

November 12, 2017

## “The Marks of the Messengers”

### 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

FCF: Uncertainty of how to convey this message

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) God has given us a message for the world.  
 (magnet) We are to speak unlike any other messengers in the world.

#### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Communication is tricky. We need to know what to say and how to say it. In diplomacy, certain customs can convey certain things. In a romance, different cues can be taken from the same signal. Experts tell us that some of the most vital parts of communication are nonverbal.

We need to know what to say. And how to say it. We are continuing in our series on “Gospel Shaped Outreach”. Last week, we looked at the basics of the message itself. This week, we’re looking at the manner in which that message is delivered. Both are absolutely essential.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

#### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

#### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Context is vital in Paul’s letters, especially when you’re dropped into the midst of a train of thought. So let’s get our bearings. Vv.1-2 assumes an understanding and memory of recent events. Paul is writing around 51 A.D., referring to things recorded in Acts 16-17, reminding his readers of things they already knew. In the city of Philippi, Paul and his team had been unjustly arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. That’s alluded to here. They traveled on from there, 90 miles SW to Thessalonica. There, a positive response to the gospel was met by Jewish antagonists forming a mob and so forcing Paul and his team to leave the city in the middle of the night.

Paul is now in Corinth and has gotten word that the hostility to this young church back in Thessalonica has not let up. That antagonism has continued with an attempt to discredit both Paul’s message and his ministry. And so Paul sets out here to defend that gospel message and his ministry. Again, he reminds his readers of things they already knew. He and his team were the real deal. Theirs was an other-worldly message. And they were other-worldly messengers. After all, who else says or does such things? And how else could it be explained otherwise?

What’s worth noting is that, as we read Paul’s defense of his message and his ministry, we get a glimpse into what it should look like still today to bear this gospel message. God has given us a message for the world. And we are to speak unlike any other messengers in the world.

Put another way, Paul makes clear what are to be the marks of gospel messengers. What are they? Faithfulness, gentleness, diligence, and boldness. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

#### **I. FAITHFULNESS**

First, faithfulness (READ 1 Thessalonians 2:3-4). This is the image of a steward.

##### *A) Disclaimer*

Paul begins here with a disclaimer, setting the record straight.

##### **1. Negatively**

Theirs was not a faulty message delivered with impure motives or dubious methods.

2. Positively

Theirs was a true message delivered with honest motives and transparent methods.

*B) Reminder*

1. As stewards

They had come as stewards. There had been a God-centeredness to everything they did.

2. Implications

They had been approved by God, trusted by God, tested by God, known by God. And, so despite and no matter what their opponents were saying, they sought to serve and please only Him.

Theirs had been the faithfulness of a steward.

*Application:*

You think about what Paul is saying here and you have to come away wondering, “Is God’s eye still upon us in that way?” And the answer is, “Yes.” Now, that may be disconcerting. After all, that’s a pretty tight scrutiny and an awfully high standard to which we are then held.

True. But it’s not just that. His seeing and knowing us so intensely can also be freeing. Think with me. Who do we serve? Unlike so many others, this master is merciful and impartial. Which, to the degree we take that to heart, will impel us all the more to be faithful in every way.

We have a message for the world. We are to be unlike any other messengers in the world.

## **II. GENTLENESS**

The second mark (**READ 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8**). This is the gentleness of a mother.

*A) Disclaimer*

1. Not selfish gain

Again, Paul starts with a disclaimer to set the record straight. He had not come for selfish gain, puffing them up with empty words. Nor was he hiding behind masks to cloak any form of greed.

2. Not personal glory

They had not come for selfish gain. Nor had they come for personal glory. Unlike others, they had refused to stand on their status and to leverage that to then make burdensome demands.

*B) Reminder*

1. As a mother

Not at all. They had shown the gentleness of a mother, an affectionate and sacrificial devotion.

2. Implications

They had not used others for themselves. For the sake of others, they had given of themselves.

Again, counter to the accusations, theirs had been the gentleness of a mother.

*Application:*

The emphasis here being the giving of oneself and not the taking from another. That is, the glad willingness to serve and a sacrificial love that must always complement the gospel.

We have a message for the world. We are to be unlike any other messengers in the world.

### **III. DILIGENCE**

The third mark (**READ 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12**). This is the diligence of a father.

