

God Pleasers • 1 Thessalonians 2:4

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Churchill

1. Winston Churchill knew that public favor was no proof of real success.
2. Once, after he gave a speech for which 10,000 people came out, a friend asked, "Winston, aren't you impressed that 10,000 people came to hear you speak?"
3. Churchill replied, "Not really. 100,000 would have come to see me hang."
4. Winston Churchill has provided me with an abundant source of stories and illustrations because of his sharp wit and his singular vision to resist the force of evil and darkness that had spread over the European continent during WWII.
5. He stands as one of history's greatest examples of *leadership*.
6. And as a leader one of the things he had learned is revealed in this story -
 - a. that we cannot live our lives for the acclaim of the crowd,
 - b. that life is not measured by popularity.
7. True success is attained by living for something higher and nobler than worldly fame

B. Paul

1. The Apostle Paul knew that and describes his motivation for ministry in our passage this morning.
2. Now that we've finished our study in Ezekiel, it's time to return to the NT and take a look at Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica.
3. We're in for some real treats as we cover this letter of 5 chapters because it's packed with truths and treasures to enrich our lives.
4. This morning, we're going to take an in-depth look at the first 4 verses of chapter 2

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

1. Paul had planted the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey.
2. And even though he had only spent a few weeks there, a thriving and vibrant church had been planted.
3. 1 Thessalonians was one of Paul's first letters, possibly even the first.
4. In it he writes to encourage them and to deal with a couple problems he had found out about;
 - a. there were those who had come in after his departure to criticize him and deny his message.
 - b. they said it was something Paul had made up & that he was nothing more than a con man.
4. But he reminds the Thessalonians of the power of God revealed both through the miracles he had performed and they had seen taking place among them.
5. He says, "**You yourselves *know*, brethren, that our coming to you was not**

in vain.”

- a. they knew the power of God to convict them of sin
 - b. they had experienced first hand, not only dramatic healings,
 - c. but deliverances from life-dominating sin and delusion
 - d. they had been converted to God from idols
 - e. and had come to realize that Paul didn't just spin tales – He opened a door into the realm of the Spirit that was every bit as real as the streets and market of their city.
6. No, his coming to them was not in vain – it had affected an eternal change

B. V. 2

²But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

1. Just prior to coming to Thessalonica, Paul and his small group of assistants had been in Philippi, which wasn't far from there
2. There they had run afoul of the authorities and were arrested and beaten in a sad example of the abuse of civil justice
3. When the rulers of the city realized they had misused their office and had treated Paul and his friends shamefully and illegally, they asked them to leave Philippi lest a scandal break out.
4. Paul complied – leaving a couple of his assistants behind to strengthen the little group of disciples that had begun meeting as a church
5. When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, with fresh wounds on his back from the beating he had endured in Philippi,
 - a. and when he thought back to the night he had just spent in a dank, rat-infested prison cell
 - b. he might be moved to cool it a bit and try a more subtle approach
 - c. but such was NOT the case
6. He said that despite the troubles endured in Philippi, and despite the opposition he faced from the unbelieving Jews there in Thessalonica, he preached *boldly* to them
 - a. he would not soft-sell or tone down the presentation of the Gospel
 - b. he would not cower or be intimidated by the threat of ill-treatment
 - c. he was bold in God and spoke as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God
 - d. He was a herald, whose message was to ring out clearly like the sound of a trumpet
7. In an orchestra, there are many instruments
 - a. there are strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion
 - b. each instrument has it's own voice & is used by the composer in a different way, to convey a different mood and feel
 - c. one of my very most favorite pieces of classical music is the Moldau, by Smetana
 - 1) the Moldau is a river in Hungary, and Smetana sought to paint a picture of the Moldau for the ear rather than the eye
 - 2) so he begins at the headwaters of the Moldau, way up in the mountains

- at a tiny stream
- 3) the piece begins with one small flute, quietly playing a simple melody, like a small stream of water coming out of the mountain side
- 4) but soon, more and more instruments are added and the tempo of the music increases, as Smetana seeks to describe the river swelling in size and plunging down the mountain-side
- 5) at one point, he adds the trumpets and the cymbals and the kettle drums as he pictures for the ear a massive waterfall and the convergence of another river.
- d. as I listen, I realize that some instruments are made to be played quietly, like the flute
- e. others are meant to be played loudly, like the kettle drum and the trumpet
- 8. Paul sees himself like a trumpet – that was his assignment – to play loudly and clearly
- 9. He would not be intimidated by opposition or the threat of suffering
- 10. The score he was given said that he was to sound forth *fortissimo*

C. V. 3

³For our exhortation ***did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.***

1. Contrary to what Paul's critics and opponents were saying, His message was NOT something he had made up
 2. It wasn't a mistake, it wasn't a con, and it wasn't a lie
 3. It was the real deal, as his readers knew full well because it had affected a dramatic change in them
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4. Now we come to v. 4 and the focus of our study this morning . . .

