

## **Season 6, Episode 3: Real Gospel (2:1-16)**

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**Sarah:** This season is sponsored by Crossway and today I'm excited to share In the Lord I take refuge by Dane Ortlund. It's a wonderful collection of heart, engaging meditations for each of the 150 songs, whether readers from start to finish or dipping in and out. As I've done over the last few months, what I've really valued is that Dane's meditations have made me just want to go back into the Psalms themselves and pour over them more and more, rather than just being content with what he says about them. It's such an edifying and heartwarming divisional that's been a trampoline into the riches of the Bible.

**Felicity:** Welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I'm here in the States and I'm here with my sister Sarah. She's in the UK. And this episode, we're excited to be jumping into chapter two of one, thessalonians Sarah, as well as the Bible in your hand. What is in the cup?

**Sarah:** Well, today hello. Today I've got twinings English breakfast tea paired with a Nigella Lawson breakfast bar that I made earlier today. It's weirdly. Not breakfast time, though, but I've seemed to have gone for that.

**Felicity:** Yeah, I do feel like those bars are universal rather than breakfast.

**Sarah:** Oh, definitely. I wouldn't actually eat one for breakfast. They're quite sweet.

**Felicity:** Yeah, I love that you said the word paired with. As soon as you say paired with, there's a certain kind of restaurant elegance.

**Sarah:** That's me all over. What have you gone for today?

**Felicity:** Oh, I've got a good one, actually. Today I've got Earl Gray Bravo, which actually means that it's got little blue bits in it, which is just quite fun. You don't really taste the blue, it's still good. And a very sweet friend heard about the biscuit kind of trauma of there being none in my cupboard. And she bought me some Jammy Dodgers. She went on the internet and actually ordered them for me.

**Sarah:** So.

**Felicity:** Thank you, Kelly.

**Sarah:** That's so sweet, isn't it? That's so nice. Whilst we sip and lunch, we're chatting a little bit today about why do we bother prioritizing the Bible when life feels really pressured? So whether it's hectic work deadlines, whether it's just a kind of season or maybe just even a job, the job itself is just really pressured. Or maybe it's just different season of life heavy with grief. There are so many different ways that life could be pressured. Why bother prioritizing getting the Bible open? What do you say to that question?

**Felicity:** It's a great question, because I don't know about you, but I feel like I've been through seasons like that, where it feels like opening up the Bible is just one more thing on the fairly pressured to do list. And so it can feel like, well, I'll just leave that for the moment. And I think that's the thing is, we may be grouping it with the other stuff on our to do list, when actually, as we open up the Bible. These are words that give life. Life and spirit is how Jesus describes his words in John's Gospel. And I think that probably changes the way we then think about it. So if we're thinking about it like that, then actually as we open the Bible, these words are giving us life that then enables us to actually go through the rest of the day to actually do those things and to be sustained through that. So I think in my thinking that's always been a helpful kind of shift that then prompts me to like, oh, actually I need the Bible in order to then do the rest of life. Really. What about you? Any wisdom to add?

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think yeah, it is that though, isn't it? In Deuteronomy I can't remember what verse it is because it says these words are your very life. But actually why are they life their life? Because in them we hear and receive God's love. In them we are reminded of his lavish love for us abundantly kind of showered upon us in Jesus. And actually we need to be shaped by that love, don't we? We need to be shaped by that so that we would go into our pressures seeing them in perspective and in light of his love and in light of his suffering hand over us that day. And I know increasingly I just need to be shaped by his words, his

voice first. The challenge is actually not thinking I need to read a whole chapter or I need to read like a Bible read through. At this point in this pressured part of life, the Lord promises to speak through his word verse by verse. Take a verse and just dwell on that week. Let that sit on your heart rather than biting off more than you can chew.

**Felicity:** And I mean anytime. So we're not talking. You don't have to set aside an hour. That's fairly unrealistic.

**Sarah:** Do it when you can just make it. Yeah. Anyway, let's get into it. I'm going to read chapter two, verses one to 16 today. We're going to be thinking a little bit about the tone and feel today, which list you're going to explain to us in a minute. But as a read through, just have a think about the tone and feel of the passage in this part of the letter. Okay? Chapter two, verse one to 16. You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know. But with the help of our God, we dare to tell you His Gospel in the face of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel. We're not trying to please people, but God who tests our hearts. You know, we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed. God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though, as her apostles of Christ, we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children 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 helped with each one 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. And we also thank God continually, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and prophets and also drove us out. They displeased God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so they may be saved. In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

**Felicity:** Thank you, Sarah. So, as Sarah said, we're thinking a little about the tone and feel which will help us just to dig into this book a little more. And actually this is true for the Bible as a whole. And what we're really saying is that as you're reading the Bible, don't ignore the emotion, don't ignore the tone, which is informed by the way that the writer is feeling about what he's talking about. So here in this passage, we have just so much love, don't we? Like the way that Paul feels about the thessalonians overwhelmingly kind of determines the tone of the passage. So you can't read this passage and think, yeah, he's kind of just functional. I'm just telling them the gospel. He is like all in. I love this. The heart level is just brilliant, isn't it?

