**1 Thessalonians 2:1-4**

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**What Is God’s Calling For You?**

***1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. 3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4 but 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.***

* This morning we come to the second chapter of Paul’s first letter to the church of the Thessalonians.
  + After having expressed his thanks to God for all that He had done in blessing and establishing this faithful church in chapter one, Paul now comes to the next purpose of his letter . . . a defense of himself and his missionary team from accusations that they had used their ministry as a pretext for taking financial advantage of the unsuspecting Thessalonians.
* From what we learn of Paul in the New Testament, he was a humble man who always very scrupulous about not being a burden on those he ministered to and always attempted to deflect any praise away from himself and onto the Lord.
  + So, for Paul to be put into a position of having to **commend himself** for all that he had done must have been difficult and distasteful.
  + But, because of the accusations against him, Paul is forced to recite all the things he had done in his service to the Thessalonians in order to refute the charges against him by his enemies.
* And although Paul probably found it distasteful to have to “toot his own horn,” **we are fortunate to have this passage** because this passage gives us a rare glimpse into who Paul was and how he went about serving the Lord in ministry.
  + One of the things that we always wish, as we read Scripture, is to know some of the back story . . . what was life like for Paul as he traveled from place to place? . . . how did Paul and the other evangelists live and function in each city they came to? We always long to know “more of the story.”
  + Well, here in this passage we are given some rare insight into Paul’s ministry life as Paul is compelled, by the circumstance of false accusations, to defend himself. So, despite the discomfort it caused Paul to write these things, we are grateful for the opportunity for the opportunity to gain some insight into who Paul was.
* We were first introduced to the issue of spurious accusations against Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 & 9, when he first mentions the matter . . .

***1 Thessalonians 1:5b— . . . you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.***

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***1 Thessalonians 1:9a— For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you***

* So, having first hinted at the charges against him in chapter 1, here in chapter 2 Paul takes up the matter directly, and in earnest.
* And the first line of defense Paul uses in his defense of himself and his ministry is to call upon the Thessalonians to validate, through their own experience, the result of what was accomplished while he was among them. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul calls them to remember . . .

***1 Thessalonians 2:1— For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,***

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* Here in v. 1 the phrase, ***our coming to you was not in vain***, has caused some disagreement among scholars. The disagreement comes in interpreting the meaning of the term ***in vain***.
  + The Greek word used here, *kenos*, can mean either “empty-handed” or “actions that result in nothing being accomplished.”
  + The question is, which does Paul intend here? In fact, both meanings seem to apply here.
  + Paul **was** accused of coming to the Thessalonians with “empty hands” . . . meaning, he was accused of seeking to enrich himself by manipulating and defrauding them.
  + But, on the other hand, Paul **was also** accused to preaching a message that was devoid of truth and left the Thessalonians with nothing but empty words.
  + So, which is intended here by Paul?
* While both meanings have validity, **the context seems to favor the view that Paul has the second meaning in mind here . . . that he is calling upon the Thessalonians to judge him according to the validity of the message of the gospel.**
  + In other words, **was the gospel message I preached to you true and life-transforming or was it nothing more than empty words that had no effect?**
* Knowing the profound effect that the Holy Spirit had already wrought in the lives of the Thessalonian believers, here in v. 1 Paul calls upon the Thessalonians to validate the message of the gospel. And the first means of validating his ministry among them was to call to mind their own experience with him . . . ***for you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain*** . . . **your transformed lives are evidence that the gospel message is the power of God.**
  + **If someone accuses me of preaching a useless and worthless message, you need only point them to the change that has occurred in you to refute that accusation.**

**Remember how much we suffered for the gospel**

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***v. 2— but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.***

