

AN APOSTLE'S INCREASING PRAISE

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For those of you who are visiting with us for the first time, we are in a series in our morning services on "The Prayers of the Apostle Paul." We are really just getting started. I want to consider with you this morning the prayer that we find in 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

This is a prayer of thanksgiving. We are going to find that thanksgiving is at least a part of many of the Apostle Paul's prayers. The prayer we considered last week in 1 Thessalonians 1:2- 4 was also a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer prompted by the confirmation Paul had seen, or had heard, that a work of salvation had been done by God in the hearts of many of the Thessalonians. It was a thoroughly pagan city when the Apostle Paul went there. The report which Luke gave in the book of Acts is, "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:4). The words "some of them believed," refers to Jews because Paul was speaking in the synagogue in Thessalonica. Paul was always moved to thank God when he remembered their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope" that had been demonstrated not only by the believing Jews, but also by the believing Gentiles in Thessalonica.

I. THE REASON FOR PAUL'S THANKSGIVING.

This prayer in chapter 2 was just as constant, just as joyful; as his thanksgiving in chapter 1, but the reason is different. We might say that in chapter 1 Paul was thanking God for the results that were evident in the lives of the people. But he has given a different reason for his thanksgiving to God in the verse that I want to consider with you today. It was not just that they had received the word of God, but they had received it not as they might have received it, and surely as some did receive it, as the word of men, but, as we read here in our text, "as it is in truth," as it really is, as it actually is, as it always will be, "the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Paul was indicating when he wrote this verse that there were at least two different ways that men could accept the teaching of the Scriptures. You can accept it as the word of men and dismiss it as nothing more important than that. Or you can receive it "as it is in truth," which means as it really is, "the Word of God." The first way is the wrong way, and the other way is the right way. The one way, the first way, had no affect on the people who received it, unless possibly to harden them against the truth. The other brought not only life-giving, life-changing results, but eternal results. People who received the word as the word of men could easily cast it aside and forget all about it. Many people go to church that way, don't they? But the people who received it as the Word of God would never forget it. It was evident that God had ministered

to the hearts of those who had received it as His Word. The power of the Word of God had changed their previous ideas about religion, because they were a religious people. The Word also changed their understanding about God. For the first time in their lives they realized in their own hearts that they were hearing the truth. Although the people had not known the Apostle Paul, nor Silas his co-worker, before, the Spirit of God convinced them that at last they were hearing the truth.

From the Scriptures they had learned, according to verse 14, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Person whom they had been taught to despise, was the long-awaited Messiah, and they believed. Some Jews believed. Also a large number of Gentiles (who evidently were Jewish proselytes), and many of the chief women, believed. The reference to the chief women means that among the Jewish and Gentile women who were saved, were some of the most prominent, some of the most influential, some of the most important women in the city of Thessalonica. Later, when Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and was referring to those whom the Lord calls to salvation, he said that the Lord does not call many wise, nor many mighty, nor many noble. But He does call some! And evidently in Thessalonica there was a real response to the Gospel in the hearts of women in the higher ranks of society. So much so that Dr. Luke in writing his report made special mention of them.

As we read the record, we need to notice that Paul did not commend the people who believed. He did not commend the people who had been saved. Instead, the point of this verse that we are looking at this morning, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, is that he was thanking God! And he did this continually. He knew, and undoubtedly Silas knew also, that what had taken place in Thessalonica in such a short time (because he was there only three weeks), was definitely a work of God. If God had not been at work, all of the people who listened to Paul as he spoke in the synagogue would have received it as a work of men. But God was at work. God was speaking to the hearts of people. God had used Paul's exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures to convince the people that Jesus was the Messiah, and not only the Messiah, but the Savior. So if God had not been at work, nobody would have believed. That is always true. When-ever people turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is evidence that God is at work. It is only those who receive it as the Word of God who really profit from its message.

I do not know what some of you think about the Bible. I know what most of you think about it. You believe that the Bible is God's Word. But I hope that all of you will pay close attention to what the Apostle Paul had to say here.

What does it mean when he said in verse 13, "they received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe"? It means that they believed the Gospel, because that is what Paul was preaching to them. And so this means that they were saved. What they had been working for as a reward (because that is the general idea that people have about salvation), they learned was a free gift from God. They received the gift of the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of eternal life, because of what the Lord Jesus Christ had accomplished for them on the Cross. They had truly become the people of God. And so Paul had thanked God continually for the changes that had taken place in the lives of many people in Thessalonica. He thanked God instead of the people because it was God Who had done the work in the hearts of the people. Paul did not even take any credit for himself. He did not give Silas any credit. He did not give the people any credit because they believed. He gave the thanks to God. He gave all of the glory to God, and to Him alone it really belonged.

