

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

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Preacher: B Shutter

[0 : 00] Amen. Please be seated. Good morning. It's very good to be with you this morning.! I've been in this building many times for a presbytery,! but it has been ages since I've been with you on a Sunday morning.

A lot has changed since I was last here. Tom, I remember you were in your old building. I wasn't ordained, so I wasn't preaching. And I don't think my family had any children.

So let me just offer this as a brief introduction. I'm Barry, my wife Amy. We have three children. Nicholas, who's 15. Quinn, who is 13. And Kiri, our daughter, who's 8.

And we have been at New Life Mossigar for a long time. New Life Mossigar is an IPC church in Heston. And I believe it was the first daughter church of your church, of this church.

And now we are planting a daughter church in Hounslow, of which I will serve as a church planter. And in Hounslow, we thank you for your prayers. And we definitely could use your help.

[1 : 03] Please do pray for us. Next Sunday, we're having our first gathering or vision meeting where we're hoping to bring together those who we would hope would be interested in joining with us and being on the core team.

So please pray for that. You can also help if you do know of anyone in Hounslow who you think might want to come along. We would welcome all referrals. And so we invite you to pray with us and to consider if you know anyone in Hounslow who would come along.

This morning, we're in 1 Thessalonians. We've already read the text. So let's pray together as we go and consider this passage. Heavenly Father, we do recognize and we thank you for your word, the wonderful, wonderful word of the Lord.

True wisdom, its pages unfolds. Lord, we confess that though we may read them a thousand times over, we pray that they never, no never would grow old.

For each line has a treasure and each promise is a pearl. We pray that as we hear from your word now, that we recognize we are hearing from you.

[2 : 19] We thank you that your word changes us. And we ask, Lord, that would happen now. May these words be your words for us, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. As a way of an outline, I want to ask these three questions, which I think come from our text.

I hope these questions will probe our minds and encourage our hearts this morning. Verse 13, I think, asks this question. Who do you listen to?

Verses 14 to 16 asks the question, what will you die for? And verses 17 to 20 asks the question, what are you living for?

Who do you listen to? What will you die for? And what are you living for? So let's first ask this question. Who do you listen to? Are you aware of the effect on you of those to whom you listen? My first year at university, I attended a communist action group. My teacher, my literature teacher, was a communist. And he was a part of this communist action group.

[3 : 29] This story really is the sort of stuff that today that conservative media would absolutely have a field day on. Jordan Peterson would eat this up.

He would go absolutely bonkers over it because instead of teaching us literature, my literature professor took the entire class along to this communist action group.

And so we listened to them. And to be honest, we came under their influence. We heard all about how certain groups were oppressed. And other groups had privileged and used their privilege to oppress.

We listened to how they argued that the world was fundamentally ruled by power. And we heard their strategies of how they could gain more power and influence on the college campus, on my university campus.

As I listened to them, I remember coming under their influence. I remember I wanted to support them. At the end of the term, I remember that I actually spoke up in their meeting.
[4 : 31] And I offered solutions on how I thought this group could grow in influence on my university campus. The term ended. I no longer was compelled to listen to the communists.

That's when I stopped listening. My days as a communist supporter came to an end. I'll tell you this story to illustrate this basic point that those we listen to shape the type of people we become. So let me ask you, who do you listen to? Paul in 1 Thessalonians encourages the church in Thessalonica. He gives it high praise, actually, that they're listening to God. Verse 13. This church had received the scriptures which they heard. And they accepted it. Not as if it were words of men, but they recognized it to be the very words of God. They were listening to God. And his word, we read, was at work in them. Changing them into the type of people God wanted them to be.

[5 : 38] Rick Phillips, pastor in South Carolina, in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, tells this story of the power of God's word to change.

He said that a German wife was married to a Chinese man in a small village in Germany. And she wanted to give her husband a book in Chinese.

And so she searched through her village to try to find some book in Chinese. And all that she could find was a Chinese Bible. Now, they were both atheists. And so she didn't want to give him a Bible. But she knew her husband really wanted to read something in his native language. So she reluctantly bought this. And he reluctantly received it. He also didn't want to read the Bible. But he began to read it.

Because he loved his language and longed to read something in his heart language. Amazing thing happened. The skeptic, he started to believe. As he read God's word in his own tongue, in his own language, he began to believe.

