

1 Thessalonians Ch 2 Vs 13-20

“The Work Of The Word”

Vs13-20

Being thankful seems to be almost a lost art today. Warren Wiersbe in his commentary on Colossians speaks of a ministerial student in Evanston, Illinois, who was part of a life-saving squad. and In 1860, this ship went aground on the shore of Lake Michigan near Evanston, and this student (whose name was Edward Spencer) waded again and again into the frigid waters and rescued 17 passengers. and In the process, his health suffered permanent damage. and Some years later at his funeral, it was noted that of all 17 people that he rescued, not one of them ever thanked him.

In Luke ch 17 we find the cleansing of 10 lepers, and of the 10 cleansed we read that only 1 of the 10 returned to thank Jesus, 9 out of the ten men whose lives Jesus touched, and changed, and made whole never even so much as thanked Him for it. and How sad it is that that's a fairly accurate picture of the way many people treat their relationship with the Lord today, they beg and plead with Jesus to do what they want Him to do for them (as if He's *their* servant vs the other way around) and if it doesn't happen they get mad, and if it *does* happen it's taken for granted, never even thanksgiving being given to the Lord for His overwhelming kindness and grace towards our lives.

Yet we find that as believers, thanksgiving should be nearly as common as exhaling, everything we have (including the breath of life) comes from God, He's given us everlasting life, clothes to wear, food to eat, homes to live in and so much more, many of us get our greeds met nearly as much as our needs. How thankful we should be, and the command is given over and over again throughout the scriptures to be thankful, and we find with the apostle Paul that he was constantly giving thanks, thanksgiving is just laced all throughout his epistles.

Here was a man (Paul) who was beaten (seemingly all the time) shipwrecked on numerous occasions, lived in cold and nakedness and hunger, in constant fear for his life, a disease in his eyes, but whether abased or abounding it didn't matter he gave God thanks. and Not only for the way God kept *him*, and delivered *him*, and moved through *his* life, but Paul found reasons to rejoice for what God was doing in the lives of others. It moved him to thanksgiving just as quickly to see God blessing someone else as it did when God blessed him, now most of us grow covetous, or jealous and envious. We wonder, “Why them God, and not me?” “What have they got that I don't have, what have they done that I haven't done?” and You know what, maybe they haven't done anything, but such is the nature of God, we serve a gracious God, and I find He has a tendency to bless the lives of those who know they don't deserve it. God has said, “*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*” Ex 33:19

Such is the sovereign right of God, but those who think they're doing God some big favor whereby He owes them often get served up a dish of humility. Because God will be a debtor to no man, in the gift of eternal life He's already out given you (and anything you could ever give) for the rest of eternity, anything more that He gives is a bonus, a simple blessing out of His grace.

But what a mark of maturity we have in the apostle, he didn't always need to be on the receiving end to find a reason to give thanks, he thanked God for the way God was moving in their lives, how often do you thank God for the life of someone else. For the way God is blessing them and changing them and using them for His glory, or do you get the poor me's?

The apostle gave thanks, may we learn from his example, notice vs 13.

Vs13

This is the 2nd time we see Paul giving thanks in this letter for the work of God in the lives of others, in vs 2 of ch 1 Paul mentioned the fact that he was always giving thanks to God for them and keeping them before God in his prayers. and In vs 3 we seen what it was he was thankful for, their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope, and we spent some time considering those things. and Now here in vs 13 of ch 2 Paul says in essence, "and Here's something else I'm thankful for regarding you believers there in Thessalonica." *"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."*

Paul commends them because they *received* the Word, rather than *question* the Word.. From the beginning Satan's strategy has been very simple, yet remarkably effective, from the very beginning he initiated a strategy that has been the downfall of not only Adam and Eve, but millions throughout the passing years. Journey with me if you will in your minds back to the Garden of Eden, and there we see Eve standing by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan comes along, and the very 1st thrust of attack, or point of reasoning that he would initiate in order to pull humanity down and damn the human race would be to question the validity and the veracity of the Word of God. and As he approached Eve that day as she was gazing upon the fruit (possibly) of that tree, maybe wondering, "What *does* it taste like?" He came along and says to Eve, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" "Did God really say that Eve?" Just a simple question that would send the human race spiraling, he was questioning what God had spoken previously very clearly to Adam and Eve.