It would be impossible to say what their convictions about the Scriptures were right after they were saved.

They knew that it was the Word of God, but remember that they did not have the Old and New Testament like we do. They only had the Old Testament Scriptures. But after hearing Paul they undoubtedly believed that God had something to do with the giving of that book. They knew about Moses, and the way Moses had talked to God, and the things that Moses had written down as the Word of God. But never before had they seen that it was all, from start to finish, the Word of God. It was what the Scriptures had to say about the Messiah that convinced them not only that Jesus was the Messiah, but that the book which gave such a verbal portrait of Jesus of Nazareth, had to be the Word of God.

When Trinity Bible Church began around fifteen years ago, one of the things that those of us on the Elder Board did was to formulate a Statement of Faith. We worked on it for many weeks, and sought to express what we believe in the clearest possible way. We wanted it to state what the Word of God teaches. It was our intent that our Statement of Faith would always be subject to the teaching of Scripture. We felt that if the Lord gave us greater understanding of Scripture so that our Statement of Faith was not as accurate as it could be, and should be, that we would change our Statement of Faith, always giving priority to the Word of God. So far, we have seen no reason to change anything that was our understanding of the Word of God at that time.

In our Statement of Faith, we make this statement, "We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts, infallible, the sole authority in matters of faith and holiness."

We also set down four questions that we want people to be able to answer affirmatively. I am just going to read one of those. This is the question: "Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?"

Those people in Thessalonica who were saved under the ministry of Paul and Silas would have had no trouble with our Statement of Faith. That is the foundational truth of the Christian faith. We are a people of one Book. When I speak of us, I am speaking of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We firmly believe that, as the Scriptures were written, men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God. We believe that this applies equally to all of the Bible, and only to the sixty-six books of the Bible. There is not anything missing from our Bibles that can be called the Word of God.

Now, as I have said, the Thessalonians did not have all that we have. They could not have turned to the Book of Acts because there was no Book of Acts at the time. They could not have turned to 1 Thessalonians because this was just in the process of being written, and sent to the church. The Bible was not completed, as we now have it, until the end of the first century. And it was even later that it was compiled into one book.

The point that I am concerned about for all of us today is, How deep and how strong is our conviction that the Bible, as Paul said, is really the Word of God? Those Thessalonians who believed it had to suffer for it. There was a price to be paid by way of persecution because the message of the Bible has never been popular in the world. But if you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and not the word of men, then you are going to want your life to follow the teaching of this Book. That sets the Bible apart from any other book that has ever been written. If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God and not the word of men, then you are going to give it a place in your life that no other book has. You are not going to be able to leave

it alone. You are going to want to read it. You are not going to be like a lot of church people who bring their Bible to church, but all week long pay no attention to it. If you believe that the Bible is God's Word, you are going to want to be taught what it means. Nobody will ever be able to convince you to give it up, or make you believe that it is not the Word of God. You will be like Martin Luther who said that his "soul was captive to the Word of God."

But you would not believe that it is the Word of God if God had not done in your heart what He had done in the hearts of those Thessalonian people almost two thousand years ago. My parents taught me the Scriptures, taught me to believe that the Bible was the Word of God, but it was God Who took their teaching and convinced me that it was the Word. I had faithful Sunday School teachers who taught me the Word of God, but God was the One Who used their teaching to show me that the Bible is His Word. God uses human instruments. He was using human instruments there in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas went in as missionaries to preach the Gospel, but God was the One Who did the work. He uses human instruments, but He is the One Who does the work, and He is the One Who gets the praise.

Let me suggest this, by way of a practical exercise for all of us. Right where you sit today, just in the quietness of your own heart, or whenever you can get to a place where it is comfortable for you to do so, will you lift your heart in thanksgiving to God that He has caused you to understand what most people in the world today do not understand? That is, you have the conviction in your heart that this is His Word. Perhaps at the dinner table today, the one who prays before you eat your noon meal could lead your family, or whatever group you might be in, in a prayer of thanksgiving to God, that you know and believe that the Bible is the Word of God. You see, this is something that is so tremendous that you have to recognize that this is a work of God. It is not something that we just slip into, or something that we might be convinced of by apologetics. Apologetics are meaningless unless God is at work. So when you read the Bible even by yourself, bow your head and thank your heavenly Father that He has shown you that this Book is His Book. It has the marks of divine origin all the way through it.

