



Jesus People – The Bond We Share
1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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We need each other. We cannot become fully devoted followers of Jesus alone. We cannot be vibrant disciples of Jesus alone. We can't do it alone. And we don't have to, because of the bond we share as brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the most intense stories of human bonding is the story of Easy Company during World War II. You've probably heard of the movie *Band of Brothers*. It's the true story of Easy Company parachuting behind enemy lines on D-Day, 1944.

They were called a "band of brothers." Because they trained together. They ate together. They ran together. They left home together. They parachuted into Europe together. They laid in foxholes together. They faced danger together. They bled together. And they died together. And they celebrated victory together. This is picture of Easy Company atop Hitler's Eagles Nest retreat in 1945. They shared a bond few people experience.

The movie included interviews of these men, much older men, reflecting on their time at war. Bill Guarnere, who lost a leg in the war, said, "I was just one part, and I was proud to be a part of it. Sometimes, it makes me cry." Don Malarkey, who died just last week, said, "I served with men so brave, it was unbelievable. I don't know anyone I admire more. But when your friends go down, you never forget them." And Major Dick Winters said, "My grandson once asked me, 'Grandpa, where you a hero in the war?' Grandpa said no. But I served in the company of heroes."

Through the years, Easy Company gathered for many reunions. Because of what they went through. Because of the bond they shared. This "band of brothers" is a wartime example of the incredible bond that can exist between human beings.

The passage we are going to look at this morning is about that bond. It is about the bond between Paul and the young believers at Thessalonica.¹

Paul was the first to introduce Christianity to Europe. He spent three weeks in Thessalonica teaching the gospel. Acts 17 tells us that many believed. But the religious leaders opposed Paul and threatened his life, so he had flee the city. In the weeks ahead, Paul worried about these new believers. Were they safe? Did the gospel take root? So Paul wrote a letter, expressing his love for them and also challenging them to stand firm in their new faith.

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at Paul's challenge to "walk in a manner worthy." A challenge that is compelling and direct. A challenge that forces us take a look at ourselves. A challenge "exhorting and encouraging and imploring" us to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls (us) into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, NAS). ***More than anything else, Jesus people want to walk in a manner worthy of the love and sacrifice of their Jesus. But you can't do it alone.***

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians was straight from his heart.² "Having such a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our

own lives, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8, NAS). And longing to see them, he wrote, “We were all the more eager with great desire to see your face” (1 Thessalonians 2:17). Why? Because he loved them, and because he wanted them to live like Jesus people. ***More than anything else, Jesus people want to walk in a manner worthy of the love and sacrifice of their Jesus. But you can’t do it alone.***

WE SHARE A LIKE BELIEF

So, let’s talk about the bond we share. ***We share a like belief in the gospel, and so did the Thessalonians.*** “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NAS).

Paul was so pleased that the gospel took root in their hearts. He thanked God for them, and he prayed for them, that they would walk in a manner worthy.

They received the gospel “not as the word of men,” but as “the word of God.”³ The gospel is not some philosophy. It is not human invention. It is the “word of God.” As Paul said to the Romans, “It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16, NIV).⁴

The Bible says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV). When you become a Christian, you may look the same, you may weigh the same, but you are not the same. You are a new creation; with a new heart, a new life, and a new destiny.

Just like the Thessalonians, we share a like belief in the gospel.⁵ We believe in Jesus. We believe in His crucifixion. We believe in His resurrection. We believe in heaven. And we believe we will see Him one day because of our faith in Him.

The Bible says, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27, NAS). We wear the same jersey. We’re on the same team. We are “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, NAS).⁶ We share the same story. The details of our stories may be different, but we all came to God through the same door, through faith in Jesus. And hopefully, all of us, as Jesus people, want to walk in a manner worthy of the love and sacrifice of Jesus. ***But you can’t do it alone.***

WE SHARE TOUGH TIMES

Like the “band of brothers,” we share tough times. ***We share tough times, and so did the Thessalonians.*** They endured persecution. “For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews” (1 Thessalonians 2:14, NAS). They shared tough times.⁷

And so do we. As friends, we walk through life together and face cancer, pray for a prodigal child, endure a rocky marriage, suffer a job loss, encourage each other through disappointment and

doubts. As the Bible says, we “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). We “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15, NAS).

We know the benefit of friendship during tough times. As King Solomon said, “Two are better than one ... If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, NIV).

The point of spiritual friendships is care and challenge, comfort and encouragement. That’s why Paul later said in 1 Thessalonians, “Encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NIV).⁸ Do you get his point? ***You can’t do it alone.***

WE SHARE A MUTUAL LOVE

We share a mutual love for each other, and so did the Thessalonians. Paul’s heart overflowed in verse 17. “Since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person but not in heart, we were all the more eager with great desire to see your face” (1 Thessalonians 2:17).

Paul’s life was threatened and he had to flee Thessalonica. He felt “torn away” from the Thessalonian people.⁹ The word means to be orphaned. In chapter 2, he already described his love for them as a mother and a father. Paul felt like he had left them as orphans. He also felt the grief of a parent losing a child! As he said in 2:8, “Having such a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.”¹⁰ So, he was “all the more eager with great desire to see (their) face” (1 Thessalonians 2:17).

When I’ve gone on missions trips, some for two weeks, the best part is coming home. The moment I go through customs and the door opens, I fix my eye level at 5'2" and look for Kathy. And then I see her. Her smile is bigger. Her hug is tighter. There’s nothing like coming home to those you love.

