suffering. That is a dying to ourselves in a lot of ways and we continue to do that but there's also some suffering for following Jesus. We risk being ostracized or left out or looked over or belittled or disowned simply because we stood for Jesus' righteousness and held fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's all suffering for the name of Jesus. That's what Paul and Silas experienced in Philippi that Paul references in those early verses that we just read.

[14 : 48] They were beaten and they were imprisoned for daring to preach the gospel of Jesus. And after God had rescued them quite miraculously out of that Philippian jail, they then went on to Thessalonica and experienced more persecution there.

They had to leave that place after just a few short days. But here's the thing that Paul's drawing attention to and helping us consider. Suffering for something reveals how much we really believe in it.

If someone is well paid for something they do, if they were to do it again, we would kind of assume the motive or the reason behind it at least partly is because of the money. Like at least they're getting compensated for the thing.

And Paul and his crew, they arrived in Thessalonica with the scars of suffering in Philippi and then he goes about preaching that same message that got him in trouble. And he doesn't seem to be afraid or care much about the consequences.

He's just saying, I am not going to be silenced. I am going to preach this gospel message. Where does that boldness come from? Well, Paul says it's boldness in God.

[15 : 57] For him and his team, it is boldness in God. Not in himself, not in his ability to be eloquent and provide fine sounding arguments. No, it's boldness in God, which means this, courage and suffering is actually a theological matter for you and me.

And you may say, how about Jesse, I'm not a theologian and actually everybody's a theologian. Theology is simply the study of who God is. And we all have an idea of who we think God is.

It's just a matter of whether that is right or wrong. And what do you know of God? What do I know of God? Is he the God, the God I believe in? Is he the God who has revealed himself in his word?

Or is he a God that I would like him to be? We're all theologians. Tim Keller said, a God who never contradicts your will or offends your sensibilities is just a false God that is merely a reflection of your own desires.

Who is the God you believe in? Paul can confidently say in verse three and four, our appeal didn't spring from error. They didn't have an erroneous view of God or any impurity like their gospel hadn't become infused with some false heretical view of who God was or any attempt to deceive but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak.

[17 : 23] He's saying the message I got is the message that God gave me and that's the one I'm gonna preach. You and I, we are called to share, we are called to teach, we are called to proclaim an unadjusted gospel.

And any generation is gonna face this challenge. In the 1990s, getting back to when I was a teenager in the early 2000s in my 20s, the gospel faced an assault of well-meaning heretics.

He wanted to make the gospel message more palatable to our modern context. And one of their theologians likened Christian doctrine to a big trampoline with a lot of springs.

And surely it's okay to take a spring out like say the virgin birth. That's really hard to believe. Do we really need to hold on to that doctrine? If we just take that one spring out of the trampoline, can't we still jump on it and have a good time?

Well, the problem with that line of thinking is who gets to decide which springs are no longer meaningful and why? And also, whose trampoline is that in the first place that we get to mess with?

[18 : 23] Like we're thinking about like if you were equating that to God's doctrine and the truth that God has revealed in scripture, isn't that then God's trampoline? We gotta be careful that we have the right to come and oh, that's an inconvenient truth.

Let me just pop that spring out. Don't you think God may have an issue with us removing his springs without him asking, without us asking him if that's okay?

So Paul says he didn't do that. He didn't come with any deceit. He didn't come with any impurity or error. He didn't adjust the gospel that God had given to him because he thought maybe in the Thessalonian context if I just don't bring that up, it just might take better.

And we're tempted to do that. It is so tempting to adjust the gospel. I mean, think about it from this angle. Mercy and compassion, they are godly realities.

And those things get stirred up in us as we see broken and hurting people. And sometimes those same people that are broken and hurting, they are sin.

[19 : 26] They have sin. They're sinners who sin. And we are so tempted to excuse that out of a heart of compassion, out of a heart of mercy. But here's the problem. When we minimize sin, what we end up doing is minimizing grace.

You cannot minimize sin without minimizing the grace of God. And when we minimize grace, we are minimizing God's power to forgive and heal the most important parts of us, the sin and the suffering that we truly live in.

and I just want to say this, man, integrity and intimacy, knowing God's love, those are inseparable things.

