

Welcoming the Word
1 Thessalonians 2:13-16
Halifax: 13 August, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today, I am continuing our sermon series in 1 Thessalonians.

- Today we come to chapter 2, verses 13-16, but before we begin, I want to do a little review.

You will, perhaps, remember how Paul thanked God for the church of the Thessalonians.

- He told them so right from the start of his letter to them.
 - They were a church that was in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - They were full of faith, love, and hope.
 - They had received the Word in much affliction.
 - They had imitated Paul and his ministry companions and so had become a wonderful example to everyone—a model church as it were!
- They are already starting to have a far-reaching influence for the gospel.
 - Everywhere Paul went, people were talking about them...
 - And everywhere he went, he found people who had already heard the gospel through them!

Last week, we saw how Paul reminded them about the kind of leaders that he and Silas and Timothy had been when they were with them.

- Some think that Paul was defending their ministry, but there is no indication that the Thessalonians needed such a defense.
- It seems rather that Paul was using his example to teach them how to minister.
 - This is how discipleship works—you not only tell others what to do, but show them.
 - In any case, the Holy Spirit has certainly given us, as well as all other churches a model through Paul's words we looked at last week in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

And now today, Paul speaks about the one great reality that made the Thessalonians' reception of his preaching so transformational in their lives!

- Listen now, as I read from verse 13-16—1 Thessalonians 2:13-16.

1 Thess 2:13-16: 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. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶ 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.

May the Lord bless to us the hearing of His holy Word.

Did you see what was unique about the way they had received Paul's preaching?

- It was that they had welcomed it not as the word or men, but as it is in truth, the word of God!
 - Paul drew attention to this way of looking at God's Word because he wanted to encourage it, both in them and in others!
 - The word was continually making a difference in their lives as they went on serving the Lord—and Paul is saying—“You see! It is your attitude about that word that makes the difference.”
- Welcoming the word as the word of God will have the same impact in each one of you and in our church as a body.
 - The Holy Spirit has given us these words in our Bibles to encourage us to receive the word the way these Thessalonians did, and to encourage others to do so.
 - I yearn to see each one of you receiving the work like this! Yearn for this for yourself, for each other, for your own children.
 - If you are going to yearn,

I. You need to realise, first of all, that there are different ways to receive the word when it is preached to you.

A. Realise that there are many who receive it by outward profession.

1. The word translated *received* that Paul uses here when he says, “When you *received* the word of God which you heard from us...”
 - speaks of an official reception.
 - It is a technical term used by the Greeks for receiving a tradition or an authoritative message...
 - where you accept it as something that you will follow.
 - When it comes to religion, it is what we would call making a profession of faith—it is an official declaration that you will follow this way that you have been taught.
 - Israel made such a profession when Moses preached to them, and whenever proselytes came to join God's people, they made such a profession of reception.
 - This continued in the church as we see throughout the NT.
 - Those who profess are baptised and added to the church officially when they officially receive the message preached.
2. Of course there are many who do not receive the word at all.
 - But Paul is not talking here about *receiving* versus *not receiving* here.
 - He is talking about *receiving it in one way* (that the message preached was the word of God)
 - instead of receiving it in *another way* (that it is the word of man).

B. In the parable of the sower, Jesus made it clear that there are good and bad ways to receive the word—good ways and bad ways to make a formal profession of faith.

- Interestingly, Jesus says that unless we understand this parable, we will not understand any of His parables.