This is always what Satan does, he begins to place questions and doubt in the minds of people concerning the integrity, the authenticity, and the validity of the bible, it's inspiration by God. So that by the time you get even to vs 4 of Gen ch 3 Satan goes for the jugular with a full on contradiction when he says, "You will not surely die." Now God had expressly said, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Gen 2:16-17

But such has been the strategy of Satan from the beginning, because if he can get it into a persons mind to begin to question the inspiration of the scriptures, the historical validity, or the scientific legitimacy, then it's not a very big distance from doubt, to full on disregard and the leading of your life in contradiction to God's Word, and His will for you.

But here Paul is saying, "Man, I thank God because you didn't question our words to you, but rather you received them as they were in truth, the word of God." and Take note of that in your bibles, they did more than *listen* to the word, they *received* the word. Now you recall that Paul had just been in Thessalonica only a short time ago prior to writing this letter, and since he left there he went to Berea, and then he came to Athens and when he reasoned with them there, they didn't really receive the word, they just listened. Paul gave this incredible message to them spurred on by the altar he saw with the inscription on it that said, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" and he said, "*Therefore the One whom you worship with out knowing, Him I proclaim to you.*" and He went on to give this incredible message that brought in creation, and repentance and judgment and Christ's resurrection, and we read in vs 32 of Acts 17, "*And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."* So Paul just left, they weren't interested in giving their lives to Christ, they just wanted to hear some new thing, they "listened" to God's word, but they didn't "receive" it. and Paul was reminded of how eagerly the Thessalonian believers accepted and received God's Word, and he says here, "I thank God for that."

Because he'd just experienced how frustrating it was to pour out his heart, pleading with people to repent, with people just starring at you like you're some type of circus sideshow that they're viewing for entertainment, but no desire to get right with God. But he says such was not the case with you, you did more than just *listen* to God's word, you *received* it. You welcomed it into your heart and into your life; understand this morning that there's a big difference between simply hearing the word, and *receiving* the word. There are people all across this country this morning sitting in churches and *listening* to God's word, but sad to say that by comparison it's a small percentage that are actually *receiving* it. But Jesus said, "*take heed how you hear.*" Luke 8:18

In other words there's a responsibility on the part of the hearer as to what he/she does with that that's been divulged, or made known to them. and What you do with that information has a direct relation as to the affectivity that it has in your life. and I might add that what determines what you do with it correlates directly with the value that you place upon it, which also (as heavy as this seems) shows our regard or respect for Christ, all these things are woven together.

Because God's written Word, and the person of Christ are virtually inseparable, because He's the Living Word, John 1:1 "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" John 1:14 "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" and

The bible supports the inseparable relationship of the 2 over and over again, they're both referred to as #1 *bread* (or that which gives us sustenance) John 6:48; Matt 4:4, they're both *light* John 8:12 and Ps 119:105, 3^{rdly} they're both truth John 14:6 and 17:17, and they're both eternal John 17:5 and Ps 119:85, and Jesus said, heaven and earth will pass away, but My Word will by no means pass away, so it's impossible that we should separate the 2.

So you can see how the value that we place upon the Word of God that is shared with us will have a direct impact or influence on the transformation that takes place in our lives. The question is, how much value do you place on the Word of God. Do you *listen* to it, or do you *receive* it?

Do we value the word of God (the bread of life) more than our physical food? Job said, "*I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food.*" Job 23:12 The word of God is called bread Matt 4:4, milk, meat (or solid food) Heb 5:11-14, and the Ps even refers to God's Word as sweeter than honey Ps 119:103. You remember that Mary chose to sit at the feet of the Word, while Martha got consumed with making a meal, and Mary got the blessing, she chose the better part.

Do you value the Word of God more than money, (think carefully) again the Psalmist said, "*The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.*" Ps 119:72 and Yet how many believers today willingly choose to work Sundays so that they can make some extra money. Now I realize some people have no choice and that happens occasionally, but be careful that you don't place your work schedule, or your job before the word of God, seek 1st the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and God will take care of your life.

What about sleep, again the Psalmist said, "*My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.*" Ps 119:148 How many people can't get out of bed so as to spend time in God's Word or come to church, the Thessalonian believer placed value, and had an appreciation for the Word of God. They heard it not only with their heads, but with their hearts, it made an impact on their lives, they meditated on it, allowed it to sink way down in there. I've mentioned before to you how the Word of God is to the soul as physical food is to the body; even so meditating on God's Word is like the digestive system. How many of us are guilty about coming to a bible study only to hop in our cars afterwards to listen to something completely unedifying so as to erase everything we just heard? And we quench what the Spirit wants to do in our hearts and lives because we don't meditate and chew around on what we just took in. Yet if our physical digestive system were shut down like that you'd die, and yet we're so quick to quench the Spirit by what we watch or listen to.

