

## God's Means

Call to Worship: Psalm 19:7-14

Hymn #681- *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*

1st Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

Hymn Insert- *Every Promise of Your Word*

### **Introduction:**

We recall back in chapter one, beginning in verse two, that Paul had expressed how he (and his co-laborers, Silas and Timothy) continually gave thanks to God on behalf of the Thessalonians, because of their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This morning, here in chapter two, verses thirteen and following, Paul expresses an additional reason for why he continually gives thanks to God, on behalf of the Thessalonians. And while it ties into all that he has already said, there is another dimension added to what he says here, which continues to build on his main goal of encouraging and exhorting the Thessalonians to continue to persevere in their pursuit of holiness, in the face of ongoing persecution.

### **I. Another Reason to be Thankful**

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (vs. 13-14).

And so, Paul here expresses how they thank God without ceasing; they thank God continually, because when Paul and his companions had preached the word of God to the Thessalonians, they received what was preached, as God's words, and not simply Paul's or Silas's or Timothy's words.

Now, Paul has already alluded to this, on at least two occasions already, back in chapter one. However, again, he is going to add further to what he has already stated. Remember, back in verse 5 of chapter 1, he stated, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance..." That is very much another way of

saying, "You received what we taught and preached as coming from God and not merely from men." When the Word comes with power upon anyone, clearly, the Holy Spirit convinces the individual (in the inner man) that that which was spoken, is God's word and not man's.

And again, very clearly implied in verse 9, we found the same idea present. "For they themselves (other brethren throughout the world) declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." What was Paul saying there? Namely, that without Paul or his companions having to say a thing, other Christians throughout the world, had heard about what had happened there in Thessalonica. Their testimony had gone forth, proving what "manner of entry," Paul (and his co-laborers) had among the heathen Thessalonians. The whole notion of, "what manner of entry," means, the way in which Paul and his companions were received, not merely as men coming with an agenda of their own, but rather as ambassadors of God, with words from God. That is how they were received and everyone knew this.

And how was this evidenced? What is the confirmation of the certainty of the matter, proving that Paul's message did not come in word only, and that he was well received among the Thessalonians, as one who spoke on behalf of God? What visible evidence confirmed the invisible reality, that the Thessalonians had truly received Paul's words as God's words? Well, in verse 6, we found that the Thessalonians had actively responded by becoming followers of Paul, and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. They obeyed, they followed, they persevered, and they did so, joyfully, evidencing the way in which God had effectually called them, by His Holy Spirit. And in verse 9, the visible evidence of Paul's successful entry among them, was seen in their repentance. The Thessalonians had turned away from their idols and toward God, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for the return of Christ, who would deliver them from the wrath to come.

And now, here again, in chapter two, we find a similar evidence, affirming that the Thessalonians had received all that Paul had taught, as God's words, and not man's (not Paul's or Silas's or Timothy's words). Notice, we are told in verse 14a, "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus..."

Here again, the Thessalonians became imitators of others, in a way that would reflect their true calling, affirming that they indeed received Paul's words, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. In chapter one, we saw how they followed the examples of Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ, when they had received the word in much affliction. And now, Paul states that they also followed in the footsteps of the churches in Judea. How? Continuing on, Paul adds, "FOR you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us..." (vs. 14b-15a).

And so, what is Paul saying here? That the genuine faith of the Thessalonians; the certainty of their receiving what Paul had taught as the word of God, was confirmed by their perseverance, as they, like the churches of Judea, stood firm even against the tide of persecution coming from their own countrymen. The Thessalonians bore the marks of Christ and of the Prophets of old, in their willingness to suffer for their faith in the Gospel. For, Christ Himself, like the prophets of old, was mistreated and murdered by the unbelieving Jews. And, they bore the marks of the Apostles, in their willingness to remain faithful in the face of ongoing, intense persecution. And they bore the marks of the churches of Judea, including the Jerusalem church (the first church), enduring great opposition and persecution for their faith. All in all, they were in good company.

