

# 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning, church. It's been two months since I've stood in this pulpit.
- I have an extra long sermon for you this morning. We have continued our study of 1 Thessalonians this morning.
- It's page 986 in the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to turn them up. Turn to that. We've spoken a few of the Pew Bible in the Pew Bible. We brought you on 1 Thessalonians.
- We're going to continue reading chapter 2 this morning. As we're turning there, let me pray for us. Wonderful, merciful Savior.
- God, we've been singing your praises this morning. Because you and me are great. You are worthy of praise. Lord, in these moments, would you continue by your word.
- [ 1 : 07 ]     You speak to us, Lord, in your grace. And we would come into a deeper communion with you. As you, by your spirit, Jesus, come and continue with us.
- Lord, we pray that this would be the case. For your holy and great name's sake. Amen.
- Well, friends, we live in a message-saturated culture, don't we?
- Studies have shown that we're exposed to anywhere from 500 to 3,000 advertisements every single day. Everything carries an ad these days. Of course, we're so bombarded by images and advertising every tender block.
- Most of them are out, don't we? A few years ago, the Guardian newspaper in London did an experiment. A reporter by the name of Owen Gibson wore a pair of eyeglasses equipped with a camera that captured everything in his line of vision.
- And then that camera was then connected to a hard drive in a fanny pack to collect all the video data. No one said it was going to be a fashionable experiment. He had to wear a fanny pack when he was willing to make a sacrifice for journalism.
- [ 2 : 14 ]     He then took a trip around London's West End using various forms of public transportation. And when it was all said and done, the data showed that in 90 minutes, Gibson saw 250 advertisements from more than 100 brands in 70 different formats.
- He was bombarded by 250,000, and 90 minutes. But guess how many he actually remembered without a problem?
- An advert that plays the Harry Potter movie on the side of the bus. Well done, Harry Potter. He had blocked all the other messages out. Good and message saturated culture.
- But that's just advertising. Think of all the other messages that you receive throughout the course of a day or a week. Your friends, your co-workers, your parents, your in-laws, your teachers, your professors, talking, lecturing, emailing, texting, tweeting, blogging, either their own piece of advice or theory or recommendation or philosophy of what's worked so well for them and so must obviously be gospel truth for you.
- Message saturation. And finally, of course, there's the most influential voice in all of our lives. The one voice we listen to the most and the one voice we just can't see to turn on.

[ 3 : 37 ] The one that's running in our very own head. That internal monologue or unabated internal dialogue that runs and runs and runs, recycling and rerunning all the messages that we've accumulated and internalized over the years.

Our own piecemeal attempt to make sense of ourselves and our world and our relationships. That self-talk that just doesn't go away. Message saturation.

Message saturation. Message saturation. Message saturation. We're studying 1 Thessalonians this spring. And this morning we come to chapter 2, verse 13.

Where the Apostle 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 accept it. Not as the word of men, but as what it really is.

The word of God. Now, understand that the city of Thessalonica, like you did, was something of a cultural hub. If you walked down the streets of that ancient city in Macedonia wearing your own eyeglasses and fanny pack, you probably wouldn't be a bombardier about 250 advertisements in 9 minutes, but you would probably still find a fairly message-saturated culture.

[ 4 : 50 ] First and foremost, in your face, there would have been the propaganda of the empire. Rome disseminating its version of how the world really works, and its version of how to find peace in the midst of that world, which of course meant unswerving allegiance to Caesar.

But then, there were the traveling teachers of the various philosophical schools, each one telling you how to live a good life and make sense of the world, stapling their posters to the lamppost and meeting at the local public library.

Stoics telling you to accept your fate and control your passions. Epicurians telling you to maximize your pleasure, but not too much, because you wanted to last a long time. Civics telling you to take the ironic stance and mock the pretensions of the powerful.

They would have been the guys with mustaches and the aviator glasses today. But into the mix of all that message saturation, into both their world and ours, Paul makes this call.