These believers listened to Paul, they received the words he shared (God's Word) and the result was not only that it worked in them, but it worked "effectively" or "energetically" we might understand it as "actively" or "progressively" and "continually".

Now as I was studying this and kind of pondering it and thinking about it, the question that confronted me about this phrase was, what is the work of God's Word? If God's Word is at work in us, then what is its work? and with out going too deep as I canvassed the scriptures I came up with 14 different thing (and again I didn't look in every nook and cranny of God's Word so I'm sure you could find more) but at least 14 different ways (though some overlap) that God's Word is progressively active in our lives. (Now we obviously don't have time to go deep into them but I'll read you a few references and you can jot down a few for your devotions later) but the 1st thing that happens in our sobering confrontation with the word of God is that it breaks us.

So #1 we're broken by God's Word, Jeremiah 23:29 *"Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"* Jesus said that whoever falls upon the rock will be broken, but upon whomever the rock falls, it will grind him to pieces. In other words the word of God is able to break the hardest of hearts, is able to bring the sobering reality of the poverty of spirit to the proudest man. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart, these oh God you will not despise. and As we're confronted with the holiness of God with out exception the ramifications of anyone coming face to face with holiness is poverty of spirit and a sobering awareness of our sinful state and need for a savior.

Which brings us to #2 we're Born again by the Word 1 Peter 1:23, James 1:18 of course Romans 1:16 *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."*

We're Saved by the Word 1 Timothy 4:16; James 1:21, Sanctified by the Word John 17:17; Cleansed by the Word Eph. 5:26; Psalm 119:9, we Grow by the Word 1 Peter 2:2, if you're #ing these then #7 we're enlightened by the Word Psalms 19:8; 119:105, #8 we're Kept by the Word Psalms 17:4; Revelation 3:10, #9 the Word of God produces faith, Romans 10:17 tells us, *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* The work of God's Word, produces Fruit in our lives Mark 4:13-20. It's the work of God's word to discern the motives and intents of our hearts, so #11 It judges: Hebrews 4:12 *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

When Paul says that God's Word is working in you effectively or progressive and actively you begin to see what that means and what all that entails. and What is the single key ingredient that sets God's Word to work in your life, we read it right here, these things are happening in the lives of those who what? Believe, belief is the catalyst (so to speak) that sets God's Word to work in your life. with out faith it's impossible to please God, so as we place our trust in the Word of God, or our commitment to the veracity of it then the Word goes to work in our lives, changing us, convicting us, molding us and shaping us into the image of the Living Word Jesus Christ and Again it's a beautifully woven circle because we receive the faith, or the capacity to believe God's Word, by the hearing of God's Work because faith comes by hearing the word of God, so God does the whole thing.

Now you may be thinking, “Jeff, that was just 11, you mentioned 14?” The remaining 3 are demonstrated in our present text, two of which are negative, the last of which is positive. So #12 if God’s Word is active in your life, it will bring about hostility by those unwilling to receive it, (we might call this *hostility from the oppressors*). But we also can know that God will deal with those who are hostile toward His word and those who *have* received it, notice.

Vs14-16

So not only did the church at Thessalonica become imitators of Paul and of the Lord, in their example of living the crucified life, they became imitators of the church that suffered before them in Judea. Why, because Paul gave them the Word of God, the word of man is never worth suffering for, but concerning the Word of God, *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* Rom 8:18 and Paul said, *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* 2 Tim 3:12 and So even as they persecuted Jesus, and no servant is above his master even so they’ll persecute you, and again time will forbid us to examine every indictment, but Paul brings a 5-fold indictment against the Jews and their relentless persecution of those sent to them for their benefit.

He says here that #1 they killed the Lord Jesus, #2 they killed their own prophets, #3 they persecuted the disciples, #4 they do not please God, and #5 they’re contrary to all men. Now we know that the Romans put the nails in Jesus’ hands and feet, so that when we speak of the crucifixion both Jew and Gentile played a part and ultimately it was we (our sin) who crucified the Lord. But not only did they crucify their Savior, they killed their own prophets who sought to reason with them regarding their repentance. After Christ had ascended you remember the persecution started on the church and Stephen became the 1st martyr of the church because of his testimony concerning Jesus. Now all of these things add up to #4 they’re not pleasing to God, that was a rather refined or gracious way of putting it.