[6 : 39] He began to trust in Christ. Now, his wife didn't like that, as you can imagine. And she wanted to refute him. So she went out and bought a German Bible. Same thing happened.

She began to believe. The two of them joined a local church. See, God's word changes lives. What this German and Chinese couple found, and what anyone who's been converted finds, is that the Bible is the very word of God.

That it's true. And that it's life-giving. First, it's true. It fully, it sufficiently describes what we need to know about life.

It tells us everything we need to know about God. That God exists. That he made us. That he's our judge. He's our ruler. He upholds all things.

He sustains all things. It tells us everything we need to know about ourselves, doesn't it? That we were made in the image of God. And yet, our first parents rebelled. They sinned.

[7 : 43] And that we're born in that same state. And that from their rebellion, all forms of evil, all forms of brokenness, sin, death, came into this world. It also tells us everything we need to know about God's salvation.

That God is gracious and merciful. That with Jesus, hope is real and living. Because God took on flesh.

Jesus entered into human history. He lived a life that we couldn't live. He died the death that we deserved. He defeated sin. He defeated death. And he now, he rose again.

And he now reigns on high as King of Heaven. It's the truth of Scripture. And that truth, that story, that Gospel message, we find throughout all of Scripture, don't we?

From the first writings of Moses in 1400 B.C. down to John at 100 A.D. 40 human authors wrote 66 books of the Bible spanning 1,500 years proclaiming the same truth of God.

[8 : 54] Proclaiming the same truth of who we are as humans. Proclaiming to us the Gospel. 40 human authors divinely inspired to write the words of God.

You know, each of the human authors, we see their humanness come through, don't we? We see that here in our passage with Paul. We see his passions. We see his love. We see his character, his personality come forth.

But with each human author of the Bible, they each affirmed that their words were God's words. Not their own. It was God's words that they were proclaiming.

So many of them began with something like this. The word of the Lord came to me. Consider how the book of Amos begins, right? Amos begins this way.

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa. How human is that? And yet, his very next words were, thus says the Lord.

[9 : 54] Thus says the Lord. So the Bible affirms that it is the word of God, written by human authors, who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

You know, it matters, doesn't it? It matters that God wrote the Bible because we actually need him to reveal himself to us. We need him to show us who he is.

Herman Bavinck, who's a Dutch theologian, wrote this. He said, No knowledge of God is possible except that which proceeds from and by God.

We need God to reveal himself to us. And he does so because he wants us, his people, to know him. God never remains hidden.

He's not far away in some far corner of heaven just sending down prophets to speak for him. No. He constantly, he consistently shows up.

[10 : 59] He reveals himself. Dr. Dan Strange at our Catalyst Conference, the IPC Catalyst Conference, right here actually this summer, illustrated this point in this way.

Perhaps Paul has shared this with you. This really struck me. Dr. Strange asked, Have you ever tried to play hide-and-go-seek with a young child? You know, with a teenager.

Teenagers are great at hide-and-go-seek, aren't they? I haven't played with my teenagers, but I suspect if I did, they would probably go out in the back garden, lift the panel, go into the next neighbor's yard, trespass, right?

Go several gardens down, and they'd find some foxhole to hide in such that I would never find them, right? With a young child, with a three-year-old, you play hide-and-go-seek with a three-year-old, they stand in front of you, they cover their eyes, right?

And then before you're even done counting, they jump out, take their hands away from their eyes, and they say, Here I am. Here I am. Right? You can't play hide-and-go-seek with a three-year-old.

[12 : 07] Yet in the same way, God doesn't play hide-and-go-seek with us. Because he never hides. It's we who hide. It's we who are the ones who hide.

And what we hide is the truth of scripture to ourselves. It's us who suppress it. It's us who cover it up. It's we who denies. And it's God who reveals.

It's God who illumines scripture so that we can understand it. It's God who seeks after us. Because he wants to be known by his people for the sake of his glory.

Which is why, as God's people, we see in this passage that, as God's people, we read the Bible regularly. Because we meet him there, don't we? It's why we feast on it.

Because where else are we going to go to find life? Where else does God reveal himself such that it satisfies the hunger of our souls, such that it changes us into the type of people God wants us to be?

