

## Three Important Reasons and a Fourth

### I Thessalonians 1:1-3:13

#### Introduction

You walk into an office and you see a secretary writing out a letter by hand and you think that she must be writing a personal letter to someone. However, while you sit there and wait for your appointment you see the secretary finishing one letter and begin writing by hand the next letter and it appears to be very similar to the previous letter. You then go in for a meeting and following the meeting you exit to see the secretary writing another letter by hand and a pile of hand-written letters beside her.

This time you can't help but ask, "Why are you doing this? Are these letters for something special?"

The secretary responds that the letters aren't for anything particularly special but she is letting a group of people know about a meeting.

"But, but but!", you stammer, "Why don't you send out an email? or use the photocopier in the corner? Strike! Why don't you just use the typewriter in sitting in the corner of the room?!"

The secretary informs you that she has always done letters like this and believes that there's no substitute for the personal touch.

Naturally you consider the secretary to be well meaning, if a little quaint and old fashioned, but not particularly efficient nor really justifiably employed.

Many people look upon mission in a similar way to our reaction to the secretary, we know missionaries are well meaning and all, if perhaps a little quaint and old fashioned, but hasn't the era of mission passed and aren't there better avenues for employment?

On top of this there are a number of people within churches who see mission as really only being confined to a few small sections of the Bible and not characteristic of the whole book. Aren't there other more important things in the Bible that we should focus on?

Today I want to look at three important reasons as to why mission work is still important and justifiable today and we'll see that it's not confined to a few select verses.

We may even consider a fourth reason why mission must still be regarded as a vital undertaking for all Christians but we'll come to that later.

Allow me to give you a definition so you know what I mean by 'mission'. Mission can probably be summarised as "God's efforts in bringing people to himself and God brings this about by the sending out of people from his church." A 'missionary', in turn, is one of the people sent.

## People Don't Know The Living And True God (1:8-10)

The first reason why mission was and still is important is found in verses 8 to 10 of chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians, “The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

The reason why mission is still important today and why people still go as missionaries is because people all around the world do not know “the living and true God.” (v. 9) It is very sad that people don’t know God and there is also a consequence of failing to have a right relationship with God, God’s wrath is coming (v. 10). God’s anger at all who oppose him is a frightening and horrible thought. And yet God himself provides the way for us to be rescued from his wrath. It is “Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” (v. 10)

The way people are rescued is by faith in God and specifically we know from Paul’s other letters, and from the whole of the New Testament, that people are rescued by their faith in the rescuer God has provided, Jesus Christ, and his death as a payment for sins.

Let me tell you about a lady we met in Indonesia, we call her Ibu P. “Ibu” is the Indonesian word for “Mrs”, and so this is about Mrs P. I met Ibu P at a supermarket in Jakarta where she worked. Ibu P sent a series of text messages to us with lots of questions about God. These questions allowed us to explain some things about our relationship with God. At the heart of Ibu P’s concerns was that she did not know peace with God. We had the opportunity to give to Ibu P a Bible and a little tract on how to have peace with God.

From answering Ibu P’s questions via sms and then giving her a Bible she decided to trust in Jesus. Now, after years and years of not feeling like she could pray and not having any peace, she now knows that her prayers are being heard by a God who loves her, the living and true God who also grants her peace.

Before we left Indonesia we met with Ibu P again and she asked why we came to Indonesia. She said, “I know it’s God who brought you to Indonesia and I’m glad he did. Because if you hadn’t come then I still wouldn’t know him.”

The first reason why missionaries are still needed today is because there are still people all around the world who do not have a relationship with God, the living and true God. And for many of the people who haven’t turned to the living and true God they’ve never even had the opportunity to hear for the first time about him and what he has done for them in Jesus and so make up their own minds.

## We Display The Character Of God and His Kingdom (2:7-12)

Is it only the words of the missionaries which are important? If it's only the words that have any real significance wouldn't it be better if we just worked on massive publicity campaigns seeking to get pamphlets, Bibles, and audio materials to the people who have yet to hear the good news about God's love for them in the sending of his Son?

Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 how the whole of his life was a vehicle for the message of Jesus and what it means to be a follower of him. He writes, "Instead, we were gentle among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

The words of the good news are truly powerful and people do indeed respond to the truth of this message even if they hear or read it in isolation from Christians. However, normally people are also interested in what does this message look like in practice. The second reason mission and the sending of missionaries is still important and justifiable today is because missionaries have the challenge and responsibility to display by their life and deeds God's character and the values of the Kingdom of God.

Just as we receive the good news freely and can not do anything to earn our salvation, so the apostle Paul says "Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." (v. 9) Paul was providing a living example of this principle of grace.

Likewise Paul says "Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you." (v. 7) How does this compare with what Jesus says in Matthew 22:37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." Paul has thus provided an example to the Thessalonians of Christ's character in his gentle care of them.

I'd like to tell you now about another person in Indonesia, Mas I, "Mas" is the Indonesian word for an unmarried man. Mas I was a member of the Muslim College located right in front of our house in Central Java. Mas I was studying to be a teacher and, though I didn't know it at the time, Mas I's father had recently passed away. Mas I came to

me to practice his English. However, while we would meet together we would talk about a whole range of different topics and that would include religion and personal beliefs. Mas I joins us for meals and I have also had the chance to visit his village and celebrate important events with him.

