

Spiritual Awakening

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[0:00] I don't know if you've been following the events of this past week with the Hurricane Michael! that has devastated the panhandle of Florida and many other states.

On its way north, but it captured my attention. Maybe one of our meteorologists could explain this better, but a short summary of the development of this fast-moving storm actually began on October 2nd. The National Hurricane Center began monitoring a broad area of low pressure that had developed over the Caribbean Sea. And then by October 6th, the disturbance had developed into a well-organized deep convection, whatever that means. Although it still lacked a well-defined circulation. It wasn't quite spinning yet. But by the morning of October 7th, the radar data had found a closed center of circulation and the newly formed tropical cyclone quickly strengthened into a tropical storm. So that by October 8th, Michael became a high-end tropical storm.

And as the cloud pattern became better organized, it was only two days later that it made landfall there at the panhandle of Florida in Mexico Beach, Florida. It's said to be one of the most powerful hurricanes to hit the continental U.S. in nearly 50 years. Strongest tropical cyclone by maximum sustained wind speeds since Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Strongest on record to hit Florida panhandle ever.

The third most intense hurricane to make landfall on the U.S. in terms of pressure. Entire communities destroyed. Houses obliterated so that only the concrete slab is left as gale force winds of 155 miles an hour pounded that area. Several people are dead. Millions are without power. About 1,500 are still missing. And the devastating effects will be felt for months and possibly years to come.

I'm reminded of this for a couple of reasons. First, I'm reminded of this because of our need to pray. Our need to pray for brothers and sisters who are there in Florida. We often talk about the common grace of God, the sun that comes on the good and the evil. That's God's grace lavished on the wide audience of saved and unsaved individuals. But we often forget about the fact of the common crisis that comes on the evil and the good. Yes, there were saloons that were devastated by these wind forces, but also churches. There were believers, brothers and sisters in Christ who are experiencing the devastating effects of this natural force.

[3:46] So we need to be praying. Praying that God would use crisis in the lives of those who do not know him and in the hearts of those who do to be willing to share the gospel and perhaps open the door for the gospel in the hearts of those who are suffering in great physical need that may open the door to access to helping them see their desperation for the true need and that is a spiritual need.

We need to be praying that God does that. I'm also reminded of this over the past week because it reminds me of other storms. Not just the devastating wind of hurricanes, but a storm that Jesus talked about in his parable, I think at the end of Matthew chapter 7, when he's speaking to the crowds and he's talking about the wise man and the foolish man. He's talking about a house that's built on the rock and a house that's built on the sand and he summarizes it this way. In chapter 7 of Matthew verses 24 to 27, he says, everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rains fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand and the rains fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was the fall of it.

Same rain, same floods, same wind, different result. And the different result was not that they both were exposed to the word, the difference in result was their response to the word.

[6:05] those who heard the word and obeyed it versus those who heard the word and refused to obey. You know, the winds of life, they will come.

They are inevitable. That's what Jesus is trying to communicate through this parable. The winds of life will come. Maybe you're experiencing the winds of life right now.

You feel the wind beating on your life. The floods are rising. The storms are blowing. But there can be an unshakableness to your life depending upon your response to the word of God.

And that's where we come this morning. The question is not will the winds come, but when they come, will your house stand? And what does it take to have an enduring home, an enduring life? What does it take to have a solid foundation in the storm? It takes a steady foundation built on the word of God.

[7:23] And that's where we come this morning. In our passage found in 1 Thessalonians 2. If you would, please turn there. 1 Thessalonians 2. Beginning in verse 13 and working our way to verse 16.

If you're a guest with us this morning, it's on page 986 in the Pew Bible ahead of you. Let me read this passage and we'll spend the bulk of our time this morning kind of developing what does it look like to have a word-filled life and we'll look at that primarily in verse 13.

But let me read for us this morning. Paul says this, And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

For you brothers became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

So as always to fill up the measure of their sins but wrath has come upon them at last. Let's pray. Lord, even as we read this passage this morning, we are gripped with the inevitability of wrath that has either come on Christ or will come on us if we refuse to align our hearts to your word.

[9:19] wrath is come. And for those of us who are in Christ Jesus, it has come on Jesus in our place.

And for those who are of faith, who have believed in Christ for forgiveness of sin, have trusted in him for deliverance, for rescue and salvation, for cleansing, there is forgiveness.

forgiveness. There is the work of the Spirit in our lives to rebirth us, to regenerate us, to remake us and renew us, to cleanse us from those old sins and to remove from us the wrath of God because it was placed on Jesus.