The word, the message you've heard from us, is not a mere human word, but the very word of God.

[ 6 : 01 ] God's own message. Two weeks ago, we looked at verses 1 through 12 of chapter 2. Last week, we were in verse 3 here at Trinity.

I am bald, but I don't have an Irish accent, so I apologize for that big time. Nice. Two weeks ago, we looked at verses 1 through 12 of chapter 2, and there Paul was reminding us of how different his ministry was, as an apostle of Jesus, from all the other teachers and philosophers and prophet Janus of his day, and of our day for that matter.

But here, as Paul continues, he's saying that it's not just the nature of his ministry, but it's the nature of his message that is utterly and radically distinct. And if you look back in chapter 2, you'll see that he's already said in verse 2, and in verse 8, and in verse 9, that what he's bringing is the gospel of God.

Not another message about God. The world has plenty of those. But God's own gospel. That is, his announcement. His good news for the world.

So here's the big idea this morning. In the chorus of chaos, of human messages in which we are saturated, the message of the apostles, the apostolic word, if you will, is God's very own word for us.

[ 7 : 25 ] In other words, what the apostles like Paul and Peter and others proclaim and talk about Jesus, which is preserved for us in the New Testament, is not just another human word, but the very message of God wants you and I to hear and to heed and to heed.

And therefore, he too, as verse 13 says, must accept it as what it really is, the word of God. Now I want to spend some time unpacking that this morning, and then after we do that, we're going to look at the rest of verses 13 through 16, where Paul underlines some of the key implications of that one of the friends we have.

So, one big idea, three implications. Got it? Good, that's a perfect idea. Accept the apostolic word as God's very own word. Now, of course, that's a hard idea to wrap our minds around.

That God would break into the sea of our message-saturated human culture and send his very own word for humanity through a group of 14 or so guys in the first century. Okay.

That sounds a little strange at first. I get it. But it would have been a hard idea in the first century to see you. As we saw in the first part of chapter 2, there were probably detractors of Thessalonica who were casting doubt on Paul's ministry, and they would have been doing the same in Paul's message.

[ 8 : 39 ] Paul, they would have been saying, was just a fly-by-night teacher who ducked out of town as soon as things got tough. And his message? Just another human philosophy and a merely human attempt to capture an ultimate reality.

But friends, this is a hard idea on the surface. Let me offer two, just quick, all-too-brief reasons why accepting the apostolic word as God's very own word is not an utterly unreasonable thing to do.

One is historical, and there is personal. So first, historical. Nearly every religion will tell you that their message is God's message. Why would it be reasonable to accept Christianity and New Testament teaching of the apostles as God's very own word?

After all, aren't we just sort of grabbing different parts of the elephant, right? Of course, that sort of really poses you seeing the whole elephant. So it doesn't really teach you how to track, right?

Well, the historical reason is this. The historical reason is because of Jesus. Start with the historical accounts of his life in the world of apostles.

[ 9 : 50 ] You don't have to begin by accepting them as an infallible scripture. Just start with them as faithful narratives of what Jesus said and did. Is Jesus who he claims to be?

Did he rise from the dead? It all hinges on that. And if you, like so many others, come to see that, yes, Jesus Christ is the Son of God and did rise from the dead, then he'll also make us something else.

At the risen Jesus himself appoints certain men as his apostles, as his delegates, to go forth and to teach with his authority. Paul's letter in the Galatians opens with that very statement.

He says, Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. So there it is.

Paul's whole ministry is predicated on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and appointed him to be his delegate to the nations. The book of Acts points us in the same direction.

[ 10 : 55 ] In other words, these twelve men who were with Jesus for his whole earthly ministry plus one or two others like Paul and James were personally selected and sent by Jesus to definitively carry the message forward. And what's more, in John 14, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit would come and teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that he had said to them.