That is what Paul was doing here. He says, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." How that thrilled the heart of the Apostle Paul. He went to a heathen city. God worked through his teaching of the Scriptures to convince people that the Scriptures were His Word, that Jesus Christ was His Son, and that He had come into the world to save sinners.

Acknowledging that that is true, not only of them, but true of us, why is it important to believe that the Bible is the Word of God?

II. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BELIEVE THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD?

Well, obviously, in our text it says that it is the Word "which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

We learn from the Scriptures that we are "born again . . . by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." That means, as I have said many, many times in talking to you, that nobody is ever saved apart from the Word of God. The Word of God has had some part in the salvation of every one of us who is here this morning. Everything that God does in our hearts He does through His Word. When it says that God works

in us through His Word and does it effectually, this word "effectually worketh" is actually the translation of one verb in the Greek. The New American Standard says, "performs its work." The New King James says, "effectively works." So you can see that when we deal with this Book we are dealing with a powerful instrument which God uses for His glory.

Since we became a church we have had occasion to refer many times to those wonderful verses in Isaiah 55. I want to read two verses from that chapter to you again this morning, where Isaiah said,

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

The apostle, in writing the Epistle to the Hebrews, said, "For the word of God is quick (living), and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword . . ." (Heb. 4:12). Paul could not have gone into Thessalonica just with his own arguments, nor anything else that he could have said, that would have been as powerful as it was when he opened the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures showed them that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. When any person is exposed to the Word of God, they do not necessarily have to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. I love that statement that is often made about D. L. Moody. He said that when he was talking to people who did not believe that the Bible was the Word of God, that did not bother him in the least because their unbelief did not change the nature of the Word. He continued to give them the Word, and time and time again he saw people fall before the Word of God and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior.

So it was through the teaching of the Scriptures that those Jewish people and Gentile proselytes were convinced that Jesus was the Person He claimed to be.

We grow through the Word, don't we? "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). We are sanctified by the word. The Lord Jesus prayed in His great prayer in John 17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (17:17). That is why we teach the Word here at Trinity Bible Church. We know that it is only through the Word that people will be saved, and it is also only through the Word that believers can grow. It is only through knowing and believing and obeying the Word of God that we can become a holy people. This is the only way that we can live a holy life. It is when God is using His Word in our hearts that He teaches us more of Himself, and more of Christ, and that He gives us a greater understanding of all that is in His Word.

The Word of God has been the delight of the people of God throughout history right down to the present hour. Remember that Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). The psalmist said, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). So Paul says that this Word effectually, effectively, works in the hearts of those who believe.

But I want you to notice the part of this text that I purposely have passed over. You notice how the Apostle Paul began this verse, "For this cause also thank we God..." That is, he had been able to thank God that they

had been saved, and he had been able to thank God for the progress that His work had made in their lives and for the blessing that they had experienced. But he was writing about something else here. He concluded by saying that it was because of this “also” that he was thanking God, in addition to the fact that they had received the message as it really is, The Word of God. What was he talking about?

Well, if you look just at verse 13, without connecting it with verses 11 and 12, you will miss part of the emphasis which the Apostle Paul was making. Let me show you what I mean. He said in verse 11 that “we exhorted and comforted (which means encouraged) and charged every one of you, as a Father doth his children.” And then he went on to say, “that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.” And this led Paul into our text: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing . . .” (1 Thess. 1:13). Paul had charged them to “walk worthy of God” (verse 11). And therefore he and his co-workers were thankful that they did not receive the Word as the word of men, but as the Word of God. What did he mean by using the word “also”?

He meant that the only person who is going to walk worthy of God is the person who has experienced the transforming power of the Word of God in his life. If you and I did not have the Bible, we would not have the slightest idea of what it means to walk with God, to walk in fellowship with God, to do His will, to bring glory to His Name. So what Paul meant was this: “Because we are to ‘walk worthy of God,’ we are doubly thankful that you received the Word as the Word of God.” Through it they had been saved. And through that same Word, and only through that Word, would they be enabled to “walk worthy of God.” He said that it was because of what God's purpose is in our salvation that he was so thankful to God that they had received the Word as the Word of God. It was only through the Word of God that they could ever hope to “walk worthy of God.” It is through the Word of God that God effectually, effectively, works in the lives of those who believe. The result is that those who believe are going to be enabled to do something that they could never do under any other circumstances, or by any other means: that is, to live a life that is worthy of God.