Thank you for forgiveness. Thank you for cleansing. for cleansing. But I would guess this morning that there are those who have not trusted you, Lord. And so it is my prayer, my plea this morning that you would also lead them to salvation so that they would experience not the wrath of God on them, but they would experience the wrath of God removed from them because of grace, because of the gift of Christ given to them.

May they not continue to fill up the measure of their sins, but may their sins be paid for in Jesus Christ and may they experience the freedom that can be found through faith in you.

[10:57] Lord, for the rest of us in this room who have responded to the word, Lord, I pray that you would continue to move us in ever-increasing depth and security in the foundation of the scriptures.

Please cultivate the soil of our hearts. May it yield abundant fruit, the fruit of the spirit that can be found in us, the fruit of a changed life, the fruit of the expression of thanksgiving that marks us as a people, the fruit of individuals who are satisfied only with a deeper intimacy with their Savior, a longing for you that presses them deeper into the word, a desire to know you more richly, more fully, so they can obey you more completely.

Lord, may that be true of our lives today. for those this morning who are experiencing the crisis of life, the winds of this life that are blowing on their home, as it were.

May they come to enjoy the steady bedrock foundation of the scriptures. May their roots go deep and anchor them and hold them in that truth, the never-changing word of God, the all-sufficient scriptures that can speak to every area of life.

May your word be sweet to them today, sweeter than the honey, from the honeycomb. And Lord, may the word of God continue to grow in our attention as a people and our desire to follow.

[12:56] Bolstered by the strength, the indwelling strength of your Holy Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. This morning, I want to look at what does a word-filled church look like?

And how does God create an awakening in the hearts of his people through the ministry of his word? And so this morning as we look at this, I want us to see that God has a spiritual awakening in mind for you today.

He has a spiritual awakening in mind for me today. Every day can be a new experience of a fresh awakening, a fresh reminder, a fresh fellowship and intimacy with God.

God. It is ready. It is accessible. It is available to you through the ministry of the word, the spiritual awakening.

And as Paul begins this little section, and again, we're going to spend most of our time in verse 13, but as Paul begins this section, he wants to set before the people this understanding and appreciation for what does the word of God accomplish in heart.

[14:15] And I think almost unintentionally, Paul begins with this statement of thanksgiving. It flows from his heart there in verse 13.

He says, and we also thank God constantly for this. And by doing so, Paul demonstrates that he is held by the word.

He is held by the word. That's our first point this morning. Anchored in the word. Secured in the word. Confident in the ministry of the scriptures, in the testimony of God in his word to him.

And it is helped to fix him in his faith in God, his appreciation, even in the circumstances that he's experiencing.

So the outflow of his heart in life is an expression of this deep satisfaction in God and deep commitment to trusting God so that he is held by the word.

[15:26] The storms of life had certainly beat against the life of the apostle Paul. We'll look at that in a moment. And yet, he is able in this short verse to testify to the fact that thanksgiving is the constant expression on his lips.

Maybe some of your translations say, for this reason, we also thank God without ceasing. Those of you who have the New American Standard or the New King James would actually begin with that phrase.

And that's because it begins with, and because of this, literally. Paul has just recounted in verses 1 through 12 the hardship that he's experienced.

He's no stranger to adversity. In chapter 2, verse 1, he says, our coming was not in vain. In verse 2, he says, even after we had suffered and were spitefully treated at Philippi, we were bold to speak to you the gospel of God.

In verse 8, he talks about his mom-like ministry, this ministry of grace and affection for these people. In verse 9, he talks about his dad-like ministry, the toil and the labor, the sleepless nights, the burden that he carried for this people.

[16:54] Ministry that was immersed in a measure of suffering, expending self, this personal sacrifice for this group of individuals.

We think of his investment when we read the first 12 verses of this chapter. And so, it's no wonder to begin to see in Paul this expression of gratitude when the work of God is becoming evident in the lives of a church.

Those of you who have children know this to be true. the investment that you pour into their life and speaking the truth of the scriptures to them and seeking through those late nights of encouragement where you'd rather be in bed or those early mornings of helping them with schoolwork or leading them through those broken friendships that they're experiencing at school. Whatever it might be, there is the burden that you carry as a parent for your kids. maybe there are those health concerns or maybe there are other kinds of pressures that your children are facing and parents tend to feel them even more than their kids.

It's one thing for it to happen to you but to happen to your kids is another thing altogether. And Paul in his affection for this church was carrying the burden of the ministry and now to see the work of God played out in their life brought to him this expression of incredible thanksgiving.

[18:33] We've seen in a couple of other occasions the Apostle Paul in his gratitude to God for God's work in the lives of these individuals.