Paul strings together three emotionally charged words when he said, “We were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.” His heart overflowed. He loved them so much, and he longed to see them again.

So, let me ask you, do you have friends like that? You may say, “Sure, I’ve got friends. I’ve got friends I hang out with.” But I’m talking about more than a golfing buddy or a Facebook friend.

- Who really knows you?
- Who really cares about you?
- Who challenges you? Who speaks truth into your life? Who do you *invite* to speak truth into your life?
- Who are you completely honest with? Who knows your secrets? Who do you confess your sins to?

- Who tells you when your zipper is down or when you have food stuck in your teeth?
- Who do you go to when you're facing a tough decision?
- Who would you call at 2:00 in the morning if something terrible happened?
- Who encourages you and cheers you on? Who believes in you and pushes you to reach your potential? Who urges you to press on in your faith?

And here's why you need a friend like that. Because life is tough. Real life is filled with struggle, with questions, with discouragement. We need friends. You can't do it alone.

Paul wanted to see his friends so much. "For we wanted to come to you ... more than once ... yet Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18, NAS). Yes, Satan has the power to meddle in our lives. He has the power to tempt us and to trip us. Peter said, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, NAS). That's why we need each other.

The crescendo of the passage is verses 19-20. "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, ESV). "My greatest joy is you! My greatest love is You!" That's what Paul was saying. And to us, he is saying the greatest joy and the greatest love should be our spiritual relationships.

A great joy will be the day we stand before Jesus and see Him face to face. An even greater joy will be standing before Jesus with those we love and with those with whom we have shared the gospel. That will be our "crown of boasting." That will be, as Paul said, "our glory and joy." You can't take your money to heaven. You can't take your house to heaven. The only thing you can take to heaven is friends, family, those you love, and those with whom you have shared the gospel. As Paul said, "That's my glory. That's my joy."

INTERVIEWS

Think about the bond we share. We share a like belief in the gospel. We share tough times. And we share a mutual love for each other. That's the basis for spiritual friendships. I want to invite several folks on stage to talk about the spiritual friendships in their lives.

- Bruce and Angie Moore – (1) Tell us about your small group, how long you've been meeting, and what happens in your small group. (2) Share a story about a time when your small group helped you two as a couple.
- Mike Elford – Mike, you're in a men's group. Tell us how that group has helped you grow in your faith.
- Patty Evans – (1) Patty, tell us about your ladies' small group and how it has helped you through the years. (2) What would you say to anyone here this morning who is not in a small group? Perhaps, they don't think they need it or don't think they have the time to commit to one.

Let me appeal to you. Some of you don't think you need this. You tend to be self-reliant, and are proud of it. Let me challenge you on that. That's not what godly character looks like. That's not how Jesus wants you to live. You can't do it alone. You need spiritual friends to encourage you when you're down and to challenge you when you drift. I urge you to get into a small group with friends who will care about you and challenge you.

And some of you are still disconnected. You don't feel connected to our church yet. You don't have the kind of spiritual friendships we've been talking about. So, we want to help. There is a table in the lobby where people can help you find a small group. But you've got to take that step. You've got to make an effort to get connected, and we will do everything we can to help you.

More than anything else, Jesus people want to walk in a manner worthy of the love and sacrifice of their Jesus. But you can't do it alone.

NOTES

¹ Paul traveled to Thessalonica after a man in a vision summoned him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Thessalonica was developed in 315 BC by Cassander – a student of Aristotle, a general in the army of Alexander the Great, and married to Alexander’s sister Thessalonica. Cassander named the city for his wife. Thessalonica was situated along the Via Egnatia, the famous commercial highway connecting Europe and Asia. Its original name was Thermai, named for its famous hot springs and its harbor on the Thermai Gulf.

² Paul’s letter to the Galatians was a rebuke. “I am amazed at how quickly you have deserted Jesus and His gospel” (Galatians 1:6). His letter to the Corinthians confronted a church in chaos. His letters to the Romans and the Ephesians were highly theological. But his letter to the Thessalonians was his most affectionate.

³ See John 1:12, in which John used the words “received” and “believed” interchangeably, just as Paul did with “received ... accepted ... believed” in 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

⁴ Paul described the power of the gospel when he wrote to the Corinthians. “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, NIV).

⁵ This was true on the first day of the church in Acts 2. “All those who had believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44, NAS).

⁶ See Ephesians 4:3-6.

⁷ Paul vents his righteous anger toward the Jewish religious leaders in verses 15-16, “who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved – so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!” (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, ESV). Another version reads, “They continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last” (1 Thessalonians 2:16, NLT). Paul knew what he was talking about, because he was one of them. Before he was Paul, he was Saul. Acts 8 tells us that Paul-Saul was there the day Stephen was stoned to death, and “on that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem ... (and) Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:1, 3, NIV). Paul was on the other side of persecution now; he had been “beaten with rods” in Philippi (Acts 16:22). So, Paul had great empathy for what the Thessalonians were suffering.

⁸ This was personal for Paul, as he wrote in a letter to one church. “I long to see you ... that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:11-12, NIV).

⁹ The Greek word is ὀρφανίζω, meaning to be orphaned.

¹⁰ Paul expressed his affection for the Philippians, when he wrote, “I have you in my heart” (Philippians 1:7).