[13 : 11] Where else would we go? Well, we do eat on other things, don't we? We do feast and drink elsewhere. We look elsewhere for nourishment. A helpful tip on where you might be doing that, I think, comes to us each Monday morning.

There's this app on your phone called Screen Time. And it sends along its report. For me, it's always very telling. It tells me exactly what I've been feasting on, where I've been giving my attention.

Because as 21st century humans, we all do spend a lot of times on our phones. looking for someone, doing something, searching out that which might satisfy.

Tony Reiki, who works with John Piper at Desiring God, he wrote a very helpful book. It's called 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You.

I would recommend this book. It's wonderful. And he says this. He says, Our phones are like the mirror in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. You remember that story in the mirror?

[14 : 18] The mirror, I didn't know this. I'm not a Potterite. If you're a Potter person, you would know this. The mirror is called a recid. And if you hold the word a recid up to the mirror, that spells desire backwards.

Right? Because that mirror shows us our desires. And Tony says, Our phones work the same way. They show us that which we desire.

He writes this. Too often, what my phone exposes in me is not the holy desires of what I should want, not even what I think I want, and especially, not what I think you want me to think, what I think.

My phone screen divulges in razor-sharp pixels what my heart really wants. It's very telling, isn't it? Very convicting.

He goes on to talk about how about through our digital technology, we're addicted to distraction. We ignore our flesh and blood.

[15 : 23] We crave immediate approval. We become what we like. We get lonely, and yet become so comfortable with our secret vices.

We lose meaning, and yet we fear we're missing out. We become harsh with each other. Tony wrote that book in 2017, a full three years before the pandemic, which pushed all of us so far deeper into our love of our phones and deeper into our love of technology.

You know, technology, really, it's just a tool, isn't it? It can be helpful. It can also be harmful. But what technology can never do is what the Word of God always does, and that is reveal God to you. It preaches the gospel of God's love to you and of His grace for you. It satisfies your soul. I ask you, what is it that you feast on?

What is it that you feast on? Listen to how the prophet Isaiah describes scripture. It says this, Isaiah 55, verses 10 and 11. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

[16 : 52] It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish what I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. You hear what God is saying to us about His Word?

His Word nourishes, brings forth life, like water to the earth that brings forth crops that go and then make bread to satisfy and to feed.

That's what God's Word does to our souls. It gives us life. It tells us who God is. It reminds us of His grace so that we in turn would go and be fruitful, so that we would be satisfied such that we would obey and would be profitable and useful in God's kingdom.

There are many voices today that promise life, that hold out truth, but for God's people, we're called to listen to God through His Scriptures.

So it matters who we listen to. Secondly, and briefly here, the passage asks us, who will we die for? Who will we die for? Verse 14, for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they.

[18 : 05] These were believers from Israel. He's talking to largely a Gentile audience. As they, the believers from Israel, did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out.

You know, suffering because of faith in Christ, really down through the ages, is normal for the follower of Jesus. It's only us in the last 300 years in the West, that we've lived in a relative period of peace and of safety.

The norm for the followers of Jesus down through the ages, across all cultures, is that those who trust in Christ, they know rejection.

We as God's people, we're outsiders, not insiders. We have to leave our homes, as the text said. We face death. Paul says to this church, be imitators of those who suffer.

Be imitators of those who are persecuted. We're to look at them, to learn from them, to copy them. They're willing to die for their faith because they listened to the word of God and they counted Christ as the most precious one, even more precious than their own life.

[19 : 24] And today, today is Reformation Day and so it would be very fitting for us to remember Martin Luther. It's good that we quoted from him earlier. Do you know the story of Luther at the Diet of Worms?

It's a good one, I think, that we could imitate. Luther was on trial. So Reformation Day, the 31st, was 1517. It was the day that he posted his thesis in Wittenberg, right?

But several years later, actually 500 years ago to this year, in the springtime, he was on trial and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, was there.

One of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, figure of the time and Luther wrote beforehand, the night before the trial, that he was afraid because death was in the air.

Similar people before him had been burned at the stake and the prosecutor thought that Luther would capitulate simply because everyone knew he was facing death.

[20 : 22] And so when the prosecutor asked Luther, would you change your view and return to the fold, come back to the church, Luther said, here I stand.