1. In this parable, He presents four kinds of soil that represent people who receive the word.
 - First, there is the hard ground that actually refuses to receive it—these are the ones who never make a profession.
 - But the other three types of ground all receive the word—but in different ways.
 - There is the stony ground, which refers to shallow soil with rock hidden underneath.
 - These are said to initially receive the word with joy, but then they do not continue the way the Thessalonians did when persecution comes.
 - Next there is the ground which is full of weeds and thorns.
 - These are the ones who hear the word and receive it, and it grows up a bit, but then is choked out by the weeds of competing interests—the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.
 - Although the stalk grows up, it never produces any fruit.
 - And finally, there is the good soil.
 - Outwardly, it receives the word just like the two soils just described,
 - but this is the only soil that produces fruit.
 - It produces different amounts of fruit, but there is fruit.
 - These are the people who receive eternal life.
2. So you see then that there were three soils that received the seed, but with very different results.
 - They all made a profession of faith.
 - They all officially received the word.
 - But they received it in very different ways with very different results!

C. And here in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul tells us what is unique about the good soil.

1. When they receive the word, they *welcome* it!
 - The word *received* as we saw was of the formal reception—the profession, but the word *welcomed* is a word that is typically used of welcoming a guest.
 - The word of God is not like a guest that imposes on you—that you resent for having come to you to trouble you...
 - But it is a message that you welcome into your heart and life!
 - You make a place for it, you want to keep it there.
2. But much more than that—you welcome it *as the word of God!*
 - It comes to you with all the authority of the Creator of the heaven and the earth!
 - It comes to you, not as a mere human word that could be right or wrong,
 - but as the very Word of the living God—the judge of all the earth,
 - the One who is true and speaks what is true,
 - the One who raises up kingdoms and destroys them as He pleases,
 - the One who is beyond challenge, who is holy, who knows all things and has all power.

II. Now I would ask you, have you welcomed the word as the word of God?

- I am not asking you if you have made a profession of faith.
 - You may have done that and you may have joined the church and be a member in good standing.
 - But I am asking you if you welcome God's word as God's word or do you treat it as if it is just the word of man?

A. If you have welcomed the word as the word of God, it works effectively in you...

- It transforms your life and it stays with you.
 - It doesn't just come to visit and then go away, but you keep it with you.
 - What are some of the things it does?
- 1. It cuts through to your heart and exposes your sin.
 - I am not talking about self-help therapy here.
 - I am talking about cutting in through the layers of deception that we have surrounded ourselves with so that you see your moral corruption.
 - In Romans 6, Paul speaks about how it makes you ashamed of how you have lived and ashamed of what you are.
 - It cuts off your excuses and your self-justification and causes you to cry out for mercy.
 - Because it is the word of God, you cannot push it away or dismiss it.
 - It is God Himself who is addressing you and you cannot escape.

➤ But that is not all that the word does when you welcome it...there is much more...

2. It also shows you what God is really like.

a. Our hearts are constantly producing idols.

- An idol is a way of presenting God or thinking about God that you embrace—either you come up with it yourself or you hear it from someone else.
- We do this because we are uncomfortable with God.
 - Our idols of God are always inferior to God—they have less power so that we can control God—He is less holy so that He doesn't care so much about our sin.
- Sometimes people wonder why there are so many religions in the world and so many different ways of looking at God in the church!
 - Well this is the reason—because we love idols.
 - We want God to be different than He is, so we embrace idols and happily share them with each other.

b. But when you welcome the Word of God as the Word of God, you see Him as He really is.

- You realise how foolish it is to think that we can think of our creator as something that we can shape however we want!
- He is the Creator of heaven and earth, He has eternal power and a divine nature.
 - What He is, He is and you cannot change Him.
 - Like it or not, He is a consuming fire who envelops in flames the wicked—no sinful creature can stand before Him, and no power in heaven and earth can get in His way.