* The second argument that Paul uses in his defense against his accusers is found in v. 2 . . . ***but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.***
* In this second point in his defense, Paul calls upon the Thessalonians to recall the events surrounding their arrival in Thessalonica.
  + Remember, in Acts 16 Paul and his companions arrived in Philippi after having received the calling of “the man of Macedonia” in a dream. And while they were successful in planting a church, the events that precipitated their departure from Philippi were very painful.
  + Having cast a demon out of a servant girl, Paul and Silas are arrested and condemned without trial. Having been publicly stripped and flogged, the two men were then put in prison, with their feet held in stocks.
  + Following the night in prison, which saw an earthquake and the salvation of the Philippian jailer, Paul and Silas cite their Roman citizenship as grounds for accusing the local magistrate of violating Roman law by having them condemned and flogged without a trial.
  + Leaving Philippi, Paul and his entourage arrive in Thessalonica.
* With the wounds of their flogging still fresh and raw, the story of what happened in Philippi would have soon been known to the Thessalonians as they saw how Paul and Silas moved.
  + It is this . . . the fact that the Thessalonians knew the story of what had happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi . . . that Paul now calls to their remembrance.
  + In effect, Paul is saying . . . **“you remember what happened to us in Philippi . . . what suffering we endured . . . how injured we were when we first came to you. And yet, despite our unjust suffering, we still came to you in boldness and proclaimed the gospel of God . . . even as we faced even greater opposition in Thessalonica!”**
  + And based upon their terrible experience in Philippi, Paul and Silas and Timothy were faithful to continue to preach the gospel of God.
  + **Although Paul doesn’t say it explicitly, by reading between the lines, you can see that Paul is saying . . . having been treated so horribly in Philippi, what sane person would risk the same result in Thessalonica??? After all, the Jews and pagans in Thessalonica were even more hostile toward him than those in Philippi!!**
  + And Paul’s point is a good one. Even conmen and thieves are smart enough to know when the risk far exceeds the reward. Who, but a group of men called and commissioned by God, would dare set foot into another lion’s den and invite more abuse?

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**v. 3-4 Motives of the messengers**

**v. 3 Denial of 3 negative motives**

***v. 3— for our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit***.

* Then, after having first called upon the Thessalonians to remember the events surrounding their first arrival in Thessalonica, in v. 3-4 Paul cites **their motives, as messengers of God**.
* First, in v. 3, Paul gives his adamant denial of **3 negative motives** for which he was being accused **. . . *for our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit***.
* The first negative motive Paul was being accused of perpetrating on the Thessalonians was that of **doctrinal *error***.
  + In other words, Paul had been deceived by false teaching and was propagating that false teaching upon the Thessalonians.
  + The accusation of propagating false teaching is a common accusation by those who reject the truth. We who believe in the doctrines of grace and reformed theology are often accused of being false teachers. Why? Because those who disagree with us are so sure of their own views and see our views as being so abhorrent to them that they grasp at any accusation they can to discredit our teaching and us.
  + This accusation of **doctrinal error** was a very common accusation made against Paul, especially by the Jews and the Judaizers.
* The second negative motive Paul was accused of was of ***impurity***.
  + The term ***impurity*** can refer to one’s **moral *impurity*** or one’s **impure motives**. Here, in this verse, the term ***impurity*** refers to the latter. The accusation of ***impurity*** was an accusation against Paul’s **motives** for preaching . . . that his gospel was being preached out of a motive of **personal gain and greed**.
* The third negative motive that Paul says he is accused of here in v. 3 is that of was ***deceit***.
  + This term was used to accuse Paul of **willful deception** of the Thessalonians to accomplish his **impure motives**.
* Although there are three negative motives listed here . . . ***error, impurity and deceit*** . . . we can see that all three really fall under the same umbrella. All three negative motives accuse Paul of willful deception for the purpose of defrauding and taking advantage of the Thessalonians.

**It is God who “*approves*” His servants**

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***v. 4— but 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.***

* Then, in contrast to the three negative motives listed in v. 3, in v. 4 Paul responds by giving **the one, single positive motive that truly motivated himself, Silas and Timothy . . . *but 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.***
* Here in this verse we learn Paul’s true motive in ministry . . . his true motive for enduring severe hardship and persecution.
  + And to help us understand the significance of what Paul is saying here, I want to first define an important term that is used **twice in this verse**. The term I want to define is the Greek term *dokimazō*. This term is important because of what it illustrates.

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* + This term is also important because **it is translated in different ways in this verse.**
  + Here in v. 4 the term *dokimazō* is first translated ***approved***, but at the end of the verse it is translated ***examines***.
* To begin with, the term *dokimazō* is a term that is used in metallurgy and has several nuances.
  + First of all, the term *dokimazō* means “to test, examine or scrutinize” a object to determine its authenticity and purity.”
    - If you were to find a nugget of gold, you would take it to an expert, such as a goldsmith, who could determine not only the genuineness of the nugget, but also its purity.
  + Secondly, the term *dokimazō* refers to “the process of determining the purity of an object.”
    - Using the same example, if you were to take a nugget of gold to an expert, he or she would subject the nugget to testing to determine the purity of the nugget.
    - Furthermore, during the refining process of that gold nugget, the goldsmith could continually test the purity of the metal until all the impurities had been removed.
* And how are the impurities removed?