On at least three occasions he uses the word constantly. In chapter 1 verse 2 he says we always thank God for all of you mentioning you in our prayers.

Here in our verse this morning and we always thank God for you or we thank God for you constantly depending upon your translation. And then last week we looked at chapter 5 where Paul says pray without ceasing but also connected to rejoice always and give thanks in every circumstance.

this is the predominant perpetual expression of mature spiritual heart. A heart that is willing to give thanks.

It is a heart that is anchored in God. A heart that is confident in him. A heart that is steadfast in faith. A heart that is bolstered against the storms of life.

[19:48] Colossians chapter 2 verses 6 to 7 helps us see this show up. It says this, Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him rooted and built up in him established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving.

those who are rooted in Christ those who are founded on the bedrock of Christ will be those who are abounding in thanksgiving because they have come to the place of being able to trust him in every circumstance.

But what are the challenges to a thankful heart? What are the challenges to your thankful heart? What are the challenges to my thankful heart? What keeps us from being thankful people? I thought of these questions.

Questioning God's wisdom. You ever done that? God is this really best for me? Do you really know what you're doing here? Or questioning God's faithfulness.

[21:11] God this just isn't fair. This isn't right. This isn't good. Are you really faithful? Questioning God's power.

God the adversaries seem to be so strong. the opposition is too great. God are you really in control here?

Do you really have power to overcome my situation? Or perhaps questioning God's goodness. God I know you're good but do you really love me?

Do you really care about what's happening in my life? all of these could have been true about Paul for sure. Think about his situation. God closed the door on Asia.

God closed the door on Bithynia. He finally opens the door to Macedonia and what does he experience there in Philippi? Beating, opposition, imprisonment, is run out of town, opposed by the Jews, beaten up physically, having to provide for his own financial needs and also for the needs of his ministry team, afraid for their lives, can't even stay in one town for more than a couple of weeks.

[22:44] Satan seems to be getting the upper hand. his aging body continues to feel not only the aches and pains of his older age but also the abuse that he's experiencing on a regular basis.

Maybe Paul could have said, I don't know how my courage will last as I think about all the enemies I make from city to city. If anyone could have questioned the goodness, faithfulness, power, and sovereignty of God, it could have been the apostle Paul and yet in this instant he says, we thank God constantly.

How is that possible? How truly remarkable. God, I thank you.

I give thanks to God always for you. For what is our hope? He says in a couple more verses, we're going to look at in a couple weeks. here. What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? For you are our glory and our joy. You see, the litmus test for spirituality, if God is cultivating spirituality in your life, if there is a spiritual awakening that has occurred, that is happening for you, you'll be able to know as God is growing you in ever increasing moments of joy.

[24:15] as you learn and are being conditioned to rejoice always and to count it all joy when you fall into various trials, recognizing that God is working this for your good and for his glory.

But it doesn't end there. now he expresses being held by the word, but now he begins to call attention to the work of God in the lives of this church.

And he's calling attention to that work and God moving them in ever deeper courses of trusting and loving his word.

He begins here in talking about their reception of the word. He says, you received the word. We find that in the second phrase.

We thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us. What is this reception? Paul is talking about a previous work that was done in the past that is showing up now in the present.

[25:27] This is the first step in the chain of responses that stem from hearing. This receiving the word, and it is an emphatic in the New Testament, trying to call attention to their possession of this word, the word of God that had come to them.

They had a personal connection to it. Some commentators say that the reception of teachings from a teacher by a student was commonly described using this word that's employed right here.

They heard the word, they received the word, they accepted the word in its authority in their lives. They recognized that there was something distinctive about this word.

Not only that the speaker was authoritative, but that he was speaking words that came from an original source of authority. We see this happening in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

We see that people throughout Christ's ministry also recognize something quite distinctive about his word. In Mark chapter 1 verse 22, speaking about the crowds, it says, they were amazed at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

[26:53] A few verses later it says, they were all amazed. So they debated among themselves saying, what is this? A new teaching with authority. Jesus spoke with the authority of God the Father.

It was distinctive. It was visible. It was compelling. It was fresh. It was not like the messages they had heard before. They recognized that there was a work of God through this speaker and a work of God that was playing out in their own lives as well.

Paul points to this in chapter 1. He takes comfort in this in verse 5 when he says, our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

And then in verse 6, you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. The word of God was embraced by this church.

They recognized its quality, recognized that its content was unlike anything they'd ever heard. The work of the Spirit in their life of convicting them of sin and illuminating their hearts was evident.

[28:07] And it resulted in a reception of this word. But this is just the starting place. Receiving the word is just the first step.

Because as we know from James chapter 1, James says, be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves.