3. But here is the best part of all—the word of God reveals to you the true way of salvation in Jesus Christ.
 - It tells you that the Holy God I have just been talking about has an eternal Son and an eternal Spirit...
 - And that although the whole human race is full of sin and will only experience God as a consuming fire when the day of judgment comes,
 - He has acted in mercy toward us through God the Son.
 - This is the gospel—the good news—that Paul preached.
 - It is the message that God sent His eternal Son into the world to save His people from our sins.
 - He sent Him to become human flesh that He might represent the people He came to save.
 - That He was born of a virgin, that He lived a holy life in our flesh—as a human being—that was pleasing to God.
 - And that He went to the cross to atone for sin—to be punished for the sins of His people so that they could be fully pardoned.
 - He was not just some guru guy that went around and taught people—
 - He was the infinite eternal Son of God.
 - No one else could have borne our sins without being utterly consumed.
 - It was only because He is God that He could bear all the wrath that would have fallen on us.
 - And the word of God tells us that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life.
 - This message comes to us with all the wonderful authority of God!
 - It comes to us not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God!
 - We love the authoritative message that tells us that we who were once condemned are no longer condemned through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - We have it from God!
 - What comfort, what joy, what attachment to God and Christ we have when we receive the Word of God as the Word of God!
4. And that is still not all. We are told that in securing the pardon of our sins, Jesus also becomes our Lord.
 - The call to follow Him comes to us with the full authority of God.
 - His commandments are not negotiable.
 - They come to us not as suggestions of men, but as the commandments of God.
 - That is why Christians always cut across the grain of the society in which they live—because they live according to God’s commandments instead of according to human wisdom.
 - There is no more messing around with man’s morality—we have the commandments of God from His holy word.

- When Jesus calls us to come into His kingdom, we not only receive forgiveness, but we also receive His Spirit—the Holy Spirit He gives to us.
 - And the Holy Spirit works in us—He gives us spiritual life
 - He writes God’s law in our hearts so that we can obey God and keep His commandments.
 - We are promised that we can put off our old ways of living and put on new ways of holiness and righteousness in the truth.
5. We could go on and on talking about what happens when we receive the word of God as God’s word.
- Now we have authoritative revelation about how the world was made.
 - Now we have the word of God about the future—about the coming judgment, about heaven and hell—we have the promise of heaven and the resurrection and the casting away of Satan into the Lake of Fire.
 - Now we have the word of God to tell us what life is all about.
- B. But perhaps you are one who doesn’t see anything special in the word of God.
- You read it, but it does not have power in your life.
1. You have received it formally—but you have not welcomed it as the word of God.
- To you it is helpful advice, but there is no real authority in it.
 - You feel perfectly free to pick and choose what you want to believe and what of it you want to reject.
 - You find it helpful for you, but it doesn’t necessarily always apply to other people and not always to you either.
 - In the end, it really doesn’t do that much for you.
- Do you know why it doesn’t do much for you?
2. The problem is that you have not welcomed it as the word of God!
- a. It is something like the difference in having a friend tell you not to drive so fast and spotting a policeman up ahead with a speed detector.
- Your friend has some helpful advice that you can take if you want, but the policeman speaks with authority.
 - It is like that—times a million—because the authority of God is so much greater than the authority of a policeman.
- b. The reason you do not welcome the word of God as the word of God is entirely your fault!
- The word of God is self-attesting, but you have a sinful heart that wants it to have no more authority than a word from man.
 - You don’t want it to have authority so you resist it—you push it away.
 - Oh yes, you may receive it with joy in an outward way, but you really don’t welcome it as the word of God.

- c. It is not an intellectual problem that keeps you from welcoming the word of God as the word of God.
 - There are brilliant people and there are very simple people that accept it.
 - It has nothing to do with intelligence.
 - It is as easy to see that it is God's word as it is to see that you have two hands.
 - The problem is not with an intellect that *cannot see*, but with a rebellious heart that *does not want to see*.
3. I tell you, you will keep on rejecting it until you repent of that rebellion!
- a. You are fighting against God.
 - You need to accept that and come to terms with that.
 - You need to repent and welcome God's Word as coming from Him!
 - You need to see how wrong you have been to resist it.
 - Right here and now, you need to humble yourself and receive with meekness the word of God implanted which is able to save your soul.
 - b. But you will never do this unless you are born of God's Spirit.
 - We are all stubborn and rebellious by nature.
 - God did not create us that way at first—not at all—but we became that way when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.
 - It was then that they determined that they would set themselves up in the place of God to obey their own desires rather than listening to God.
 - That is how all the suppression started.
 - But when God calls us, He sends His word along with His Spirit and the Spirit breaks through our resistance and we welcome the word of God.
 - We see clearly that it is the word of God, and we welcome it.
 - What should have been obvious to us all along we can now see.
 - That is what needs to happen to you.
 - Perhaps God is calling you even today!
 - Perhaps you have received the word outwardly, but perhaps today you will truly welcome it as the Word of God.

