

SERMON THEME: FACING THE END WITH SOBRIETY

SERMON TITLE: ADVANCING THE GOSPEL, BY REV DR BERNARD CHAO

SERMON TEXT: 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5 (NIV)

¹As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. ²And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. ³But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. ⁴We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

PROLOGUE

- Today's text is:
 - A prayer letter, with a list of prayer items/requests for Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, and also for the Thessalonian believers.
 - Evidence of the importance of prayer to Paul; He bookended both his letters to the Thessalonians with prayers.
 - 1 Thessalonians started with a thanksgiving prayer, then a prayer for growth, strengthening, love and holiness, and ended with a benediction that is filled with hope based on the certainty of the return of Christ.
 - In 2 Thessalonians, we see also that prayer bookends this letter.
- Our prayers are *revealing*.
 - It reveals the issues that our hearts are concerned with – *What did you last pray about?*
 - Paul's prayer revealed what was important to him, giving a summary of his greatest concerns.
 - It also pointed to the reasoning and source of his faith, and what guided and sustained him.
- Paul's prayer is broken into three parts:
 - Priority of the spread the Gospel.
 - The gospel is Paul's priority.
 - He prayed for the rapid spread of the gospel above all others, and for their labours to be aligned with God's work in saving the lost.
 - He prayed for those who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ to respond to and honour Him, and that they will see more new believers, just like the Thessalonians (v1).
 - Reality of human and demonic resistance to the Gospel.
 - He recognised that the gospel will be resisted, even if it is good news bearing the promise of salvation.
 - There will be people with different world views, values, and beliefs, or even under the influence of devil, who will wholly oppose and resist God, Jesus and Christians.
 - Understanding the reality of such resistance, Paul understands the need for divine help and protection, seeking prayer for his ministry team.
 - Nurture and flourishing of the fruits (believers) of the Gospel.
 - He prays for the Thessalonians' faith and growth – that God would lead them towards the depth of His love and Christ's perseverance.
 - That they would mature in their knowledge of the love of God, in loving God and loving one another.

- As they do so, they will become increasingly anchored in Christ, and hold on to Christ as they face tests and trials and be able to persevere.
- His third prayer has two statements of faith:
 - Declaration that God is Faithful – He will strengthen and protect the believers from evil.
 - Affirmation of the Thessalonians’ faithfulness.

A. PRIORITY OF THE SPREAD THE GOSPEL

- Paul’s prioritizing for the spread of the Gospel was conceived out of his own intimate encounter with Jesus + his commitment to Jesus’ mission + his mission as a disciple of Christ.
 - Eugene Peterson paraphrased Jesus’ words in John 17:18:
 - “In the same way that You gave me a mission in the world, I gave them a mission for in the world”.
 - Paul understood Jesus’ priority for the spread of the gospel and embraced it as his own (Acts 20:24).
 - Our mission, as disciples of Christ, is to testify and share the Gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ, and the grace of God given to us.
 - It is a priority for Jesus and Paul.
 - Is it a priority for us?
 - How have we been testifying to and telling others about the gospel?
- Paul’s prayer tells us something about the God he believed in and prayed to.
 - God is active and present in the world, protecting and responsive to His people’s prayers, and is invested in and loves His creation.
 - He yearns for His children to hear and receive the good news, to be in communion with Him, and to live a full and complete life till eternity.

B. GOD IS MISSIONARY

- Paul’s prayer also demonstrated a missional understanding of the identity and activity of the church of Jesus Christ.
 - Underlying his missional understanding is a belief that:
 - God invites us to participate in His mission of saving the world.
 - This mission will not be unopposed by evil of this world.
 - God both commissions and empowers us, the disciples of Jesus, for this mission
- This concept of “missional understanding” has been developed by several theologians.
 - David Bosch’s words expand Paul’s motivation in his prayers to the Thessalonians.
 - “Mission is understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the missio dei (i.e., the mission of God) as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another movement: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.” – David Bosch
 - God is a missionary God.
 - This concept helps us realign our thinking – We are carrying out God’s mission when we embark on the various missions entrusted to us.
 - This again reminds us that God is active and responsive in this world.