And we know that God's love is so good when we face up to it and that anything that we can do is not beyond the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for us and the blood that covers those sins and washes those sins away and removes them as far as the east is from the west.

We don't have to ignore sin or minimize it. We just leave the gospel unadjusted. So don't swing too hard to a gospel where God doesn't care about sin and also don't swing too hard to a gospel of woe that can't see God's delight in you as his beloved.

[20 : 45] Kind of that like hyper-Puritanism that is like you never get to see God as someone who delights in you. You're just like, oh, I am just a worm and that's all I ever am. Right? The unadjusted gospel of truth and grace will give us courage and suffering.

We don't have to manipulate it in any way. And here's the thing, it will keep us from compromising to benefit ourselves. That's often what we try to do when we're suffering. We try a way to get back in control or start to benefit ourselves in our suffering.

We get so focused on ourselves. And then unadjusted gospel will keep us from that. And as much as suffering reveals what we believe, I just want to say this, so can prosperity do the same thing.

Nothing exposes our motives like prosperity or the possibility of prosperity. Success is alluring. It is an alluring thing. Nobody wakes up in the morning and goes like, oh, I can't wait to fail today.

Right? Nobody does that. I profile as an Enneagram 3, if you're into that stuff. If you're not, hey, get on you too. But what that tells you is that I see life in terms of winning and losing, and I do.

[22 : 00] I absolutely do. Every endeavor to me is a scoreboard where I'm trying to stay ahead of my perceived competition. I want to be better. Why?

Because for me, success equals acceptance. And I get that through performance. That's my twisted, sinful, jacked up nature inside of me.

That God is, he's just sanctifying me all the time. Now maybe you get that, maybe you don't. But what is that for you? What is success for you? Success equals what?

Is it money? Is it marriage? Is it life of leisure? Is it like, you know, loving your family in a way and wanting them to be so close that you kind of want to be the Von Trapps or something, right?

What is your thing? What does success look like to you? If it's money, then you will go about excusing lying and cheating to hold on to it.

[22 : 57] If it's things like a relationship, you might excuse sins that God prohibits in order to hold on to it. And we convince ourselves that, man, God really doesn't care about those things.

And that's how we end up adjusting and compromise recognizing the gospel in order to succeed and to pursue prosperity. But the question for you and me is why would we do that?

Why would we? Surely you and I wouldn't do such a thing. Well, here's the thing. We go through life and as we go through life, we tend to build a false self around three core lies. I am what I do or I am what I have or I am what others think or say about me.

And here's the thing. You can prosper in any one of those core lies. But that has nothing to do with who you are in God's eyes. And when you and I, when we live out of that false self, we can become a slave to prosperity.

And yes, you can become a slave to prospering. If you must be prospering in career or parenting or marriage or finances or materialism or sexual fulfillment, then those things have become your gods instead of just good gifts from God.

[24 : 08] And they will call you to serve them at the expense of being faithful to God and the truth that his gospel calls us to. And at some point, you will be tempted to compromise for one of those things.

And we attempt to adjust the gospel to justify both our greeds and our needs. Or we do it for those we love that we think we can't live without.

So what's at the root of all that compromise? Well, it's who you're living to please. That's what Paul draws out in verses four to six.

But just as we have been approved by God, Paul knows he's already approved, so we speak not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Then he goes on to say, that's why we never came with words of flattery. We weren't trying to please you. We weren't impress you or get you to like us. Nor did we come with a pretext for greed.

[25 : 13] We weren't trying to line our pockets and gain influence and power anywhere. God is our witness. Nor did we seek glory from people. We weren't using you to get rich and famous.

Or to like climb some kind of weird religious corporate ladder where it's like, man, I just, like, you know, there was apostles in Paul's day and then there was super apostles in Paul's day.

I mean, we just add tiers like T-I-E-R-S, levels to like God's economy and kingdom. We're always thinking like, okay, what's the next step up that I could take here?

But Paul says we did none of those things. Instead, he had a gospel motive. The gospel motive is this. A gospel motive desires to please God alone.