TRANS> Then the word of God will work effectively in you too!

- And do you know what the result of that will be?
 - You will enter into the normal Christian experience...
 - What is the normal Christian experience?

III. The word will work in you and the world will work against you.

- That is the next thing I want you to understand from this passage:
 - That whoever welcomes the word of God will be opposed by the world.
- A. Paul tells the Thessalonians that this is what has become their state of affairs: the word of God is at work in them and the world is at work against them.

1. In verse 14 & 15, he tells them that they have become *imitators* of the churches in Judea that were in Christ Jesus:
 - **1 Thess 2:14-15: For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us;**
 - They imitated those in Judea who were first to receive the word of the gospel as the word of God...
 - As soon as they did, they were opposed by their own people.
2. Paul is telling the Thessalonians what this passage tells us, “Do not think that something has gone wrong when your own people oppose you for welcoming the word of God.”
 - a. People are the same everywhere.
 - As soon as they see someone welcome the word and it starts working in their lives to transform them, they start opposing it.
 - b. Of course they do!
 - They are trying to reject the authority of God here is someone right in front of their face fully accepting His authority!
 - It is very offensive of them.
 - This idiot is shining the light on the thing they are trying to avoid.
 - c. You can understand why they are afraid.
 - 1) Jesus Christ threatens their whole way of living,
 - He exposes all the lies in which they have found comfort,
 - He threatens their political ideology.
 - 2) And they are right—Jesus is very dangerous!
 - His disciples are not forced to follow Him, but they are completely devoted to Him.
 - They seem to love Him and to be ready to die for Him.
 - The world does not want to see fanatics like this multiply!
 - 3) Of course if we are those who only profess but do not welcome the word of God as the word of God, we are no real threat.
 - If we are like that, we will give way on all the things that are opposed and every one will smile and say that we are the right kind of Christians.
3. Do you see, Christian? You are in good company when you are opposed.
 - You are like all true believers who have received the word of God as the word of God.
 - a. You are like the Thessalonians—who suffered from their Gentile compatriots who were worshipping idols like they used to...
 - b. And you are like the churches of God in Judea that were in Christ.
 - Religious people are some of the most vicious opponents of those who have welcomed the word of God...

- They are trying to be good through their religion, and you are exposing them by your faith in the gospel...
 - You are telling them that all of their religion is not good enough—all of their efforts and all of their good deeds...
 - You are shining the light on what God says, that there is salvation in no one but Jesus Christ who was crucified.
- c. And you are like Jesus Himself whom those religious people killed...
- They killed Him because He exposed them.
 - His very life showed them the truth of God's word—that they were sinners—that they needed Him to give them life or they would die in their sins.
 - But they wanted to live according to their own standards, not according to God's standards...
 - So they killed the Lord Jesus—they delivered Him up to be crucified.
 - They treated Him the way they treated their own prophets who spoke the word of God to them...
 - The opposition to God's word goes all the way back to the fall.
- d. And you are also like Paul and his ministry companions who were opposed by the Jews.
- The Thessalonians had seen this with their own eyes—how Paul, as we are told in acts 17, was driven out of Thessalonica, and then out of Berea.
 - Because of the word was at work in him, the unbelieving Jews were working against him.
 - That is what happens to all who welcome the word into their lives.
 - Don't think that something has gone wrong or that some strange thing has happened to you.
 - It is the common experience of all who welcome the word.
- B. Paul points out how wrong these opponents are.
1. He does this because he does not want you to be intimidated by them.
 - They take it upon themselves to tell you that you are evil.
 - They exercise their human authority to oppose the authority of God.
 - But it can be quite intimidating to us when they accuse us of being evil when we follow God...
 - They say that we are immoral and wicked for saying that adulterers and homosexuals will not go to heaven unless they repent and come to Christ.
 - They say that we are disrupting things because of our religion.
 - They write laws to oppose us.
 - They raise up protests against us and have parades and things to promote their agenda.
 - They impose fines and cast into prison and even murder.