#### *A) Disclaimer*

##### 1. Negatively

Again, we have a disclaimer. And the repeated theme of refusing to be burdensome.

##### 2. Positively

Instead, they had supplemented the gifts of other churches, working and laboring for their sakes.

#### *B) Reminder*

##### 1. As a father - instruction

Theirs had been fatherly instruction - charging and encouraging, giving whatever words were fit.

##### 2. As a father - example

And with that fatherly instruction had also been their fatherly example - a striving to live holy, righteous, and blameless lives before them. The one necessarily complementing the other.

In many respects, Paul and his team had shown the diligence of a father.

#### *Application:*

Again, we have this familial imagery. Now, as a side note, we ought not to think Paul is saying, “Only mothers can be gentle” and “only fathers can be diligent.” That’s not the point. Paul is dignifying both roles by using both to illustrate what it means to carry this message.

And, with both, we see the necessity of a congruence between our profession and our practice, a consistency between what we say and how we actually live. It’s absolutely vital.

We have a message for the world. We are to be unlike any other messengers in the world.

### **IV. BOLDNESS**

Then, the fourth mark (**READ 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**). Paul is speaking here to the genuineness of their conversion, reflected in their response. In that, the boldness of a herald.

#### *A) Disclaimer*

##### 1. Negatively

Here the disclaimer is implied. This is not a message of this world, of human making.

##### 2. Positively

It is the Word of God. It’s a profound statement. Note that Paul doesn’t correct them. There is not a, “I’m just a man like you. My thoughts on these things have no more bearing than anyone else.” No, Paul is alluding here to the divine inspiration that comes with his apostolic office. This Word came from God through Paul to them. And, as such, it was having a dramatic effect.

#### *B) Reminder*

##### 1. As a herald

Paul reminds them that he had proclaimed this message to them with authority from a higher authority - from the Lord himself. And then he reminds them of how they rightly had received it.

## 2. Implications

But, given the source of this Word, it had met the resistance of Satan's parasitic kingdom. Which was to be expected. For it has been that way from the beginning in every period and place. Which demands a steadfast boldness to proclaim the message. And to prepare the hearers.

All that is to say that they had shown the boldness of heralds.

### *Application:*

And it is a boldness here. For we have to speak with candor both with the message and the resistance it provokes. Why the resistance? The message, "Jesus saves sinners" is a direct challenge to our self-righteousness, our self-dependence, and self-governing impulses. And so it requires a herald's courage to convey that and to honestly relay what it will cost to embrace it.

We have a message for the world. We are to be unlike any other messengers in the world.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We are to go forth with this message in a posture of faithfulness, gentleness, diligence, and boldness. That's clearly what we are to do. But that begs a couple of questions. Why should we be marked this way? Well, it's the only way we can be consistent to the message.

That's fairly straightforward. But it leads to a second question. How can we be marked this way? And the answer here is just as straightforward. Only by being transformed by the message we bear. At one level, you can say we've been sold on it. We know it's true. I think back to years ago one summer in college. Desperate for a work, I took a job as a door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman. Yes, it's true. This introvert who never met a stranger he didn't want to run from was doing cold calls up and down suburban streets. What on earth would move me to do such a thing? Well, again, I needed money. But I was sold on the product. I had seen it demonstrated. I knew what it could do. And, if I'd had the money, I'd have bought one myself.

How do we go forth marked by this message? Partly, it's being sold on the message ourselves. But it's not just that we've been sold. It's that we've been changed. Some of you know what that's like. Just from a physical standpoint, you've switched your diet and feel like a whole new you. You've discovered some ingredient your body couldn't tolerate, cut it out of your intake, and you can't imagine going back. It's had a transformative effect on your life.

Now carry that over. But here we're not talking about the effect of a plan but a person, the risen Jesus. And meeting Him has changed you. Fear has given way to courage. Pride to humility. Guilt and shame to assurance and joy. The orphan is now a child. The enemy a friend. The exile a citizen. The aimless wanderer a beloved servant. What has happened? We have breathed in this message and now we cannot help but breathe it out. It's our roots, our very life.

God has given us a message. It is unlike any other the world has ever heard. He has also made us His messengers. And because of that message - the message itself and its effect upon us - we are unlike any other messengers the world has ever met. It is and we are other-worldly.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) God has given us a message for the world.  
(magnet) We are to speak unlike any other messengers in the world.