So you see, it is this Jesus authorized, spirit-inspired preaching and teaching of the apostles who were playing in Jerusalem and in Samaria and throughout the Roman Empire in cities like Thessalonica and that today has been preserved for us in the New Testament and continues to move forth to the end of the earth.

If you want to talk more about this after the service, come see. I'm sure some of you are skeptical you're starting to sort of push against it, but it's too brief, but let's talk about it after the service.

There's a historical reason to accept what Paul's saying here in verse 13. The apostolic word is God's word because risen Jesus have authorized them to teach his name. And yet there's an even deeper personal reason, I think, for accepting the apostolic word is God's word.

that has to be the very content of it. After all, the heart of what the apostles proclaimed was Christ crucified.

[ 12:13 ] A message, as Paul puts it at the beginning of all his letters, a message of grace, peace. That Christ came, that the Son of God took on human flesh and lived the simplest life in our place and was crucified for our sin and was raised for our justification so that all who stop trusting in themselves and place their trust in him alone are granted full and free heart and complete and utter peace with God.

This word is at once both strange and beautiful, foolishness and utter wisdom. the very thing that our hearts are crying out for that someone would rescue us from ourselves and that we could finally have peace with the one that they is.

Of course, many today are worried that if you claim to have God's very own word, it will make you a smug, self-righteous and proud person. But did you know this helpful begins, verse 13?

He thanks God that the Thessalonians accepted their word as God's word. He doesn't praise them for accepting it, because you see, ultimately it's God who opens our hearts by his Holy Spirit to see the beauty and truth of his gospel.

It's not because we're smart enough to get it, or spiritually enlightened enough to have gotten hold of it, but because we've been humbled and awed by the God's message it is, a Jesus who stands in the center of it, and by the Holy Spirit who gives us the eyes to see it for what it is.

[ 14:00 ] And if we do get smug or self-righteous that we've forgotten that this word is a word of grace and peace, that it's a word of the cross.

So there are two reasons for accepting the epistolic word as God's very own word, one historical, one personal, but if we get that far out of the world, how do we go about accepting it? What does it mean to accept it as God's word?

Well, it's very interesting that the verse Paul uses here in verse 13 to talk about it, the first word, received, basically is a word that kind of becomes a technical word for receiving a tradition that's handed down.

But then the second verb that Paul uses accepted carries the idea of welcome. It's actually a hospitality word. It's the word you use for the reception of guests.

You're welcome. In other words, the Thessalonians didn't just receive the word like a mere tradition being handed down, but you welcomed it like a honored, esteemed guest. So as you think about accepting the word today, think about how you would accept a distinguished guest at your home.

[ 15:11 ] First, you'd probably be prepared, right? You'd set the table, you'd change the streets, you'd clean the toilet, you'd get ready. Now, God doesn't expect us to clean up our act morally before His word comes to us.

That's the whole point of the gospel, that it's for people who admit they can't clean up their own act, but are you prepared in the sense of coming on Sunday mornings, praying for the service, preaching of the word, having read over the passage, maybe having one or two people in mind that you'd like to engage with after the service?

In your personal quiet times, are you prepared in the sense of having a plan for what to read, what to pray for, with a journal to note down any insights that God is revealing to you?

Now, you wouldn't just accept one or guess with preparation, right, but also with expectation. You'd be excited about having them come into your home. You'd be anticipating the thrill of having them sit at your table and talk with you in such an intimate space.

And we're to accept God's word in the same way with expectation, and it's a great God who promises you can do great things through his word. And we can anticipate the thrill of seeing more and more of God's character and glory in his word, and be excited about the ways God will challenge and change us through his word.

[ 16 : 29 ] So we can do it expectantly, but would you listen to me howling? If a great and long-awaited guest was coming to your home, you'd be humble with you, you wouldn't be thrash or flippin when they arrived.