But the one who looks into the law of liberty, that perfect law and perseveres being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

So if you're a recipient of the word, if you've recognized the authority of the scripture, that's a great place to be. That's the first step. That's the entry point really to this next thing that we're going to look at next.

Not only did they receive the word, what do you see next? What's the next phrase? It says, you received the word of God which you heard from us and you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God.

[29:19] There was a reception to the word. They recognized the authority of the scripture, the truthfulness of that word and now it moves them in to this next part of accepting the word.

Also, speaking about something that happened in the past. This welcoming, this believing, accepting as true, taking hold of and grasping it for themselves.

The Greek uses a voice which helps to accentuate the personal nature of the word of God working in their lives.

Uses the middle voice. It's almost synonymous with receiving but it places more emphasis on a personal appropriation of the truth.

In other words, they solemnly received the sacred message and appropriated it for themselves. They put it to work in their life. They became doers of the word that they knew was true.

[30:23] They listened to the voices of Paul and Silas and Timothy but what they heard was not the voice of men. It was the voice of God speaking through these men.

This word itself, the commentator puts it this way. It says, the emissary of a man is as the man himself. And what that means is the one representing or being the mouthpiece for the message is as if he is the originating messenger himself.

The emissary is just as the man himself. And so when the people in Thessalonica heard the message from Paul and Silas and Timothy they heard the words of God not just the words of men. That's what happened. For them the message was authoritative. It was sure. And the people in Thessalonica who believed recognized the true nature of the authority.

Authority of God not the authority of men. Similar to what happens in Galatia Paul is confronting the church in Galatia for the opposite problem.

[31:44] He says in Galatians chapter 1 verses 10 to 12 He says Am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I seeking to please men?

If I were still trying to please men I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have you know brothers that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

For I did not receive it from any man nor was I taught it but I received it through the revelation of Jesus Christ. There are two roads two paths to response to the word of God.

There is the Thessalonian path and there is the Galatian path. There is the way of hearing and receiving and applying the word that we find in Thessalonica of pulling it in embracing it of wearing it for yourself of putting it to work and there is the Galatian path that hears the word recognizes its quality and wants nothing to do with the actual message but instead begins to work out their salvation for themselves and Paul rejects that kind of acceptance that kind of posture against the word.

He wants the church to experience the joy that comes in knowing and loving the truth. He commends to them the path the Thessalonian path of accepting the scripture.

[33:20] I think we're all in danger of treating the message of the gospel which is the word of God as if it were only the word of men.

So I like to put up here some things I thought of some ways that we treat the scripture as being from man and not from God.

Can you read these? They're big enough this time? There may be others I'm sure I missed some but here are a few that came to my mind.

How do we treat the word of God as if it were the word of man? First we see it is optional. Well let's see. It applies to this situation but I don't think it's very convenient right now so I'm just going to worry about that one later.

It's kind of hit or miss I can just do it when I want to. That's okay. Right now in this situation God's word is optional. Or that it lacks power.

[34:25] More I think this happens when God gives us a promise kind of like when he gave the promises to the people in Jerusalem about where salvation comes.

It comes from me and not through horses and not through military might. So we recognize that what God says is authoritative but man I'm not sure I can wait for his timing.

I'm not sure that he's really going to be able to come through for me in this instance. Does he really have the power that I need for this moment? And for us in that moment it lacks power.

At other times it is completely irrelevant. We think that our lives are too complicated. We think that our situations are too messy.

We think that the truth really isn't as black and white as it seems to be. And so it can't really apply to my specific situation. And so in those moments it's completely irrelevant.

[35:33] Perhaps we treat it as the word of man because we believe that the scripture is outdated or it's old fashioned. It was for a different time a different space but we have to modernize its message.

We have to bring it up to 21st century social standing. That was certainly can't apply to my situation today.

Or we see it as symbolic. As allegorical. It's not meant to be taken literally. Not meant to be precise in its words.

It's broad message of course and its themes. We can apply them to life but the actual words and actual phrases or perhaps we think it's the word of men because we're distracted by the messenger.

That happens a lot doesn't it? You see the brokenness of the mouthpiece? The person who's bringing the word to you you see their messed up life and you think boy if it's not working for him it's certainly not going to work for me either.

[36:45] Or you feel let down you feel devastated by the moral failures of an individual or whatever sinfulness comes through in their presentation of the gospel or their presentation of a certain truth they're not as loving or not as gentle as they should be and that obliterates any chance that it has to actually do a work in our lives.

We are all in danger this morning of treating the word of God as if it were just merely the word of man. May God help us to embrace and accept his word and to move beyond all of these obstacles that get in our way.