Now, this “they’re contrary to all men,” could also be understood as “They’re hostile towards all men” meaning that by seeking to forbid the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach out into the nations (even their own) they’re actually acting in hostility towards the people because it’s the gospel of Jesus Christ that will save them. and So to seek to keep it from them is a hostile action, and Paul clarifies the meaning of their contrary actions by saying in vs 16 that they forbid them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved. Now thank God Paul sought to please God and not man or we might not have the gospel as we do today, but they sought to keep the gospel repressed. But what are the corresponding results of such actions and indictments (notice the last ½ of vs 16, read).

I thank God that He is able to save to the uttermost, hey, even the gutter most, but if we continue on unrepentant of our sin we will have His wrath come upon us to the uttermost. His ultimate rejection of us, giving us over to our own ways so as to inherit eternal damnation and separation from Him.

Isaiah 51 and Jer ch 25 speaks of the wine cup of the wrath of God, and the bible teaches that as we reject the Lord, and reject the Lord, refuse to repent, and turn a blind eye and deaf ear

to His conviction, that we are filling up (as it were) the wine cup of the wrath of God. and When it's full God presses it to our lips and forces us to drink of the wine cup of His wrath that we've filled up to our own demise. God gave the Canaanites 400 yrs to repent before sending Israel into the Land to eradicate them. That's why He told Ab "But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." Gen 15:16 God waited for 400 yrs to bring His judgment, waiting for them to repent all the while they were filling to the brim the cup of God's fury, and when it was completely full, God began to wipe them out, His wrath came upon them to the uttermost.

Jesus said concerning His generation that God sent them prophets and apostles, and some of them they killed, others they persecuted, "*that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation.*" Luke 11:50 and Paul reminds us here (as maybe we're rejected by our families, or persecuted for our faith) that God is able to avenge all those who oppose His Word, and His people, vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay. The amazing thing to consider here though is that they were all persecuted by "religious" people.

Vs17-18

#13 God's Word brings about Spiritual warfare, now Paul wasn't so much taken from them as he was driven from them, but he wants them to know that he didn't leave because he wanted to and as a matter of fact he's tried to make it back, literally "once, and twice" or time and again, but Satan hindered him. This word "hindered" speaks of impeding one's course by cutting off his way, or setting up roadblocks. Now there are times when God closes doors to us, and other times when preventions and hindrances are satanic warfare.

But remember that God's not the author of confusion but of peace, and Jesus said, "*My sheep hear My voice.*" But even as Satan will transform himself into an angel of light, even so he often seeks to disguise his voice, but God will lead us by His peace. Paul was able to discern when the Spirit said "No" and when it was the enemy at work. But I thank God that God allowed this hindrance because with out it, we might not have this epistle. Had Paul been able to go to them, he may not have written to them. But now God's word (as presented here) has been able to reach millions, not just those in Thessalonica. So you see Romans 8:28 "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" I'm sure Satan loathes the day that he hindered Paul from visiting Thessalonica. Then finally #14 God's Word brings joy through the lives that it changes.

Vs19-20

Paul gives them a 3-fold commendation and another reassuring factor of the Lord's 2nd coming. He says here that they are his, hope, his joy, and crown of rejoicing.

Or to understand it another way, he can't wait to see them on the other side and present them to Christ. His joy will be to see them in the presence of the Lord. John said, "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*" 3 John 4

Today I want to challenge you with this thought, how many people will be in heaven because you were faithful to give them the Word of God that it might become progressively active in them. How many people have you led to Christ? Giving to missions is another great way to get out God's Word, who knows how many lives have been impacted because you invested in someone's life either personally or through an organization by which the Word of God was carried to a people who may not of otherwise had a chance to hear it. and Believe me they will be your joy on that day, when you see what your faithfulness has accomplished, because God's Word works effectively or progressively in manifold ways in those who believe. 1 life that was changed due to your faithfulness could reap riches untold in the eternal. God help us to be a faithful people, a people who get the word of God out so that many might receive it as it is in truth that it might begin it's effective life changing work in them.

Today if you're here, and the Spirit of God by the word of God has touched or is touching your heart saying, I want to begin a work in you today, I encourage you to open your heart and receive Jesus Christ (the Living Word) even now. Don't buy the lie of the enemy, believe in God's Word, For God so loved the World that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whosoever would believe upon Him would not perish but have everlasting life. God didn't send His Son to the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved, don't harden your heart against the Lord, receive Him today.