D. V. 4

⁴But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as **pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.**

1. Paul had been given a charge by God – to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ
2. It all began one day as he was making his way to the City of Damascus to root out and destroy a nest of Christians that had settled there
3. Before he had become a believer in Christ, Paul had led the Jewish opposition to the followers of Jesus
4. Once he had driven the church in Jerusalem into hiding, he got permission from the Jewish authorities to travel to Damascus and proceed with his campaign to stamp out the church there
5. But just outside the city, he had an encounter that would forever change his life
 - a. Jesus appeared to him and presented Himself as the Lord of Glory
 - b. Paul was instantly converted - then God told him that he was to go as His messenger -
 - c. preaching the gospel of Christ where ever he went
6. From that point on, Paul had a new center and a new motivation, a new priority and life-plan
7. He was no longer concerned with living a life that was approved by man

8. Now his only concern was to be pleasing to God
9. If in the living of that life he faced disapproval by the people of Philippi, or Thessalonica, or even his peers in Jerusalem, he cared not at all
10. He had one aim, one desire = To Please God!
 - a. to stand before Him and to hear the words –
 - b. “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of Your Lord.”

E. Pleasing Who?

1. Every day, you and I are faced with choices.
 - a. a few are big, most are small
 - b. in fact, as we go through our day, virtually every moment we’re making choices
 - c. it’s just that they’re so seemingly insignificant we don’t give them a second thought
2. Yet every choice is made out of some motivation, some desire
3. We choose *this* rather than *that* because we place more value in *this* than *that*
4. Think about it – when we make a choice about whatever – it’s because at the moment we make the choice, the *desire* for that thing is the *strongest*.
5. Whatever desire is strongest determines the direction we go
6. Perhaps you’ve heard the story of the Eskimo talking with a journalist who was doing an article on sled dogs
 - a. the Eskimo was explaining how there’s a lead dog on every sled and how the dogs fight to see who will be the lead
 - b. he said that he had two dogs who constantly fought for the position
 - c. the journalist asked which dog won
 - d. the Eskimo replied – “Why the strongest, of course.”
 - e. the journalist asked, “Well, which one is the strongest?”
 - f. the sled-driver answered, “The one I feed the most.”
7. The strongest desire in Paul’s life was the desire to please God
8. He knew that ultimately all choices are reduced to two motives, two desires
 - a. to please God -
 - b. or to please man, which of course, includes himself
9. He said, “I can live my life for the things the world values, for it’s priorities and pleasures, or I can live to please the one who made me and who knows what’s best for me.”
 - a. “Who do I trust? Do I trust that the world knows how to live, or do I trust God?”
 - b. “Do I believe the world wants what’s best for me or God?”
10. These are the questions Paul had asked himself and had answered with a resounding conviction that sustained him throughout his life
11. Here is his conclusion –

“As we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.”
12. Tell me – Does Madison Avenue want what’s best for you or do they merely want to line their pockets with your cash?
 - a. what about Rodeo Drive or City Walk?

- b. how about Hollywood - Las Vegas?
13. I wonder if the angels do not shake their heads in wonderment when they look at Las Vegas
 - a. it's almost like human beings have staged their own parody of the emptiness of the world
 - b. and yet we treat it with deadly seriousness
 - c. Las Vegas – a thin veneer of glamour over a pit of vile ugliness
 - d. bright lights that only blind men and women to the darkness underneath
 - e. Vegas offers everything that's pleasing to man;
 - 1) sensuality
 - 2) the promise of easy wealth
 - 3) excitement, entertainment
 - f. but lurking underneath it all is despair and loneliness
 - g. there's been an ad on TV recently that shows two young guys driving to Vegas loaded with cash
 - 1) they're happy and excited to be entering the city of lights
 - 2) they're looking forward to fortune and fun
 - 3) but all of a few minutes later they're driving home, with a stunned look on their faces
 - 4) they lost it all in a quick toss of the slot machine's handle
 14. Really – Las Vegas is like a model of the entire world and what it has to offer
 15. And it reminds us that ultimately, you and I are faced with living our lives for one of two choices – pleasing God, or pleasing man
 16. The direction we go, the choice we make will be determined by whatever desire is strongest
 17. So let me ask you this morning – what desire are you feeding?
 - a. the desire to please man - or the desire to please God
 - b. how much time do you spend letting the world influence you through TV and radio as compared to how much time you spend with the Lord in worship and prayer?
 - c. how much time do you give to magazines compared to how much you spend in the Word?
 - d. how much time is invested with worldly friends who spend their hours talking about vanity compared to the time invested with fellow believers who are seeking to draw closer to Jesus?
 18. If you find the Christian life to be a struggle, then ask yourself – which desire are you feeding – the desire to please man or please God?