And rather than see their ongoing suffering as something unusual or as something that would speak against the gospel or the authenticity of the Thessalonian's part in the Gospel, it actually confirmed these. Such suffering is not a manifestation of some weakness in the gospel or in the Thessalonians. Rather, it was a confirmation of the very power of the gospel, in the face of darkness, and the authenticity of the faith of the Thessalonians, as their faith was tested by fire, as it were. And so, Paul rejoiced in that they shared in Christ's sufferings, which was an affirmation of the authenticity of their faith! While suffering, in itself, is never enjoyable, it is a means of proving the genuineness of one's faith. And the Thessalonians were being affirmed. And while Paul did not desire their suffering, he could rejoice in what had been revealed through their suffering, and encourage them in it, so that they would find the motivation and strength to continue onward in the battle.

And lest the Thessalonians should think that the eye of God was not on their suffering, or that those who were persecuting them were simply, unjustly, getting away with it, as if God were impotent or unconcerned in some way, Paul moves on to affirm that vengeance indeed belongs to the Lord, who will deal justly with those who persecute His precious sheep. He continues on in verse 15, speaking of those who contend with the people of God, "And they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost" (vs. 15b-16).

Those who oppose the Gospel, oppose God. They are contrary to all men, because they seek to hinder the only means of all men being saved from their sins. And therefore, they always fill up the measure of their sins. They increase the vat of their guilt, as they continually contend with God, in persecuting God's people (who carry out the will of God, in redemption), and therefore, their judgment will be all the more severe. Indeed, the wrath of God has come upon them to the uttermost, in that their incurred guilt is ever increasing (Romans 1- the wrath of God is evident in the further hardening of sinners, increasing their guilt, leading ultimately to a greater judgment in the end).

All in all, the Thessalonians could be encouraged, as their perseverance confirmed their identity with Christ and His church. Their faith ought not to be shaken by their present sufferings. All that had happened from the beginning; all that had happened in the opposition, which led to Paul having to flee Thessalonica (seemingly prematurely), and all that continued to happen in the persecution, which the Thessalonians still faced, was part and parcel for the Christian Faith. And their perseverance through it all, gave Paul great reason to rejoice continually, because it confirmed that the Thessalonians had received Paul's teachings as from the Lord. Indeed, that very teaching; that word of God, which was effectually proclaimed to them and received by them, was effectively working in them, in the present, as they were trained to grow by it, especially in their steadfast faith and confidence in the Christ, whom they had received in truth, from the beginning (vs. 13). The seed of the Gospel was sown there, not on stony or thorny ground, but on fertile soil, which was producing fruit, some fifty and some one hundred fold.

## **II. Closing Thoughts and Applications**

Having worked through our main text then, brethren, let us conclude our time by considering a few closing thoughts and applications for this morning:

1) Note, that contrary to the heretical teachings of "Word of Faith" proponents today, suffering is not a consequence of having a lack of faith, but rather, it is one of God's means of proving your faith. Here, we find that the Thessalonians were able to identify with Christ, with Christ's apostles, and the churches of Judea, by way of their suffering, and that is what further confirmed their faith. Now, while persecution is one means of suffering, suffering will take on other forms, particularly in a country where there is religious tolerance. Whatever the case might be, suffering is one means of proving and strengthening the faith of God's people, and furthermore, it is a means of weeding out, those whose profession of faith, goes no deeper than the tongue.

2) Note something very significant about God's means of accomplishing salvation and conforming sinners into the image of His Beloved Son. We read in verse 13 of our text, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, *which also effectively works in you who believe.*"

Now, I want you to ponder something significant, especially about the last part of that statement. Here, Paul states that the Word of God, which was received by the Thessalonians as the "Word of God," was effectively working in all of those who believe. Consider something profoundly important about the nature of God's word, how it has worked and how it continues to work in God's created order.