And your conversation would be so you know, it's kind of like if Yo-Yo Ma came for dinner, and he wanted to talk about cello playing or the state of classical music for today, you probably wouldn't try to correct it. You probably wouldn't try to say poetically, Yo-Yo.

It doesn't go by Yo-Yo, by the way. I think you're actually wrong about that implying technique. Let me say your bow. Of course, I would defer to it. You'd seek to learn all you could for it, and it's the same with God's word, we should approach it humbly, and we should also encourage you thankfully.

You would show an honor to us and appreciation for a visit, and you might even give him a little gift to remember you by, in the same way for him to accept God's word of thanksgiving. You obviously don't have to give God a memento of your time to give her, but let God know how grateful you are.

And finally, if you were hosting someone really no-worthy, my guess is you wouldn't just do it with preparation and expectation, you wouldn't just do it with humility and gratitude, but you'd probably be ready to start spreading the word.

[ 17 : 44 ] To be honest, you would post pictures to Facebook of you and Yo-Yo Ma chilling in your living room over drinking the cup of wine, right? Come on, you have to.

You might even invite a friend or two over for the dinner to get in on the action. There would be an infectious joy that's surrounded accepting such a guest. You would naturally want to pull others in, and it's the same with God's gospel, the grace and peace of Jesus is an infectious joy that naturally pulls others in.

So when you come to God's word on Sunday mornings, or in small group, or in your quiet time, look for something to share. Some new glory of Christ that you see.

Some fresh promise that comforts your soul. And pass it along. Paul would often talk about boasting, not in yourself, but in Christ.

Make it a discipline to go to the word expecting to boast in Christ. And in addition to that, think about where you can add them around the table as the word.

[ 18 : 50 ] Easter Sunday will be here in just a few weeks. Good opportunity to invite people to be expecting to share the goodness around the word. So just like receiving a guest, accepting God's word is a joy to share.

So there it is. There's the big idea of the passage. Accept the apostolic word, not as a really human word, but it's God's own word. Because it is God's word, there are three implications now that our passage calls out.

The first is in verse 13. The end of verse 13. Because it's God's word, it's at work on us who believe. Paul says you accept it, not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is that work, you believers.

Now, if it were a human word, we'd work on it, right? We tweak it or alter it or perfect it or change it or try to get it to work for us teams, just like every other human I do. But since this is God's word, it works on us.

In fact, it works in us. The gospel progressively works itself out in us who believe. It's like a sound way to get deeper and richer as it goes on. It's like a seed that grows roots and a trunk and branches and over time becomes a majestic tree.

[ 20 : 06 ] God's word is at work. Friend, if you consider the power of God's word in scripture, in Genesis 1, God creates the universe of nothing but his word.

In Hebrews 1, the Son is said to uphold the universe by the word of his power. Greg started our service by mentioning that Ezekiel had a vision of dry wounds and it was the preached word of God that brought it back to life.

That spiritual renewal happens to the word. And in Isaiah 55, 11 that we read earlier, it says that God's word always accomplishes the purpose for which he sent.

It always does what God wants it to do. God's word is at work. Just think about the power that human words can have.

Especially if someone knows me really well. My wife, Beth, I dare say, knows me better than any other human person probably could. And when she speaks into my life, she's able to hit something very deep because she knows me.

[ 21 : 14 ] Her words are able to totally begin a reprogramming of work in how I think about myself. And friend, if human words can have such a power, how much more do God's words?

After all, God knows you infinitely better than you know yourself. He created you, and he sustains you, and his perspective is not clouded by any imperfection or bias.

If God speaks into our lives, then surely that would have to be transformative. We see a bubble of God's gospel verse in us because it speaks of a loving word for us.

The other so-called gospels tell us to do work, to be good, to try harder, to measure that. But God's gospel tells us that the one is life and death and resurrection will be all for us in our place.

at the cross, the son of God died a rebel's death, so the rebels like you and me can become son of God. Christian, you hear the father calling you his daughter, calling you his son.