I can do no other. He said that in the face of death. Now, he didn't die then, but for Luther, he listened to scripture and he understood that Christ was more precious to him than even his own life. Let me ask you, who is it that you're willing to die for? Will we speak up for what's right, for what's true, when it comes at a cost to us?

What is more precious to you? Is it your honor? Is it your reputation? Is it good relations with that unbelieving friend, with your family member who doesn't know Christ?

Is respect of others more precious to you? Or is it Jesus who died for you, who rose again and now reigns as king on high?

[21 : 27] Who are you willing to lay it all out for? Who are you willing to die for? Lastly, who is it that you're willing to live for? Who is it you're willing to live for? Notice what Paul, who is it that Paul lives for?

Notice what he's eager for, what he endeavors for, what is his great desire. Verse 17, might come as a surprise actually. It's the church. It's this church, right?

For they are his hope, his joy, his crown, verse 19. They're his glory and joy, verse 20. Who's Paul living for? Paul is living for others.

He's laid his life down for the good of others. It's not just the good of others on their terms. Paul's not a doormat here at all.

No. It's for the good of others in light of what's best for them in light of eternity and for the glory of God. There is hope and joy when Christ, we read, comes again.

[22 : 29] Christ comes again. And that means that what Paul is living for is others. That's what drives him. But it's Christ and it's the people of God, the church. What drives Paul, what he's living for is seeing Christ glorified.

The gospel proclaimed to totally disinterested unbelievers so that they would be engaged by the gospel. They'd be evangelized by the gospel.

They'd be established in the gospel. They'd be empowered by the gospel. They'd be equipped for service for the sake of the gospel. As we close here, what is it, I ask you, what is it that you're living for?

What is it that you're living for? I heard a story several weeks ago on a secular podcast called Secret Leaders. It's a really interesting story. I liked it, so I'm going to share it with you.

But it gets at this question of what is it that you're living for? The story goes like this, that a hard-charging Wall Street businessman was vacationing on the coast of Africa and he came upon an African fisherman.

[23 : 39] And he was really impressed by this fisherman. For the fisherman would get up every morning, would catch several fish, would, at late afternoon, or by late morning, he'd take those fish to the market.

He'd sell those fish, make just enough money to be able to take his wife out to lunch. He could spend the afternoon then playing football with his kids. He had just enough money to pay the bills and to go to his mates in the evening, go to the pub with his mates in the evening.

And the Wall Street guy was really impressed with the fisherman and said, listen, you're doing great. You need to go big time with this, man. You're on to something here, right?

And the African fisherman said, well, for what, why? And he said, he said, well, you could start a whole business if you worked all day. You could start a whole business.

The guy said, why would I do that? He said, well, you can employ so many other people. He said, well, why would I do that? He said, well, because you could make a lot of money and we could then buy boats and we could import all those fish to the West.

[24 : 46] He said, well, why would I do that? What good is that? He said, well, then I could take your company public and you would become insanely rich. And he said, well, what good is that?

At which point, the Wall Street guy was just completely lost and the African fisherman clued him in and he said, well, listen, if I became insanely rich, here's what I would do with all that money.

I would wake up in the morning. I would go fishing because I love to fish and I love the guys at the market so I'd take those fish and sell those fish there. And I don't really need the money but I'd take my wife out to lunch and then I'd play football with my kids and my grandkids and the evening I'd go out to the pub with my mates.

And a story was told to Western business people to tell them that life is about living now. Be mindful of now.

Don't be in the rat race after money. And maybe for some of us that's a helpful lesson. But in light of what Paul is saying, he's actually saying both guys don't get it, right?

[25 : 54] Both of them are actually living for themselves. One for the future, making money for the future. The other for living for himself right now. Both are in it for their own happiness.

Neither one of them is looking to Christ who reigns on high, who has shown that he's poured out his love for them because he died for them.

And he's, through his resurrection, has ushered in a whole new age, a whole new eschaton of resurrection life. Neither one of them are living for a greater glory and for the world's greatest good. As we listen to Scripture, as we hear the call of God on our life, we encourage us to turn from ourselves and turn to God.

To listen to the words of Scripture such that we behold our God again. the one in who alone we find satisfaction and who alone we find meaning and who alone we find grace and who alone we find forgiveness and who alone we find hope.

[27 : 05] Let's renew our faith in him such that we go forth filled with hope and joy for God's glory and for the world's good. Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father.