It would be meaningless to exhort them to walk worthy of God, if they did not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. They would not know how to walk or to live. They would not have the power to live such a life. You see, the Bible is not just a book of truths, of divine truth, but it is a book of power. This is one reason that we need to be reading it every day. We need to be seeking a greater understanding of it. It is through the Word that God strengthens us so that we can live lives that are pleasing and acceptable to Him.

This is brought out in another prayer that we will consider somewhere down the line, the prayer that Paul prayed for the Colossian believers. Listen to what he said about this:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it [the day we heard that God had done a work in your hearts], do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9).

That is the starting place. Where are you going to find the knowledge of the will of God? The only place I know of is in this Book. Paul says, "I am praying that you would be filled with the knowledge of His will." Then he went on to say, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." That is simply an Old English way of saying, *That you might walk worthy of the Lord, satisfying Him in every detail of your life.*

Do you think it is possible to live a life like that, when you think of how weak we are, of how easily we stumble, of how prone we are to sin, and of how often we have failed the Lord in the things that we have done?

But we see that the Apostle, in writing to the Colossians as well as the Thessalonian church, indicated that the key to all Christian living is our relationship to the Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit Who is going to use the Word of God in our lives, teaching us, strengthening us, showing us what we need to know. And He is the One Who enables us through the power of the Word to live lives that are pleasing and acceptable to God. Paul was so thankful that God had taught those believers in Thessalonica that the Scriptures were the Word of God because he knew that it was only through that Word that they could learn what a holy life is and find also the power to live it. "Worthy of God." How amazing that the Apostle Paul would suggest that such a life is possible for us! But he was writing by the Spirit, and we know that his words were, and are, the truth.

How would you possibly describe such a life? Whatever it is, Paul was certainly teaching us here that such a life would be out of reach, out of question, utterly impossible, if we did not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. I am not talking just about a superficial acceptance of that idea, but I am talking about a conviction so strong that nothing could possibly make us give up our faith in the Word of God.

The passage in Colossians which I read to you tells us that a life pleasing to God must extend to every part of our lives – all that we do, all that we say, and even to all that we think. It includes our whole being. I have a lot of ground to cover before that is true of me, but thank God, through the Word and by the blessing of the Lord upon His Word, it is possible. It is God Who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. How does He work? It is always through His Word and by the Holy Spirit. None of this, none of the things that Paul was exhorting the Thessalonian believers to do, would be possible if they did not believe that the Bible was really the Word of God – unchanging, infallible, and mighty.

Conclusion

You see how thankful you and I should be that we believe that the Bible is the Word of God and not something that man has reasoned out for himself. There is lots of evidence in Scripture that it is, but it is to the glory of God that we believe it. This is no insignificant thing. If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, really believe that the Bible is the Word of God, you belong to a very unique group of people in this world.

It may be that some of us here today who believe that the Bible is the Word of God have never thanked the Lord for the faith that He has given us. So let's begin today and stand with the Apostle Paul in what he did, thanking the Lord that they had receive the Word as the Word of God. He could thank God for every believer in every city for this very same thing: I am thankful to God because of the way God intervened in our lives that we did not dismiss this Book as one among many other books, but we saw that this Book was uniquely different. It is really the Word of God.

Let us begin today, if we have neglected to do so, to thank the Lord for what He has done. Let us not just thank the Lord for ourselves, but as we pray for our family members, as we pray for our church family, as we pray for believers in other places, we are all indebted eternally to God Himself because He is the One Who has opened our understanding. He is the One Who has imbedded deeply in our hearts a conviction that is never going to die, that this is God's precious Word. God has been most gracious, hasn't He, in making this known to us. This is the foundation of everything else that the Lord has done for us in meeting our spiritual needs. Therefore, as we live, as we move toward heaven and glory, let us be thankful and rejoice in what the Lord has done for us.

It may be that there is somebody here today who does not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. But possibly, as you have listened to the Word, you realize that the Bible is different from any other book, that it is God's Book. Let me emphasize with you what I know Paul emphasized with those Thessalonians when he talked to them about God's Word. He told them about Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Whose coming was predicted in the Old Testament. He wanted them to understand that this wonderful Person was the Son of God Who came into the world to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sinners. The Bible makes it absolutely clear that there is no other way for people to be saved from the penalty of their sins except through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So I plead with you, if you do not know Him, that before you leave this place today you will trust in Him as your own personal Savior.