

In Chapter 1, Paul praised the Thessalonians as an elect church, an evangelistic church, an expectant church, looking for the coming again of Jesus Christ. The Thessalonians were a transformed people by the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit and this could be seen in their joy, as imitators of Christ; mentioned in 1:6 and reiterated in 2:14 today's passage.

In this passage today; and this text really goes all the way from chapter 2 verse 13 to chapter 3 verse 13, which includes next week's sermon. It is autobiographical, where Paul is defending himself against the critics that said to the believers in Thessalonica, "Paul doesn't love you. Paul doesn't care about you. Paul left you. Paul didn't come back."

Paul is defending himself, as he assures the Thessalonians of his commitment and love to them. He is affirming that it was only his physical presence that was gone. His heart remains with the Thessalonians. This theme clearly runs through this passage, but at the same time, there is also a theme of suffering.

Just because they were a faithful church, it didn't mean that life was easy. They were facing opposition and persecution. They didn't face persecution because they were living in a fallen world; they faced persecution, because they followed Christ.

So, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians, as we are reminded today, that God has provided the way for them, and for us, to cope. I am going to outline three blessings God has given us.

**Firstly, God has provided His Word for His people, for all times and in all places, always!**

Verse 13 "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."

Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians is both instructive and encouraging. He commends them, first, for receiving and welcoming God's word. This was the word that God had appointed Paul and the apostles to preach, that those who hear might believe, call on the name of the Lord, and be saved. Like the good soil in the parable of the sower, the Thessalonians had warmly received the word. Not only this, but they received it for what it was: the very word of God.

The word of people perishes and is often false. But the word of God gives no cause for doubt. It is a living and active word, discerning all things. It is unchanging and effective, bearing fruit in all who receive it.

Hebrews 4 verse 12 "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Can I just note here, we refer to the Word of God as the Bible, and this is true. The Bible is God-breathed, as we read in 2 Timothy 3:16. The Thessalonians did not have God's word written down. The word of God came from the mouths of Paul, Silas and Timothy.

Chapter 1 verse 5 “our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”

And then verse 6 “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message, (which is, the word of God) in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”

So when Paul came to Thessalonica, he preached the word, they received the word and they responded to the word. For this, Paul is thankful. For these believers to keep their joy in the midst of opposition, they must be strong in God’s word. They appreciated God’s word. They gave high value to God’s word.

When we come on Sunday and listen to a preacher, it is important we preach God’s word, but it is also important that you listen to God’s word and that you respond by applying God’s word to the way you live, just as the Thessalonian Church did. God’s word needs to dwell in your heart because it works to transform you as an imitator of Christ.

Remember the Old Testament prophets; ‘Hear the word of the Lord’. From 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 20 and 21 “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

This is God’s church, it always has been, and we must listen to His word. And give high value to His word.

Our Bible Reading from Psalm 19 listed God’s word as:  
perfect, refreshing the soul,  
it is trustworthy, making wise the simple,  
it is right, giving joy to the heart,  
it is radiant, giving light to the eyes,  
it is pure, enduring forever,  
and it is righteous.

God’s word, according to verse 10, is to be desired more than gold because in keeping God’s word in your heart, there is great reward. When we live with this belief, we open our Bible, and we ask God to speak to us. But we must be ready to listen to God’s word and apply God’s word to our lives by faith. James 1:22 says “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

Respond to God’s word.

Psalm 119:105; “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” The word of God is not a lamp to read with, it is to get our feet moving.

So, the first blessing God gives us is His word. This is the most important. We will never be able to stand up against suffering and persecution without God’s word dwelling in our heart.

**Secondly, verses 14-16, it is the people of God around us.**

Verse 14: “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”.

Jews were persecuting the Jewish converts in Judea. Paul is saying this to encourage the Thessalonians because they are in the same situation, except that the Church is Gentile converts, from a Gentile town. Paul is gently reminding the Thessalonians that in the body of Christ, you are not alone.

This why we need the church of the body of Christ. We need the fellowship of the family of God. We need to pray for one another. We need to encourage one another to love and good works. We need to build each other up in the faith. We need the family of God. Whatever community or culture you have come from, we are one as the body of Christ here at KAC. We need others as a reminder we are not alone, we are not suffering by ourselves.

We are called to genuinely care for God’s people and walk with them in this life as we all strive to walk in step with Jesus. We also need to be people who care about living life with people, not just our friends and family, but all people. The real work of ministry is both beautiful and messy, yet extremely rewarding. Genuinely caring for, and being in community with, others will bring us gratitude and joy, just as it did for Paul. Have you ever had a messy faith based experience that God had to work through in you? This is what it means and looks like to respond to the word of God.

There’s another theme in the last two verses, 15 and 16, where Paul issues a sober warning. He reflects on turning away from God and choosing not to follow Him. There are consequences for making this choice. Paul seems to mention this in contrast to the faithful Thessalonians who both received the word of God and responded in their lives as transformed people. So our first two blessings: we have the word of God in us and the people of God around us.

**Thirdly, we have the reward of God before us right here and right now in heaven and on earth!**

In verses 17 and 18, Paul takes the opportunity to express his love for the church, as he laments his absence; he misses them. He has wanted to return to them, but Satan has prevented it. I wish he had mentioned the how and why of this, but since he doesn’t, we’ll never know exactly what Satan did to prevent his return to Thessalonica. It is interesting however, to note that Paul clearly attributes his inability to return there, to the work of Satan. Think about it: Paul left the city and persecution came upon the church, and now Paul cannot return. I can only assume that Paul had done a mighty work there, mighty enough that Satan was making a major effort to destroy it; thus goes the spiritual battle that still rages today.

But God has won. The gates of heaven have been opened when Jesus defeated death. We have the reward of God before us here on Earth, as we have it in heaven.

2 Peter 1:11 “And God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” This is for all who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Verse 19 “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?”

This rhetorical question says that despite the suffering and persecution, Paul has hope, Paul has joy, Paul has the crown. The Greek word used here for crown is not diadema, the kingly crown, but stephanos, the victor’s crown. This is the crown of rejoicing, knowing our victory is won for us by Christ. Understanding the victory crown changes my focus from the trials about me to the glory ahead of me.

Paul is saying ‘my joy, my hope, my crown of rejoicing is getting to heaven and seeing you there. In heaven, where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, where God will dwell with us and where we will be worshipping Him forever.

Paul is expressing the joy and reward of those under his care flourishing in their faith. This is living the work of real ministry. The work of real ministry is caring and being in community with those around us as we walk in step with Jesus. We see the gratitude and joy that Paul has towards the believers in Thessalonica. Paul genuinely cares about the gospel message of Jesus and how it is transforming the lives of the people in Thessalonica. Guided by our prayer lives, we respond by practicing what Jesus preached. We connect with others, living as people transformed, both individually and as God’s family here at KAC. As responders, we are visibly different.

When we respond to the word of God, we live for Him; our choices are different. We have the assurance to get through each day, whatever it brings, because we have the word of God held closely in our heart, we are surrounded by the people of God who encourage us, and spur us on to love and do good deeds, and we have the reward of glory before us, where with all the saints, we will be with God forever.

Is that worth waiting for?

Amen!