[ 22 : 31 ] He knows you more intimately than you can possibly imagine. He sees the depth of your sin and shame, your failures, your secrets, and your doubts, but at the cross and put it all away.

And now takes you and calls you and rejoices over you as his very own child. And that's worth that worth in you.

So what sins are you wrestling with this morning? Take your lust or your anger or your bitter unforgiving spirit and take it to the cross and see the son of God doing for you what you could not do for yourself.

See your sin being put to death and see your new life beginning. See his love poured out for you there like a stream clearing away your sin and your shame.

Hear the voice of your father calling you his beloved child. Let the cross start reprogramming yourself and the clock.

[ 23 : 45 ] Start reprogramming your desires. That'll do the work. So God's word is the working word.

And if it's God's word that does the work, then friends, do all you can to keep yourself and your word. Did you follow that? God's word does the work to teach yourself and the work.

How little do we change in the world because we are so little in the work. Jesus said in John 15 that will he abide in him, will bear much fruit. And then he says that part of what he needs to abide in him is that the words abide in us.

So friends, don't just hear the word on Sundays, read it, throughout the week. And don't just read it, study it. And don't just study it, meditate on it. And don't just meditate on it, memorize it.

And don't just memorize it, but preach it to your heart. If memorization is totally new to you, let me suggest a good place to start. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

[ 24 : 50 ] Very straightforward, nice parallel structure, but done. Hold that safe in your heart and see the work that God will start to do. If you've done a little memorization before, go after Ephesians 1 or Romans 8, take a chunk and see what happens.

Don't you see, if God had created an infinite expanse of galaxies with his own word, imagine what would happen if that were in you.

Imagine what would happen if it were in you and you believed what it said. You have to change. Just like the winter snow has to help when the warm spring rains come out.

The word is at work. I don't know, there are a few other things that bring more freedom and joy to that concept. Because if the word is at work, then when I think about encouraging or discipling my fellow Christians, then I know it's ultimately not my intelligence or my skill or my cultural savvy that's going to produce the fruit.

It's the word. And when I'm reaching out to my Christian friends and they know, is that my cleverness or my college or my encyclopedia knowledge of every apologetic question, which I certainly don't have, that's going to cause the change.

[ 26 : 13 ] It's God's word that's at work. So I'm free to love people and get to know them and serve them and then share the word.

I want to work to the word. I pray. I want to do it. The gospel of Paul says in Romans is the power of God. I don't know about you, but God's power is a lot more powerful than I have.

If you disagree, we can talk after the service. So there's the first implication, because it's God's word, it's a word and those who will be. Here's the second, here's the second implication, because it's God's word, it's creating a counter culture in the midst of every culture.

We see this in verse 14. Paul says, for you, brothers, became imitators of the church of God in Christ Jesus and are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own country as they did from the Jews.

You see, as God's word does its work in us, it shapes us into a particular sort of people. Do you notice that Paul says that they became imitators of the churches in Judea, not just imitators of believers in Judea?

[ 27 : 26 ] Paul has community formation in his side to him. He's talking about God's gospel creating a people who together form a whole new reality in the world.

A counterculture in the midst of every culture. And we know it's a counterculture because Paul says something. Here's what we have to realize.

The gospel will resonate positively with aspects of every culture. and that's because God's common for his permanence of every human society. But the gospel will also challenge and confront aspects of every culture because every society has fallen and need a redemption.

In other words, gospel transformation will result on one hand in cultural aggravation, but on the other hand, gospel transformation will result in cultural confrontation. And isn't that exactly what you'd expect as a gospel for God's own word if it stood above every human culture?

And it wouldn't be identical to any of them. It would confirm and confront different elements in each one. And it's not just secular or irreligious cultures in the household.

[ 28 : 42 ] It's the moral and religious ones too. Did you notice in verse 14 that the church of Neskola was persecuted by their fellow country? That is their immoral pagan neighbors.