And rather than quenching the spirit as we saw last week that we learn to activate the spirit's power in our life. We learn to awaken Our hearts to the truths and to faith.

We learn to surrender to his divine strength, his wisdom, and his work in our lives, which then leads us to this next and last step that we find where Paul is now talking to the church and he's encouraged that they've moved through the reception of the word.

They've moved through the acceptance of the word and now they're allowing the work of the Holy Spirit to actually have its way in their lives on a consistent and perpetual basis.

[38:18] They obeyed the word. They were obedient to it. They surrendered and yielded themselves to the ministry of the scripture. This is the Greek word *energeo* which is energy.

This is the active movement of the Holy Spirit in producing something good in your life. Of course we understand the quality of the word.

We understand the power of the word. We find from Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12. The word of God is living and active sharper than any two edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit and the joints and marrow and as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

That is the word of God. The faithful living word of God. And of course 2 Timothy 3 16 and 17 all of you who have been through Awana would know these verses.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and reproof for correction for instruction and righteousness the man of God might be perfect thoroughly equipped for every good work.

[39:41] That's what the word of God will do in a life that is yielded to the power in the ministry of the scripture. That's what we will see when we allow the spirit's energy to have his way in our lives.

But the work of God can be hindered. It can be obstructed. Paul talks about that extensively in the book of Ephesians and also in Galatians.

The phrases that we looked at last week don't quench the Holy Spirit. In Galatians chapter 5 walk by the Spirit. In Ephesians chapter 4 put off your old self and put on the new self created after the likeness!

of God in true righteousness and holiness. In Ephesians chapter 4 30 don't grieve the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians chapter 5 18 be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We can quench and grieve the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. We can prevent from willful disobedience the ability that God has the desire that God has to change us and to create within us a life that is tender and receptive to the truths of the scripture and is actively pursuing obedience to God.

[41:17] Let God have his way in your life. The Holy Spirit lives within don't get in the way give him access. When we do this we become like him and that's what Paul points to next this imitation that's going on that he has pointed to several times already.

He says in chapter 1 verse 6 you became imitators of us and of the Lord. And then in verse 7 of that same chapter you became an example which is the same word to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

And now in verse 14 for you brothers became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. There was a resemblance there was a likeness there was a conformity of life that resembled the work of Christ and the ministry of the prophets and the church that had been established there first in Jerusalem.

Certainly there was to second guess. Is this really what we signed up for?

This adversity that we're facing is is it because we've done something wrong? Tendency to wonder where God was in all of this. Maybe a tendency to second guess his power and his goodness.

[42:46] But instead Paul calls them to understand this pattern. Be encouraged. You're just like Jesus.

Be encouraged. You're just like the churches in Judea. Be encouraged. You're facing the same kinds of adversity that we are experiencing. Be encouraged.

This is inevitable to come. The storms of life will pound against your heart and your life but you can be secure in the word.

And then we finish this morning with maybe this last question that may have come to this church in experiencing this kind of adversity. The question would have gone something like this.

But what about the people who are persecuting us? What's going to happen to them? Is there any justice in this world? Does God really care?

[43:47] Does God really see? Will God act on our behalf against them? And so we come to this last point. The plight of those who resist the word.

The plight of those who resist the word. We find in this final phrase, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.

But wrath has come upon them at last. It's almost overwhelming to look and to see the opposition that this church faced.

They killed the Lord and his prophets. They drove us out. They displeased God. They oppose all mankind. They hinder us from speaking. All of these active words that Paul describes, this opposition, this antagonism that he's facing and this church is facing, and yet the reminder, don't worry, Thessalonica.

God's got this. Don't worry, he sees this. It doesn't escape his attention and he will judge. I think it's like the psalmist in Psalm 73.

[45:10] Let me just read parts of this so we can put ourselves in the shoes of the psalmist and then I'll close. It says this, truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart, but as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For they have no pangs until death, their bodies are fat and sleek, they are not in trouble as others are, they are not stricken like the rest of mankind, therefore pride is their necklace, violence covers them as a garment, their eyes swell out through fatness, their hearts overflow with follies, they scoff and speak malice, loftily they threatened oppression, they set their mouths against the heaven and their tongues strut through the earth.

But then he has a point of recollection in verse 16, but when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end. Truly, you set them in slippery places, you make them fall to ruin, how they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors.

It's easy for us when we're facing opposition and adversity to wonder if God really is in control. And just as a psalmist, and just as Paul is calling the attention of the church, God sees, God cares, and God will exact his judgment on these individuals.

[47:07] God is faithful. Let's pray.