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* + In the process of refining metals, impurities are removed by heating the metal until it melts. With the metal having melted, the impurities are released from the metal. With the metal being heavier than the impurities, the impurities . . . or dross . . . float to the surface and the metallurgist skims the dross off. With the impurities removed, the metal is allowed to cool.
  + Then, once the metal has cooled, the process is repeated . . . over and over. Each time, more and more impurities are removed until the metal is finally free of impurities.
  + But notice, **throughout this refining process, the metal is undamaged in any way**. In fact, through the removal of impurities, the quality and value of the metal is actually increased.
  + So, despite the intense heat of the refining process, the metal is actually made more pure and more valuable.
* The reason this is such a wonderful illustration is because **that is the process that each of us is subjected to in our sanctification**.
  + Every time we enter into a period of affliction, trial or suffering, God is subjecting us to this refining process.
  + And we all know that the refining fire can be painful. Trials and suffering can sometimes be severe. But, knowing that God is using the fire of affliction and suffering to purity us, **we know that God has a good purpose and good outcome intended for us**.
    - When the dross of imperfection and sin are slowly removed, our faith is made more pure.
* This process of purification is taught in other passages of Scripture. Several weeks ago I cites one of the passages when I taught on the subject of **joy in suffering**. In James 1:2-4 we see this refining process beautifully stated . . .

***James 1:2-4— 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***

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* + Here in James 1 we see the promised outcome of our affliction and suffering . . . ***so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing***. In other words, **so that you will be sanctified and your faith be made complete.**
  + In 1 Peter 4:12 the apostle Peter exhorts us to understand God’s purpose for affliction with the same imagery . . .

***1 Peter 4:12— Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.***

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* + In other words, **don’t be surprised . . . and certainly don’t complain . . . that God causes you to suffer. It’s part of the refining process that we are all subject to. God is using our affliction to purify our faith.**

**What does Paul teach us about the outcome of God’s refining process?**

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***but 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.***

* So, that is the **refining process**. But what is Paul teaching us here in this verse about the **outcome** of this refining process?
  + Here in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul says of himself, Silas and Timothy . . . ***just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak . . .***
  + Here in this statement Paul is emphasizing the fact that **as Christians who had been called by God to serve in the capacity of an apostle and evangelist, their lives of perseverance in affliction was evidence that he, Silas and Timothy had been *approved by God*** . . . that the purity of their faith was valid in God’s sight.
  + And having ***been approved by God***, Paul now states that the role God had given to himself, Silas and Timothy was ***to speak*** . . . to preach the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ.
* Then, having stated that their God-given role was ***to speak***, Paul then emphatically states who it is that approves their message . . . ***not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.***

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* + Never a man to compromise or seek to be a **“man-pleaser**,**”** even in the face of certain persecution and possible death, Paul is the prototypical missionary. He received and faithfully fulfilled his commission from the Lord, stated in Acts 9:15, to be ***a chosen instrument of [Christ], to bear [His] name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.***
* But, as Paul states in the final phrase of 1 Thessalonians 2:4, the **reason** he and Silas and Timothy were able to fulfill their commission was because it is ***God who examines our hearts***.
  + From what we have learned about the refining process today, we can understand Paul’s statement to be that **these three missionaries were able to fulfill their commission because God had tested them and approved their faith as genuine. And through their continued affliction and testing, God was showing everyone . . . including these three evangelists . . . that their faith was pure.**
  + **Their motives were pure because God had given His seal of approval to them as messengers who were commissioned to carry forth the message of the gospel.**

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**How were Silas and Timothy called?**

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* As I was studying this passage this week I was struck by the message Paul is teaching us here about his call to be a missionary and evangelist. And thinking about what we know about Paul, I tried to learn what I could about Silas and Timothy. Admittedly there is nothing outside of Scripture to help us learn about these men.
  + We learn from Acts 15:22 . . . during Paul’s visit to Jerusalem to address the conflict over whether Gentile believers were required to adhere to the Mosaic law . . . that Silas was a Jew and a member of the Jerusalem church.
  + And, like Paul, though a Jew, Silas was a Roman citizen.
  + He was evidently a man of strong faith and character because he was chosen by the apostles to accompany Paul back to Antioch as an emissary of the Jerusalem church.
  + Silas was moved to remain in Antioch and he became a valued member there.
  + But when Paul set out on his second missionary journey, Silas chose to join Paul.
* Of Timothy we know even less. In Acts 16:1-3 we learn . . .