Okay, got it. We expect that, right? But the churches in Judea are persecuted by the Jews, by which Paul probably means the Jewish authorities who are very religious and very more. So whether it's a strict religious moral culture or a libertine pragmatic culture, the gospel is going to cut across the grain and create a counterfeiture of you both.

Why? Because the gospel says that we're saved, saved by shame and grace. And that will strike every culture at the very roots.

You see, friends, every culture holds up something as being of ultimate significance. It could be our own collective moral performance that we're so much better than those people who were there, or it could be our own fostering of individual autonomy.

we are the culture that sort of expresses ourselves most freely. It could be anything, really. But whatever it is, that thing is seen as what will get meaning and purpose and significance.

[ 29 : 57 ] In short, the thing that's going to get you is salvation. But the gospel says that only Christ is of significance.

That Christ is the one who comes and gives you true meaning. purpose and happiness and salvation. And that means that whatever a culture holds up as ultimate is dethroned.

Moral performance, for example, shows you have no culture. So if someone has built their whole life around moral performance, and if a culture has built their whole sense of identity around their common rectitude, the message of the cross will be ideal.

because the families can spend their whole life trying to explode into the dead. Of course, we can start to see what that works is still in.

What's it? They lived in a city where deep of the history started our history a number of history. They love the idea of a king church.

[ 31 : 09 ] The history of the current lives. And there were deep cultural resonances with the gospel, right? Because the gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, is God's king.

But in the same struggle, by their acceptance of Jesus as Lord, it was an implicit rejection of the claim that Caesar is cruel. And a rejection along with the whole civil religion in the imperial vault.

Did they need Caesar for their peace anymore? For their protection? For their significance? Of course Christ. That Christ. And that caused them to be perceived as threats to the established social order that the government saw.

The very thing that the city of Thessalonica held at this ultimate, Caesar, was dethroned in the hearts of the Christians by the gospel. Here's a point.

If you accept the biblical gospel as God's gospel, if you become a Christian, it will fling you center stage into the great conflict that runs through every human culture and every human heart.

[ 32 : 28 ] Humanity worshipped and served created things rather than our creator, and now God in Christ is coming to become king. God's rescue operation is to restore the smaller nations and to redeem the people.

God is creating a colony of heaven on earth. He's bringing an outpost of his kingdom in the midst of a rebel world. and this colony, this outpost, this gathering, this church, starts to do things very different.



Money, sex, power, work, relationships, and all of your kingdom figure are in the Lordship of Christ. This word that's creating this community, a community of innovators, a community of people who do things differently, who point forward to the kingdom to come.

And that means it's going to be a community of suffering groups. You see, the church is kind of like an organ transplant. And although the new organ is meant to give life and will bring life that it's received, sometimes the sick and failing body will turn against him.

The failing system of this world will often turn against the very organ God has planted right in its midst to bring life. Now, Paul, I want to say about suffering in the coming chapters.

[ 34 : 08 ] So I'll give you just a couple brief allocations before we move on to our final one. First, Paul is talking about corporate reality. He's talking about being a church.

So in order to be a follower of Christ, you've got to be connected if at all possible to a body of Christ. You can't be part of a counter culture.

God is creating the world if you're not publicly identified with a local church or a Christian. So if you're looking for a way to get in on the actions of a Christian, join the church.

Second, is your life recognizably distinct from the non-Christian world? Is your allegiance to Christ causing you to think and act in ways that bring both admiration and confidence or at least consternation from your colleagues and neighbors?

But again, this application has to be for are we in our life together acting in ways that make us distinct from the prevailing culture which we are.

[ 35 : 18 ] Of course, I'm not talking about breath and money clothes and everybody in the room is right. I mean, are we putting into question the prevailing cultural idols of our day by the quality of how our life is lived together?