- *Missio Dei* is the Latin term for 'the mission of God'.
 - *Any mission is God's mission.*
 - He is interested, and actively participating in it, always.
 - God makes the first move.
 - We love because God first loved us
 - We go because God first came to us, and then sent us
- God is already active in our world to bring salvation to us.
 - Discipleship is about following God into the mission He has started.
 - As followers of Jesus, we are *commissioned* to join God in His mission.
 - A missional Christian and missional church understand that it is a high honour for us to participate.
 - We have to decide every day, if we are going to be part of God's mission.

C. ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN GOD'S MISSION

- Missional understanding also implies that if God is already on a mission and active in the world, the church must never be disengaged from the world.
 - For God's mission to take place, we are meant to be in communities and to stand witness there, even amongst people who are challenging to like or who dislikes us.
 - "The church that Jesus intended is a community that leaves its message publicly, transparently, vulnerably. That is why it's called *ecclesia*, a Greek word for an assembly set apart to do public business in view of the watching world." - Darrell L. Guder
 - For us to prioritize the work of God's mission, we need to take on our missional identity and be a missional people/community.
 - *Mission is for every Christian*, as we are called into the "royal priesthood", according to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.
- To be a missional community, participating in God's mission of engaging the world, we need:
 - To be attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in shaping our sense of discernment and growth in the Scripture.
 - To adopt a posture of humility in recognising that our understanding and response to the Gospel is always tentative and partial, because God is constantly moving.
 - It is an ongoing task for us to discern what God is doing (missional discernment) with prayers and intentional engagement.
 - *Missional discernment is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of vocation.*

D. GOD'S MISSION, RIGHT WHERE WE ARE

- It starts right where we are, with those immediately around us, like what Jesus had told the man to do, after he was healed from demonic disturbance in Luke 8:39.
 - God wants us to start at home, in our estate, the communities we are involved with, at our workplace, with anyone that crosses path with us.
 - No special training is required for us to participate in God's Mission – it starts from the moment we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour; we are ready witness and participants.
 - We must be ready for the time when divine opportunities arise:
 - Develop genuine relationships with people who crosses our paths and engage in meaningful conversations, so that we may share our testimonies well.

- Make time and space in our schedules so that we are ready and available for God's Mission.
- We can be ready witnesses to God's Mission by:
 - Being a decent and kind person.
 - Paying attention to people.
 - Show care and concern in concrete ways.
 - Sharing about the Gospel when asked about the difference in our conduct.
- We are called to God's Mission because we have experienced the good news about Jesus Christ.
 - We need only to live out our experiences (by being in Christ), and trust God to do His part (the conviction and conversion) when the opportunity arises.
 - People often receive the gospel in bits and parts, and this is where our work is – to be part of the divine moments and cumulative effort in turning hearts and eyes to Jesus Christ.
 - We see from Paul's prayer, our God is an active God – while we are sharing, He is acting.
- As we do our missional discernment, God leads us sometimes out of our comfort zones to:
 - People from different background, socio-economic status, language dominance,
 - Different modes of outreach platform, or
 - Countries/places with different language and cultural backgrounds.
 - Some may be easy for us to engage, but others may be a challenge to.
- To be missional people following God in His mission, it means that we are called to build bridges with all people.
 - The Bible depicts a missionary God who reaches out and sent His Son, and whose Son has sent us – *our missional identity are people who have been sent by Jesus, to do our missional activity of reaching out to others.*
 - We know that God expects us to be like Him in making the first move, when we see Him telling us to GO:
 - GOd
 - GOod news
 - GOspel

CONCLUSION

- Jesus always champions the cause and people that the society wants to ignore.
 - Those who are powerless, poor, left behind, imprisoned, orphaned, widowed, aged, mentally ill, social outcasts.
 - In this fragmented world of today, it is people with different world views and make different life choices from us.
 - *Who might God be sending you to?*
 - Be sensitive to the Spirit's prompts on who/which group of people He is directing you to.
 - Share your walk in God's Mission with others, so that we can draw courage from each other's journey and share the many ways of sharing the Gospel.
- We must be wary of resting easy and miss prioritizing God's Mission for ourselves.
 - Overtime, we may be surrounded by increasing numbers of believers, hence taking a back seat in God's Mission, thinking we have done enough.
 - We must always be actively looking out for people who needs to hear of the good news and seek God's plans and directions in reaching out to them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Share with one another how did you first heard of, was introduced to, or encountered the Gospel about Jesus Christ.
2. How have you been sharing or showing the Gospel to others?
3. If the church is a missional community joining God is His mission, where is God calling you, your family, and church to join Him?