**Sarah:** And it's the kind of word pictures that really help us see that, isn't it? So he's like a nursing mother. That's such an intimate picture, isn't it, of love and bonding with them, but not only like a nursing mother, but also like a father towards them in the way that he's encouraging them and urging them. And then in verse seven, he also says, we were like young children among you. So in this kind of part of the letter, we've got the whole family kind of represented and talked of in the way that he feels about them and the way that they were with them while they were there. And that's just beautiful, isn't it?

**Felicity:** Yeah, he said it explicitly doesn't inverse eight, because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well. And I think that's a big part of what's going on here is that we have Paul not only declaring the gospel, but he's declaring it through the way that he is amongst them. So his life reflects the truth that he's been telling them. And so that in itself is just a bigger picture of the

gospel, I think, than I initially have, that it includes very much the way that we are, as much as what we say.

**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely. And actually and here it's really integral to his witness, isn't it? Because we remember the context, remember them, they fled at night, off they went, the names were going to have left and they've been wondering, well, is this the real deal? What they are as believers, but also is the message the real deal? That what they've heard. And are the people who brought the message, are they the real deal? Were they just kind of peddling the truth? Was an ulterior motive going on here? What was going on? And actually he's really keen to kind of show them both in the way that so in the first bit of the passage, we get a lot of kind of description of just the way that he wasn't trying to trick them. Everything has been to please God, not people, God who tests his heart, just the authority that Paul comes with because he's coming with God's message. And then that's coupled with the way that he's acted towards them and I think those two things together kind of seek to further the assurance that the thessalonians need, do you think?

**Felicity:** I absolutely agree. I think that's the big kind of picture of what's going on here. You really can trust us because of the way that we are. And I love actually that the number of times just another tool being the repetition tool, but the number of times he repeats God he is for pleasing God, no one else. And that in itself then, means that he's enacting this life that we have this picture of. And so the assurance, because that's kind of been the tone all through the first chapter is like, you're doing great, you are the real deal. And so add into that picture this genuine gospel life and that adds to the assurance that the thessalonians have. If we just take a step back from that and we think, okay, as we look around at those who have shared the gospel with us or those who minister to us, I think that's really reassuring as I think, yeah, that person, what they're telling me is reflected in the way that they live. And it works both ways, doesn't it? I think it can be massively assuring and it can really help to determine whether that person is the real deal or not. That kind of be aware that it can go one of either way. And the gospel way that's depicted here is wonderfully reassuring because we see these characteristics and we think, yes, that's it. This is of God, yeah, because he's.

**Sarah:** Fleshing out God's message, which is of love, isn't it? Which is, you are outrageously loved by the Lord Jesus and we are showing you that love in ways that help you to keep turning from idols and to keep turning towards the true and living God. And why is that such an important assurance? Because they're going through a tough time. The suffering is real and it is hard. They're going through the same kind of suffering that other churches have. They're going through the same kind of suffering that has happened down history for believers. And he's kind of, again, assuring them of that, that this is nothing new, this is, you know, you're in the right lane here because we're going through this as well. But nevertheless, they need to be assured that it's worth it, it's worth suffering for.

**Felicity:** And that's kind of taking us through to that sort of last chunk of the passage, isn't it? But from verse 13 onto the end, and even just that picture of you in verse 14, you became imitated of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered this pattern of suffering, which, when you're in the world and you're thinking, it seems like I've chosen the more difficult path, how reassuring to hear that this is actually the Jesus way. And as we suffer for the Gospel, so we are walking in the path of the cross. This is the way of the cross. And that's been the case all throughout church history. And Paul talks here just about recent church history for him, the prophets and Christ and other churches in Judea. But actually, if we were to take a step back and look throughout church history, the cross and this path is plastered all over it, isn't it? And that in itself even adds to this assurance that's being given to us here.

**Sarah:** And it adds to the assurance as well, because it's kind of proof that they're living that way, isn't it? But actually they're suffering for their faith. They've imitated what Paul has asked them and this is the natural consequence of that, which is kind of daunting, I think, when we start to think about that. But actually, this is actually a further assurance that all of this is the real deal, that they are living the real, genuine Christian faith here. What do you make of the last couple of verses, then, with God's role?