Mas I has told me that he regards me as a person whom Allah brought alongside of him when his father died so that he would have a positive role model and wouldn't go off the rails. Mas I has also said that he can see that there is a real difference in our family in comparison to other families he knows.

In my dealings with Mas I I am conscious of Paul's words in chapter 2, verse 8, "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well." Missionaries are far from perfect but we seek to display in our lives the character of God and the values of His Kingdom. This is very difficult to be grasped just from words on a page but needs to be seen in practice and interacted with.

So, the first reason that mission and the sending of missionaries is justified and important is because there are people who do not trust in the living and true God. The second reason is because missionaries display both the character of God and the values of God's Kingdom.

### **Believers Are Our Brothers And Sisters In-Christ (2:17-3:13)**

The third reason that mission and the sending of missionaries is still important and justifiable is because we are brothers and sisters in-Christ with fellow Christians in other countries. We are long past the era of thinking that it is the white man or woman from a Western nation who goes off to save the poor ignorant natives in other lands. Indeed the organisation we served with The Church Missionary Society, CMS, almost always sends missionaries in partnership with local indigenous churches as this both recognises our unity with them and also the critical importance of local Christians when it comes to reaching their fellow countrymen who do not yet trust in the living and true God.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians he is writing to a church which he founded by the preaching of God's word. But how does he repeatedly describe his readers? In almost every paragraph in this letter Paul describes his readers as "brothers and sisters". Paul doesn't position himself to demand respect and authority as someone over his readers, but rather positions himself beside his readers as a fellow Christian.

To see how Paul describes his unity with the Thessalonian Christians we can particularly look at chapter 2 verse 17 through to chapter 3 verse 13. We can see how Paul describes the pain of not being with them, "when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every

effort to see you.” (v. 17) This longing to see the Thessalonians increased to the point where Paul says, “we could stand it no longer” (v. 1). At that point Paul and the group sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to hear how they were coping with the difficulties they were facing in their new faith. But when Timothy returned with a good report we can feel Paul’s joy, “But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?” (vv. 6-9).

When we had been living in Indonesia for a few months, Ibu Dien, one of the lecturers in the faculty of Theology at the university I was connected with asked me, “Duncan, why does CMS continue to send missionaries to countries like Indonesia?”

I replied, “Ibu Dien, it is not because we are the experts and you have to learn from us, or because we are the adult Christians who need to nurture the Indonesians Christians who are children. Rather, we are brothers and sisters in-Christ and for a time we will walk each others journey and mutually support and learn from each other and what we gain from this will hopefully benefit the broader churches of which we are a part of.”

At this Ibu Dien slammed her hand down on the table and said, “Yes! That is the attitude we need from missionaries coming to Indonesia today!”

The third reason that mission and the sending of missionaries is important and justifiable is because Christians in other countries are our brothers and sisters in-Christ and it is important that we remind them that they are not forgotten and it is equally important that we are willing to learn from other parts of the body of Christ even if they don’t have the material resources which others may have.

## Conclusion

In conclusion then, we see that mission and the sending of missionaries is still important and justified today and is not confined to a few select verses. First, There are people around the world who don’t know the true and living God and are under his wrath and many of these people have never had the chance to hear the good news and so people have to take this message. Second, missionaries seek to display the character of God and the values of God’s Kingdom and so help Christians understand more of the good news and what should be the distinguishing features of the people who have faith in Christ. Third, Christians in other countries are our brothers and sisters in-Christ and

missionaries walk beside them reminding them that they are not forgotten and also mutually supporting and learning from each other.

### God's is Glorified! (1:5; 2:4; 3:13)

Now, sorry to break the golden rule of sermons, that being to conclude a sermon and then add something, but we should think, is that the end of the story?

I have given you three reasons why mission is important and justified but it is relatively easy to hear these three points and keep them at a distance from us and, while accepting that mission is important and justified, some times we hope that mission and the sending of missionaries is really about other people. But what does this have to do with us here and now?

I want to mention now the fourth and probably most important reason for mission and sending missionaries. Mission is about God being glorified.

God being glorified is at the heart of the mission from beginning to conclusion. We can see this in what Paul says in these chapters. First, Paul was appointed by God and sought to please God. Paul tells his readers, “we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts” (2:4). Second, the response of people to Paul’s message was as a result of God’s work in people’s hearts. Paul says, “our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.” (1:5) Third, Paul prays that God will hold the Thessalonian Christians close so that they would remain till the end. Paul prayed, “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” (3:13)

Because the work of God is highlighted all through the mission task we see that this brings glory to God and that is what mission is about, bringing glory to God.

And what is exciting for us is that we all have a part to play in this. The whole of our lives as Christians is to bring glory to God. Whether here in Australia or anywhere around the world we can seek to bring glory to God by living out our Christian faith locally as well as being involved in mission globally.

In two weeks time we’re going to receive visitors who are preparing to serve as missionaries in a Muslim nation. I pray that today’s message will help us be all the better prepared to be involved in partnering with what is on God’s heart.