2. It is important to remember what God says about them here in His word.
 - a. First, in the middle of verse 15, he says that **they do not please God**.
 - They often invoke the name of God—of their idolatrous versions of God—when they oppose the true God and His Word.
 - They may invoke the name of Allah or the name of God or even Jesus, but it is not the true and living God who speaks in scripture.
 - They do not please God, but they insult Him when they invoke His name—they take His name in vain and they will not escape.
 - b. Secondly, he says that they **are contrary to all men...**
 - And the reason they are contrary to all men is because they forbid preaching of God's truth to the nations so that they might be saved.
 - We see more and more opposition to the preaching of God's word in our society.
 - What a horrible thing to do—God in mercy is calling sinners to come to His Son for salvation—
 - and they are trying stop it!
 - c. Paul says thirdly that they are **filling up the measure of their sins**.
 - The Lord often speaks this way in His word.
 - The sins of these opposers are not judged as soon as they happen.
 - Instead, they are all piled together—
 - The ones who persecute with the sword and the ones who oppose the truth in a friendly manner with their tongue or their pen...
 - all of them are being piled together and reserved for the day of judgment.
 - Paul says that the wrath of God has come upon them to the uttermost.
 - He is speaking the way the prophets did.
 - The wrath that is coming is so certain that it is as if it has already fallen.
 - But the truth is, as Paul said right around this time to the men of Athens,
 - **Acts 17:30-31: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”**
 - God does not punish them over the years because He has appointed a day for that.
 - He is keeping a full account of it all, and then He pour out His fury on them.
3. Instead of being intimidated by them, you should weep for them!
 - Instead of fighting against them, you should plead with them to repent.
 - Keep telling the truth of God's Word and keep living the truth.
 - Tell them of God's mercy in Christ and urge them to receive His Word, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

Conclusion

And so I plead with all you as though God were pleading through me...

- Be reconciled to God—accept His word as the word of God.
 - If you only profess outwardly but do not welcome His word as the word of God, you will perish just the same as those who reject it outright.
 - Every day you are resisting God, every day you are displeasing Him, every day you are piling up more and more sin for the day of judgment.
- But there is forgiveness with God!
 - There is no reason for you to go on in your rebellion to destruction.
 - Surely you can see that you are wrong to go your own stubborn way!
 - Repent and welcome the word of God into your life.
 - Turn to Jesus for full forgiveness and for new life and you will never be disappointed.
 - He has never rejected anyone who has come to Him, and He will not reject you either.
- And you who do believe...
 - Realise what a wonderful thing it is to have God's word...
 - to have the living God telling you the way of salvation and showing you how to live and showing you who He is and what He has done.
 - Give thanks without ceasing the way Paul does whenever you see those who have welcomed the word of God as the word of God.
 - They once shut out God's word, but now by His marvellous grace they welcome it!
 - Do you see that in your brothers and sisters?
 - Do you thank God for it?
 - If you don't you will be a cranky criticising Christian—you will be sour and glum...
 - But if you thank God for lavishing His grace on your brothers and sisters in the church, you will be full of joy and hope and you will be a great encouragement to them.