**Felicity:** I wondered whether we were going to just slide over those. Yeah, it's a tricky one, isn't it? Because I think he's talking about God's wrath ultimately is going to come upon

those who persecute Christians, which actually we need to know that that is the case because we want justice, don't we? It's so unfair. Persecution feels so unfair. And so to know that we can trust that the wrath of God ultimately will come upon those people, the wording of it can be a little confusing there because it sounds like it's all being kind of stacked up in order to then fall upon the people. But I think the big picture of it is actually God's wrath is going to come. God is justly going to deal with those who are against his people. And so that is the assurance on the other side, isn't it? Like God takes his people, carries his people through, until that which we're getting more and more of in this letter, that return of Jesus, actually, that return of Jesus brings salvation, deliverance for his people, but actually also brings rough for those who are against his people.

**Sarah:** I think just a little note on that as well. Sometimes the footnotes are just really helpful for providing a slightly different nuance in translating, isn't it? And on this one, so we're looking at verse 16 here, it says, the rock of God has come upon them at last, but in the footnote down at the bottom, which has come upon them fully. And I think for me, that just helped me to just help to explain a bit more yeah, why it's necessary. It's just that this is the right justice and the right, kind of the right righteous anger towards them.

**Felicity:** Before we move on to anything else, can I just bring us back to verse 13 where he says, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is the word of God. I love this bit, which is indeed at work in you who believe. I just I love that because what what a huge, big picture of what God is doing as we open the Bible. It kind of comes back to that question we were talking about at the start, doesn't it? Like, why would we bother opening the Bible? Well, God himself, the creator of the universe, is at work in us when we do. I just think that love and we.

**Sarah:** Still need that reminder, don't we? Because I think it can become it seems horrible to say this, but it can become commonplace to just open your Bible and just forget these are the words of God and they're going to work in my heart as I let them as I read them and soak them and pray them through. And that is just the most extraordinary thing, isn't it? Because of God's spirit at work in me, I'm a malleable human being, he's going to be changed by these words and that's really exciting. And I need to kind of stop, as you say, we need to stop and just go, wow, is that where you've landed just before we wrap up? Is that where you've landed your heart this week, do you think?

**Felicity:** Yeah, I think that's been a big part of what's going on in my heart. And I think as well through that, you can read this picture of Paul doing his thing here and it can feel like, I don't know, I am very much not like that. And it can feel a bit intimidating that this is a picture of what it is to be a gospel person. But I think when we read verse 13, we remember that God is at work by his grace, through His Word. And so, actually, by God's grace, might I be able to imitate Paul and therefore imitate Christ in some way as I interact with people and as I care for people. What about you, where's your heart landed this week?

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think that's really helpful. What you're just saying about that, actually is God at work in us to do that, isn't it? Because I just really want to strive to be more loving, to be more kind of all in with how I'm loving and serving people in my church family and outside of church family as well, in the local community. And actually, I need God to work in my heart to do that for me to not look to pleasing people, but to pleasing Him only. Even if we just think about this podcast and people listening, whatever it is, actually, what is it like for us to be all in pleasing the Lord who tests our hearts and then in the way that we love and serve others? You're right, it's the Lord at work three and three, and we need to pray for Him to do that.

**Felicity:** I think it sets us up then for the suffering, which can terrify on it. But actually, through God's grace, we are also able to stand firm in the way that Paul talks about here as well.

**Sarah:** Yeah, it's a bolstering, isn't it? It's a bolstering thing. Yeah, definitely. You want to pray for us?

**Felicity:** Absolutely. Heavenly Father, we praise you so much for Your grace at work in us through Your words, and we pray that that would be abundantly the case. Would you please be at work in us that we might imitate Christ, that we might imitate Paul here, that we might be these authentic gospel people as pictured here. Pray for us as we face suffering, potentially, and ask that you would help us to stand firm because of Your grace, because of

Your Word, because of your spirit at work in us. We thank you so much, Father, for the huge picture of what you're doing. And pray that you'd equip us in every way to be a part of that. Amen.

**Sarah:** Amen. Thanks, Christie. As we say quite often, why not phone a friend, a friend extra friend, knock on someone's door and ask them to read the Bible with you? If the Bible is this powerful, if the Word of God really is changing us in this way, what a beautiful thing to do it with someone else. We've got the discussion questions in the show notes. We just really encourage you if you're enjoying one thessalonians. Why not think about whether there's someone that you could have a 20 minutes conversation over a cup of tea with at some point, over a play date, over a work working lunch, whatever it is, and just get the word of God open and enjoy it with someone else?

**Felicity:** Absolutely. Couldn't recommend it more highly, could we? All right, well, we look forward to seeing you next week as we kick on with the rest of chapter two.

**Sarah:** Yeah, see you then.

**Felicity:** See. Bye.

**Sarah:** We're thankful for Crossway, who is sponsoring this episode today.