

"Message Delivered; Message Received – 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

When I faithfully preach what the Bible says, when I read distinctly from the word, when I give the sense, when I help you understand the meaning (Nehemiah 8:8), I can say to you "Thus saith the Lord!" If I were to just give you my opinion, thoughts that come from my own imagination, or maybe the philosophies of men, what I had to say wouldn't be worth very much. And frankly, there wouldn't be much reason for you to go to the trouble to show up on Sunday morning.

But I am committed to Biblical preaching. I'm committed to expository preaching. I take this very seriously. I am committed to deliver to you, to the very best of my ability, the unvarnished truth of God's word. I am called to Preach the word in season and out of season, to convince, to rebuke, to exhort with all longsuffering and teaching and if I am faithful to that calling, then what I say is of eternal consequence. It's not because I'm so smart; you know better than that. It is because this Bible is God's primary means of communicating His truth, His grace, His love, His mercy, and His plan of redemption.

I am called to deliver the message of Almighty God. But if you fail to receive the message, it is worthless to you, if it bounces off your ears, then frankly, I'm wasting my breath. But if you receive it, believe it, and allow it to impact your life, God will draw you close to Himself and bless you beyond measure.

James says that we must ...

... be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)

When you truly receive the message, you will become doers of the word. It will impact your life in a profound and positive way. Jesus said:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24)

That is the message I am called to deliver. I can only pray that you will receive it.

I confess that sometimes I wonder. I know that God's word will not return to Him void. I know that God's word will always accomplish the purpose for which He sent it forth. (Isaiah 55:11) It's just that I so desperately want to see all of you in heaven. Conversely, I desperately want to see you escape an eternity in hell. And it's not just you who are here this morning; It's all the folks in this community that I have grown to value, to love. So, I beg God that the seed I scatter will take root, that it will grow, and eventually bear fruit.

The Apostle Paul had that same desire. So, when he was presented with evidence that the Christians in Thessalonica were growing in faith, He gave God the glory, praising Him with humble thanks because he realized the message he delivered had indeed been received.

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in

truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:9-13)

Our text this morning addresses two specific things. First, it speaks to how Paul and his companions delivered the gospel to the Thessalonians. Secondly, it addresses how the Gospel was received. So, let's back up and look a little closer at what this passage is saying to us. Lord willing, I'll unpack these verses just a little bit.

In verse 9, Paul wants to remind the Thessalonians of something.

For you remember, brethren ...

He wants to call this to their minds, to focus their memories on how Paul delivered the gospel to them. He said he did so with labor and toil. Those words have more impact in the original Greek. The word translated labor is *kopos* (κόπος), which carries the connotation of hard, physical work leading to weariness. The word translated toil is *mochthos* (μόχθος). In the Greek, this indicates labor involving painful effort. Paul gave it his all and it was exhausting work!

Paul isn't whining here. But he wants them to remember that that the evangelists gave everything they had. They earned their own keep so they wouldn't be a burden and they worked hard in delivering the Gospel.

By the way, this wasn't at all out of character for Paul. It is the way he conducted his ministry everywhere he went. To the Corinthians, he wrote:

I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (1 Corinthians 9:22)

Paul always had a sense of urgency. He knew that without Jesus Christ, people were running down a highway to hell. People without Jesus are faced with an eternity of the most excruciating torment. That motivated him. It should motivate us too. If you have found salvation and know you have an inheritance that is absolutely out of this world, can you really stand silently by while those around you head for the Lake of Fire?

In verse 10, he intensifies this thought.

You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; (1 Thessalonians 2:10)

You guys know how we behaved and so does God. We behaved devoutly, that is, piously, or in a holy manner. We behaved justly, too, that is, properly, always acting in a manner that was right. You know we were completely blameless. There is no way anyone could justly charge us with any wrong-doing. We represented our Lord in a way that was above reproach.

Paul and his companions did all of this for one, specific, holy purpose and that was to deliver the message of salvation.

... as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, (1 Thessalonians 2:11)

To exhort is *parakaleō* (παρακαλέω), to come along side, encouraging them to submit to Christ's lordship. To comfort is *paramutheomai* (παραμυθεόμαι). The word means to relate closely to someone for the purpose of encouragement. It is a very positive word. It is building them up. Finally, Paul charged every one of them ... *martureō* (μαρτυρέω); we've seen that word before. It means to bear witness to the truth, to give convincing evidence. He did all of this quite tenderly ... as a father to beloved children.

We find his objective in the next verse, verse 12.

that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:12)

Can you believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ? Do you accept the fact that you have committed sin worthy of eternal punishment? Have you laid your sin at the foot of Jesus' cross, believing that He died in your place, believing He was raised on the third day proving that His sacrifice was accepted? Have you confessed Him as the Lord of your life? If you have, then you have been called by Almighty God. Meditate on the implications of that. Think about what Jesus said:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, (John 15:16)

That is an incredible privilege. It is God who chose you! It is God who rescued you! It is God who has promised you His kingdom and His glory!

You need to walk in a manner worthy of that calling. You are not saved by any good work that you do, but you are saved for good works. This concept permeates scripture.

... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Aren't we saved by faith alone? Yes, you are, but saving faith will inevitably produce the fruit of belief.

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:18-20)

So, you and I need to aspire to a life that is worthy of our God. You need to move from a self-centered life to a God-centered life.

I was at the hospital this past week, and I heard someone say "I just wish I knew what my purpose in life is." I hope I wasn't being rude, but I said "I know what your purpose is; it is to glorify God." And when your life glorifies God, you get to enjoy Him ... forever.

That is the message that Paul took to the Thessalonians. He gave everything he had to deliver that message. That was the task God called him to. But then, it was out of his hands. Would the message be received?

Look at verse 13.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Message received! Paul's joy just jumps off the page here. "We also thank God without ceasing!" he exclaims. They received the word ... *ho logos*. And they welcomed it, because they realized that it was God-breathed. This was God's truth!

And what was the message? Or, more accurately, I should say Who is the message? Jesus is the message!

In the beginning was the Word [ho logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)

Jesus is *ho logos*. Jesus is the message.

We're all sinners, you know.

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one. (Psalms 14:2-3)

The Apostle Paul is even more direct when he writes to the Romans:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

We all fall short of what God demands and this is a God who is immaculately holy and perfectly just. He cannot tolerate sin. He is too pure to even be in the presence of sin. His justice must be satisfied, and *the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)* Every sin carries the death penalty. Every act of self-centeredness, every act of cosmic rebellion, even those things we consider to be trivial transgressions are capital offenses in God's sight. You are guilty; I am guilty; there are no exceptions. The just punishment is forever!

But here's the amazing thing; God still loves you. Despite your disobedience, despite your continued rebellion, despite your self-centered nature, God still loves you. God does not want you to spend eternity in hell.

Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?' (Ezekiel 33:11)

God loves you so much! So, he found a way to satisfy His righteous justice, while at the same time pouring out His infinite grace and mercy. God the Son entered His own creation as a human being.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (John 1:14)

It's what we should be celebrating during this season. Jesus, entered the world He created and was born the same way you and I were born. He was nurtured by His earthly parents, just like we were. He grew, he learned, played in the dirt just like we did. He was tempted in every way as we are tempted, but unlike us, He never sinned. Then He took that perfect, sinless, human life to the cross at Calvary, accepting the death penalty on our behalf.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

If you call on the name of the Lord, you will be saved! (Romans 10:13)

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

That, my friends, is the message. I've delivered it. Have you received it? It is no good to you unless you have received it and made it your own.

Please, receive the message of God's wonderful grace!