***Acts 16:1-3— 1 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, 2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted this man to go with him . . . .***

* + Though only briefly acquainted with Timothy, Paul was able to discern Timothy to be a man of faith and took him along on what was, admittedly, a very dangerous journey.

**How do I know if I am called to ministry?**

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* In studying these men, the question that came to mind was, **how does a person know if he or she is called to ministry by the Lord? How do pastors and missionaries and evangelists know if God has called them to serve in these capacities?**
* I remember when I was a new believer, about 35 years old, that the new, young associate pastor of our church in Texas, who was a recent seminary graduate, encouraged me to go to seminary. And not only did he encourage me, but he encouraged several other new believers to go to seminary.
  + I had no desire to go to seminary and said so. But one of the men did follow the advice and did go off to seminary. Selling his successful veterinary practice, he packed up his family and moved to California to attend seminary.
  + He was a new believer and had zealous and idealistic expectations about seminary and learning God’s word with other men . . . sitting as the feet of great teachers. But by the end of the first semester he was disillusioned and disappointed to find that seminary did not live up to his idealistic expectations. He left school and returned to Texas, frustrated and disappointed.
* **Why was he disappointed?** Because, being a new believer, he wanted to serve God, but he didn’t know how. Having a zeal for Christ, he didn’t take the time to seek to know God’s will for him. So when a young pastor, whom he admired and respected, encouraged him to go to seminary, he took the young pastor’s advice rather than seeking the Lord’s will for him.
  + However well intended the advice was, it was not God’s will or calling for him to go to seminary at that time. And as a result, the outcome was not successful and the new believer was wounded and discouraged by the experience.
* I have heard other stories of men and women who have gone off to the mission field to be missionaries, only to quickly return home, disappointed and defeated. Why? Because it was not God’s calling for them.
* God has a plan for each of us. And for as much as we may desire something, it is crucial that we seek God’s leading before making a decision.
  + We have a clear knowledge of God’s calling upon Paul to be an apostle and missionary. But we have less insight, from Scripture, of God’s calling upon Silas and Timothy. We must assume that they understood God’s will for them in this matter.
  + And the reason we can assume that it was God’s will for Silas and Timothy to join Paul was because they did not abandon Paul when the persecution began.
  + Had Silas not been called and appointed by God, he would have abandoned Paul after the incident in Philippi. And the fact that both Silas and Timothy remained faithful to their calling, even in the face of mounting and persistent persecution, is further evidence that they were divinely appointed to their positions.

**What Is God’s Calling For You?**

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* At some time in the future some of you here this morning may feel called to serve God in a very special way . . . such as a pastor, or missionary or some other special ministry position. **How are you to know if this is God’s calling or your own heart’s desire spurring you?**
  + As with all things, **seek the Lord in prayer**. Ask God to lead you in the direction He wants you to go. Pray that He will open the doors that only He can open and close the doors that only He can close.
  + Search your own heart to try to discern if your desire is a calling by God or simply your own will or ego seeking to be fulfilled.
  + This process is not a quick process. Sometimes it takes awhile for us to discern God’s will or for God to reveal his will for our lives.
  + In some instances God affirms the stirring in our heart, but in some instances . . . such as Jonah . . . our hearts resist God’s will.
* I told you a few minutes ago that as a new believer it was not my desire to attend seminary when I was encouraged to go. But later I did attend seminary classes, out of a desire simply to be equipped to teach Sunday school and serve in church leadership.
  + I’m glad I didn’t go to seminary as a new believer because my experience was much the same as the other man I just spoke of. I, too, was disillusioned and disappointed by what I saw and experienced in seminary.
* I will also tell you that it was never my desire nor intention to become the pastor of a church. I have always been grateful to God that he has allowed me to do what I always dreamed of doing . . . being a fighter pilot and an airline pilot. And I was content serving in the church as a Sunday school teacher.
  + But through a sequence of events that I never could have anticipated, I was thrust into a position in which I was called to serve in this capacity.
  + I could never have dreamed of a scenario in which I would be standing here before you this morning, proclaiming God’s word to you. But, by the will of God, here I stand.
  + I’m sure that many of you will experience the same thing during your lives . . . finding yourselves in places, doing things in service to the Lord, that you would never have envisioned. And I praise God that He works in such wonderful ways.
* God does, truly, work in wonderful and mysterious ways. My prayer for every one of you is that in whatever capacity God chooses to use you . . . and He will use every one of you . . . that you embrace and excel in God’s chosen purpose for you. I pray that you will be faithful servants in whatever capacity God has purposed for you.