F. Looking Beyond

1. None of us enjoys discomfort
2. It isn't human nature to enjoy pain and suffering
3. Yet Paul said that he had made a choice to please God rather than man, knowing that that choice would lead to opposition and suffering in this life
4. Fact of the matter is, anyone who seeks to please God will face opposition and suffering.
5. 2 Tim. 3:12 says,

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

6. Jesus promised His followers that the path of discipleship leads through tribulation in this world
7. The example of Jesus and the apostles all prove this point – that to seek to please God means the hatred and hostility of the world.
8. Why then did Paul chose to please God if it meant trouble?
9. The answer's simple – He looked *beyond* the temporary suffering the world dishes out to the eternal reward and pleasure that was his sure possession in Christ
10. Let me use another example:
 - a. if I want to get stronger, it means I have to work out
 - b. if I want to get in shape, it means I have to run
 - c. so I endure the pain because it's merely a part of the journey of getting where I want to be
 - d. I endure the soreness and the fatigue and the feeling of nausea that comes after I've run two-miles in the heat
 - e. I look beyond the present pain to the reward of being in shape, of being more alert and stronger
 - f. I guess I could skip the pain and nausea and sit on the couch and eat potato chips and drink sodas all day – no pain there, in fact, just pleasure –
 - g. until the pleasure of grease and sugar has clogged my arteries and I end up with a stroke or heart attack
11. The same is true in the spiritual realm
12. Let me apply this to the basic motivations of our lives now
 - a. everyone is going to experience pain - the only question is *when*
 - c. if we chose to please God and so give our lives to Jesus Christ, then we will experience the pain of living in a hostile world now – but eternally we get to enjoy the pleasures of heaven and the reward of a faithful life
 - d. but if we chose to live our lives to please man, satisfy the world's expectations, and put self at the center, then we get the fleeting, empty pleasures of this life that don't really satisfy, but the end is *eternal torment*
13. Let's say a person chooses Christ and is born again – the basic motivation becomes a desire to please God, but that desire is challenged daily by the fact that we live in this fallen world.
 - a. even after we come to faith in the Lord, we can chose to please man or God
 - b. one day, we will face a judgment of rewards and our lives will be weighed before Christ
 - c. remember what Paul said at the end of v. 4 – God tests our hearts.
 - d. in 1 Cor. 3, Paul describes this judgment Christians will face
 - 1) it's not a judgment for salvation – that's settled in the cross of Christ
 - 2) this is a judgment for rewards
 - 3) he says that that which was done merely to please man will be like wood, hay and stubble – it will be quickly burned up in the presence of a holy God
 - 4) but that which has been done out of a desire to please Him will be like gold, silver and precious stones

- 5) it will survive the fires of judgment and be part of what our future life is built on

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Keep Your Eyes On The Prize*

1. Again, it isn't human nature to enjoy or seek after pain
2. So keep your eyes on *eternity* rather than merely on the here and now
3. Don't let the threat of the world's opposition keep you from living a life that pleases God
4. Paul was able to endure the beating and imprisonment in Philippi because he looked beyond them to the reward God was setting aside for him with each lash and each minute in chains
5. Listen to Paul's words in his very last letter as he faced the executioner's blade

2 Tim. 1:12

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

6. Throughout the centuries, from the earliest days of the church up to this very time, men and women have made a choice to please God rather than meet the expectations of the world
7. They've looked beyond the threat of suffering, torture, and death to their graduation to glory
8. And now they stand like a vast crowd, cheering us on as we run our race
9. Can you hear them? Can you hear them encouraging you to look up rather than looking around? Can you hear them beckoning you to the finish line – to the prize of God's good pleasure?

B. *A Choice*

1. Everyday, we make a multitude of choices
2. But each and every one of them can be boiled down to two options – please man or please God
3. Either we live for the praise of the world – or the affirmation of the Lord
4. What a hollow thing the world's praise is: today's hero is tomorrow's villain
5. In the world, we're all just shooting stars
6. But in Christ, our light lasts forever
7. So what is it – What's your choice – What will you live for
 - a. 15 minutes of fame
 - b. or a crown of glory?