We recall in Genesis chapter one, that the creation was formed out of nothing (exnihilo) by the spoken Word of God. And God said; God spoke the words, "Let there be light," and light happened; "and there was light." And throughout the whole process of the created order being created, God spoke, and things appeared and things happened. Now, why is this? Was it absolutely necessary that God should speak, for everything to happen? In other words, if God did not actually "speak"; if He just thought, could creation still have taken place? Is God's power limited by vocal expression? Of course not.

What then was the purpose of God, a spiritual bring, actually "speaking," audible words? Was not God establishing an ordained principle, which was to govern His entire creation forever, namely, that His Word, which is representative of His will (indeed, the very expression of His will) was that, upon which, all things were to rely? Right from the outset, God would express His heart and will; He would communicate it in a language, which would be understood by His creation, calling all to rely upon it. And this is visibly shown, at the point of creation, when God expresses His will in words, which lead to the formation of a material existence out of immaterial parts. And so, God says, and His power is exerted through His words, such that creation happens; *nothing* obeys, as it were, and brings forth whatever it is that God desires. Creation itself says loudly, therefore, that what God says, must be, and if not, His will is compromised, and there is a just penalty to be paid for such rebellion.

And so, when God said to Adam, "You may eat of every tree in the garden, except the tree in the middle of the garden, namely, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and, in the day that you eat of that tree, contrary to My revealed will and design, you will surely die," two things happened at that very moment: Man became morally culpable for how he responded to God's word, and a certain death sentence was ordained, which man must embrace if he disobeys God's Word. If he obeys, he lives and prospers. If he disobeys, he dies. And of course, man disobeyed and died, necessitating a divine Savior to come and rescue him, if he is to be freed from the ordained death sentence, not simply by God laying it aside (which He cannot do), but by God laying the curse upon that Savior, who would legally bear it for man.

But for now, we note the significance of God's Word, as the means by which, God creates, and not only that, but furthermore, as that means by which God accomplishes all things in His creation.

1- God saves through a proclaimed Word, a "gospel" (good news) of what God has done for sinners in Jesus Christ. One cannot be saved, apart from hearing and believing the good news (Rom. 10), and faith itself (the very means of justification) comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

2- Indeed, is it not interesting as well, that Jesus Himself, is called *what* in John 1:1ff? He is called the "Word." Jesus Himself, embodies all that is God and all that is God's will. He

exegetes God for us, in His very Person and life. And as we come to Christ by faith, we embrace the Word of life; we are united to Him, and thereby access all of the riches of God's grace, which come through this Living Word.

3- In accordance with our text, it is the Word of God, which effectively works in us, continually, forming more and more of Christ in us. God's Word contains the very power (Holy Spirit driven power), which alone is sufficient to enable us to put our remaining fleshly desires to death; so that we might be conformed more and more to the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. God's Word, which was a means of creating, and a means of saving, is also a means of sanctifying. It is God's means of changing us. It is God's means of revealing Himself; His means of revealing Christ to us!

The power of life is not found in anything else, not even in miracles, as difficult as that might be to comprehend. In fact, even the job of the miracles was to attest to the authenticity of the Word. He gave us Moses and the Prophets. If we don't believe them, we will not believe even if a dead relative came back to life.

All of this, to simply say, that we must be a people of the Word, written and preached, if we are to expect any form of growth and progress in our Christian walk. There is no other means, outside of that means that God has chosen, to exercise His divine power, from the beginning. His Word is His means!

3) To the unbeliever, do you realize that the more you neglect to repent of your sins and to turn to Christ by faith, the more you are filling up the measure of your sins, and incurring a greater judgment. If you are outside of Jesus Christ, you are presently condemned and kept under the wrath of almighty God. And should you die in such a lost condition, all that you have incurred will fall upon you, in full. You will bear the full price of what your sins deserve. Sometimes, we cringe over the wicked, whose lives are cut short in judgment. As bad as it is for them, know that it will be worse for those who live longer, filling up the measure of their sins, and especially for those who have heard the Gospel, over and over again. Where there is greater light, there is a greater accountability for having received that light, and therefore, a greater judgment to be expected. Flee to Christ now, before it is too late! Don't die in your sins!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25