How are the ways in which we think and act regarding work and rest and marriage and singleness and sex and singleness and money and stewardship, how are they profoundly challenging the deep-seated individualism and consumerism that shape the air in which we breathe?

That's part of the job. To let the word start working on us in such a way that it forges a whole new way in the world together.

I'm excited to be a trinity because we've only just begun this project. But it all starts with a deepened conviction of this passage that the gospel is not just a mere human word, but God's own word to us.

That brings to our third and final point. The Thessalonians we see are suffering for their faith and Paul says that that's evidence that they truly accepted God's word as God's word.

[ 36 : 41 ] But in the midst of all that suffering Paul declares that because this thing is God's word, it won't be overcome. Verses 15 and 16.

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 it's always to fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them at last. Now in these verses, Paul's intention is primarily to encourage these persecuted believers of Thessalonica that their opposition and suffering won't last forever.

He wants them to know that God sees their suffering, and like an unrelenting lover he will vindicate his bride. It's hard for us in the West to imagine what true physical persecution must be made.

This hit home for me in recent weeks when we received news at the church office about a friend of Pastor Samuels. For those of you who don't know, Pastor Samuels is the pastor of Pemar Christian Fellowship, a church that meets here on Sunday afternoons in this largely Ethiopian and Eritrean congregation.

[ 37 : 59 ] Samuels showed with us the news that one of his dear friends in northeastern Kenya named Avi Welle, a Muslim background believer, was killed just weeks ago. He was a leading terrorist.

Shot dead outside of the bank at 10 a.m. I don't mention this this morning to be a sensation, but simply to be real.

And that is to realize that for the family and the church family of a brother like God in my life, it's good news to know that those who stand in the way of the gospel will not stand in the way of it.

That the suffering of God's church will not be a last word. That oppression and violence will one day come to an end. And to know that since the apostolic word is God's very own word, it will not be overcome.

Of course, these two verses are very difficult for us. And they're made more difficult for us because of the long history of Christian anti-Semitism. We read a passage like this and it's hard not to read through that awful lens of Western history.

[ 39 : 20 ] So we have to address it. And let me do so briefly by saying just very clearly that discrimination against Jewish people on the basis of their ethnicity or for any other reason for that matter is utterly contemptible and contraprevents the gospel of Christ.

Those who have acted this way in the past were to do so in the present and betray the name of Jesus. And we also need to realize that this passage is teaching and quoting the gospel of the scripture.

First, as I've already alluded to, when Paul mentions the Jews here, he doesn't need all Jewish people everywhere, but most likely the Jewish ruling authorities in Judea and some of the other cities where he's been were actively persecuting the Christian church.

Paul himself was Jewish after all of the apostles and the earliest Christians, and his missionary work always went to the Jewish synagogue first. And many of the Christians in Thessalon might have been Jewish.

We learned that from I-17. In fact, Paul was so deeply in love with his own Jewish people that he could write this in Roman times. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I can wish that I myself were accursed and caught off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.

[ 40 : 46 ] Reading that passage from Romans, it makes one wonder whether Paul wrote verses 15 through 16 in our passage, not with anger in his voice, but with tears in his eyes.

So you see, we read Paul in his own terms. We see that neither this text or any of the New Testament has many grounds for intestinal twisting. What is Paul saying?

He said that the gospel will not fail, that it will not be healed. Notice the threefold opposition to the word described here. They killed Jesus, they drove out many of the Jewish believers from Judea, and they now had new commission to the Gentiles.

But you see, at every turn of the corner, they couldn't succeed. The Gentiles were continually converted, and the believers who were driven out of Judea caused the church to spread even more.

And of course, though Jesus was put to them, he rose to the door nicely from the grave. At every point, God vindicated his son and his church and his God.

[ 41 : 53 ] So those who oppose the gospel simply find that they are opposed from his God. Of course, the last line of our passage is the most cryptic. Paul says, wrath has come upon them at last.