That's it. And what's put before us here is that whether you find yourself in suffering or whether you find yourself in abundance, you can face it with a very different perspective and purpose.

[26 : 22] And these verses come from a guy who was, who had been going places in this world. before Paul was converted to Christianity, before he became a believer, he says he was a Pharisee of Pharisees.

Today's equivalent would have, he would have been a guy who got a Harvard MBA and graduated magna cum laude. And he was climbing fast in the religious ranks, getting people's attention.

Man, his trajectory, he was gonna be the next big thing in the Jewish religious world. and he left it all. Counted it all as rubbish in comparison to the heavenly calling in Christ, he said.

Rubbish. All that was trash. He lived toward eternity as the thing that most defined him. For him to live was Christ and to die was gain.

And here's the thing, if suffering defines us or if our prosperity defines us, then they will own us. They will. And we will never really live free in this life.

[27 : 33] Towards the end of his life, Tim Keller had, he died of cancer recently and one of his last kind of interviews that he had, he made this comment and I remember it just, I mean, it just was like, wow, that is absolutely phenomenal.

phenomenal. And he said that in a sense, drawing nearer to death and he knew his days were numbered. He said drawing nearer to death meant having to let go of the things of this world that he loved and yet, what he discovered is was in that letting go that he learned to truly enjoy them to the fullest.

and he's talking about things like his kids and his wife and the church that he belonged to, the city that he lived in.

None of those things were what he now needed. He was realizing he was about to lose all of them and yet, it was exactly because of that that he found a greater freedom to love and appreciate them all the more.

Sounds like a bit of a paradox, doesn't it? He went on to say he didn't need to find meaning from them or purpose for them.

[28 : 52] They no longer could give him any sort of glory or exaltation and so he was living in true freedom to love them and find joy in them as they were meant to be, as gifts from God to be enjoyed with God and for the glory of God.

And that is the most beautiful life lived by gospel motive to please God. Our new mission statement begins with this great gospel motive, glorify God.

That's what we want to do. We want to glorify him, not just on a Sunday but every moment of the week. how do we glorify him?

By enjoying him, trusting in him, living in him, obeying him, doing what pleases God, not adjusting a gospel, the gospel that he has entrusted to us.

It's not to please man, it's not to please ourselves, it's to please him and surprisingly that is the greatest freedom and the freedom that only the gospel offers.

[30 : 02] As the band comes up and we look to respond. In a moment we're going to take communion and I just want to say if you're here and not yet a follower of Jesus, don't come to the communion table. Your first step into this life of freedom that only Jesus offers is to put your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

He is the one who came and lived a life you couldn't live. He suffered and died in your place to pay the penalty for your sin so that you wouldn't have to suffer eternally. And he rose again to life and ascended into heaven where he is now ruling and reigning over everything and over his kingdom.

And he invites you into his death and he also invites you into his resurrection triumph over death and he does that because he loves you. There's going to be a prayer on the screen for you to pray and I want to encourage you to pray that.

Now if you're here and you're already a follower of Jesus I want to say as we come to the table let's reflect on a few things.

First this very simple meal glorifies Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He died and defeated death when he rose again.

[31 : 18] And in this meal what we are doing we are coming to the table and remembering him but we are coming to partake of this and we feast.

We eat and drink to his glory. We eat and drink to his glory and before you and I we come to the table today I want us to think and consider what is your motive in this life?

What are you living for? Is it to glorify God? Is it to please him or is it to please man?

Let me pray and when I'm done praying you can go when you're ready you can go to the table nearest you. Lord we come to the table.

Some of us are coming to the table. We're going to grab bread and a cup. Your body broken and your blood shed for us. And we're going to partake of that and enjoy communion with you and remember that you are the Lord and Savior who died for us to set us free.

[32 : 30] That we can live free from all the things and the trappings of life to please you and not to please man. To please you and not to please ourself. To please you and not even in the face of suffering or prosperity and we thank you for that.

I pray for my friends in this room who are considering giving their life to you Jesus Christ. Surrender and in prayer and in faith that you indeed are Lord and Savior.

And I just pray that you encourage them towards that and meet us right where we are at. Pray this in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.