Some scholars think Paul has in mind a recent historical event like the Judean famine in 1844, the first semester in 1848. But I think it's more likely that Paul is actually speaking of a future effect.

That he's speaking of God's judgment, he's speaking of it as so certain that he uses the passive tense to describe it. We actually do this from time to time.

You know, if your basketball team is trailing 20 points in the fourth quarter and your star player gets hurt, you might say to yourself, well, we've lost this world. And I think that's the kind of certainty Paul is expressing here.

And the certainty that God's gospel will not be overcome, that's opponents will face judgment. It's two three applications. First, it gives persecuted Christians the strength and hope to hold up on their suffering.

[ 43 : 01 ] It will not last forever. If you live in fear and anxiety, you can know that God's word will not be overcome. Second, this truth gives us strength to love our enemies and not to tell you.

Because since God will judge, I don't have to. How should Christians respond to persecution? In chapter 5 of this same letter Paul writes, see that no one repays evil for people, but always seeks to do good to one another and to every one.

Romans 12, 14, bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Matthew 5, 44, love you, enemies and pray for those who miss you. Luke 6, 47, and 28, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament, that we're going to love our enemies and let God be the judge. Third, knowing that God will judge gives us humility in our walk and in our witness.

grace. Because we have been saved from that same wrath by God's grace. And by God's grace for me. And all who call the name of the Lord can know that salvation too.

[ 44 : 22 ] Paul, after all, was once an opponent of the gospel, a killer of Christians and yet God saved him. And friends, I know my own heart. It's left to my own devices as I would pose the gospel were it not for God's grace.

Even now, enemies of the cross can lay down their own position and flee to the city. So, friend, as you look in your heart, are you opposing the gospel as you know?

Not outwardly, not actively, but inwardly, in your own own heart. There's a mountain of grace waiting for you in the arms of Christ.

He endured the wrath on the cross so that all the bound man will never face judgment, no matter how great they say it. All man is forgiveness and so can you.

If you will simply let down your resistance and accept the gospel as what it really is, God's very beautiful for you. A few years ago, a man with a quiet land set up playing a metro station in Washington, D.C.

[ 45 : 37 ] He played six classical pieces for 43 minutes and over a thousand people walked by. But during the course of his playing, only seven people stopped to listen, and most of those only for a minute or two.

Only about 20 other people threw money in his violin piece, mostly on the run, and the total only ended up to about 32 bucks. little did any of those of a thousand plus people know that this nondescript man was one of the finest classical musicians in the world, playing some of the most elegant music ever written on one of the most valuable violins ever made.

Three days before playing in the metro of D.C., Joshua Bell had filled the house at Austin Symphony Hall, where seats were like \$100. Two weeks later, at the Music Center at Strathmore, Maryland, they were played with a standing room of the audience, so respectful of his artistry, that they stifled their thoughts until the silence became movements.

Friends, one day, the gospel music of God's presence is going to fill this world like a great violinist filled in concert hall. And yet, God in his mercy has come to us now, into the messiness of human life, into our message-saturated culture to start playing the same tune as he is ready for that day.

But only those who accept him now, in the nature of the world, will have a seat who counts by fault. Friends, the biblical gospel is a heart-changing, counter-contracting, unstoppable force.

[ 47 : 25 ] Because after all, it's God's gospel. May we all accept it as such this morning, and may we go on accepting it until the great concert begins.

Let's pray. Lord, we pray to you.

Continue to soften our hearts to see the word of your word and the word of your word. and speaking in words of life, giving power to us and the Lord.

Lord, thank you for giving us this message through apostles and preserving the word in the New Testament. And thank you that when we open it up, when we take and mark, you can read, you can know that you yourself, God, are speaking and giving this to us.

Lord, I pray that you would accept it as it really is. your powerful transforming word to us. Lord, we ask this in Christ's name.

[ 48 : 30 ] Amen.