**1 Thessalonians 2:13**

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**The Transforming Power of the Gospel**

***13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.***

* In the past two weeks we have examined Paul’s letter to the saints in Thessalonica concerning his defense of his motives and actions while ministering to them.
* Having been accused of using ***flattering speech*** as ***a pretext for greed*** and ***self-glory***, Paul asks the Thessalonians to recall the actual behavior of his missionary team while they were among them, namely that they . . .
	+ **loved** the Thessalonians, treating them ***gently*** and ***tenderly caring*** for the new converts as a mother loves and nurtures her own children.
	+ That they were **self-sacrificing** of their time and energy . . . experiencing ***labor and hardship*** in working tirelessly to preach and teach the gospel to the Thessalonians . . .
	+ That **their conduct was** ***devout, upright and blameless*** toward them . . .
	+ And that in their **care** of the new Thessalonian believers they ***exhorted, encouraged and implored*** them, as good spiritual fathers.

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* This morning we continue our exploration of this first letter to the Thessalonians as we examine the next phase of the letter . . . Paul’s gratitude to God for the work that He had done and was doing in the saints of Thessalonica.
* In this next section of the letter Paul expresses both his thanks to God for the saving faith that the Thessalonians had received and the perseverance they had been given to endure the opposition and persecution of the enemies of Christ.
	+ This morning I want to examine the first . . . Paul’s gratitude for **the saving faith** they had received.
* One of my shortcomings . . . one of my many shortcomings . . . as a preacher, is my habit of immersing myself in the meaning of a particular passage, but losing sight of the primary message.
	+ For example, last week, in v. 9, I explained the significance of Paul’s statement about their ***labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.***
	+ And while explaining the sort of ***labor and hardship*** Paul, Silas and Timothy endured for the sake of ***the gospel of God***, I neglected to emphasize **the reason for their *labor and hardship*** . . . **the proclamation of *the gospel of God***.
	+ Again, in v. 12, I emphasized the importance of what it means ***to walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you***, but I neglected to emphasize **what you have been called into . . . *His own kingdom and glory.***
* So, this morning, as we come to v. 13, this is a very appropriate place to emphasize these points.
* Here in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 the apostle Paul again expresses his abounding thankfulness to God for what He had done and continued to do in the new believers in Thessalonica.
	+ And in expressing his thanks, Paul reminds us of **the transforming power of the gospel of God.**
* In fact, here in v. 13 Paul outlines the process of salvation. He states in v. 13 . . . ***For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.***
	+ Here in v. 13 Paul explicitly states **the three steps that occur in the process of salvation . . .** **hearing, believing and working***.*

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**The First Step in Salvation—Hearing**

**3 Critical Components**

* Here in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul states the first step in the process of salvation when he says, ***you received the word of God which you heard from us . . .***

* Here in this statement we see **three critical components** in this first step of salvation.
* The **first component** of **hearing** is **the physical act of *receiving* the message**. The Greek word for ***received*** is *paralambanō*, from the preposition *para*, meaning “beside or **from**,” and *lambanō*, meaning “to take or procure for oneself.”
	+ Literally, the term *paralambanō* means “to take from someone, for oneself.” This perfectly describes the act of **hearing** . . . the speaker **broadcasts** a message, our ears **receive** it, and our brains **process and interpret** what we have heard.
	+ If any of those three steps . . . **broadcast, receive or interpretation** . . . is missing, then the entire process of **hearing** has not been completed.
		- In other words, it is not enough to merely receive a message into our ears. That message must be received by the brain and understood.
		- In the context of this verse **hearing = listening**.In other words, for hearing to take place, there must be understand or comprehension, not merely reception of the message in our ears.

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* The **second component** that Paul lists in the process of **hearing** is **the message content**. In this case, the message content is ***the word of God***.
	+ In the process of salvation, **this is the critical component**. Without proper and valid content, salvation is impossible. But I will speak of this component more in a few minutes.
* The **third component** that Paul lists in the process of **hearing** is **the messenger**.

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* + In this instance, Paul uses the plural pronoun, ***us***, to identify himself, Silas and Timothy as **the messengers.**
* Here in this step in the process of salvation is where we participate. Of all the possible ways that God could use or devise to save, God has chosen to use the efforts of men to be the mechanism by which a knowledge of the way of salvation is communicated.
	+ As Christians, God has given us the role and responsibility to be the messengers of the way of salvation. God has assigned us all to be **evangelists**.
* The word **evangelist** is translated from the Greek word *euaggelistēs*, meaning “the bringer of good tidings.”

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* + And as “bringers of good tidings,” what are these “good tidings”? The Greek word for “good tidings” is *euaggelion*, which is translated in English as **gospel**.
	+ Literally, **the gospel is “the good tidings” of God regarding salvation.**
* That is what Paul, Silas and Timothy were . . . they were “bringers of good tidings” from God. They were messengers of the gospel.

**The Second Step in Salvation— Believing**

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* Then, in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul teaches us that **the second step in the process of salvation is believing what you have heard**. As Paul states in v. 13 . . . ***you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.***
* Here in this second step in salvation we see that it is not sufficient to **merely hear the word of God preached.** As Paul says here, **the word of God must be *accepted***.
	+ The word that is translated ***accepted*** is the Greek word *dechomai*, meaning “to welcome” or “to receive favorably.”
	+ What does it mean to ***accept*** or “receive favorably”? It means **to believe what you have heard.**
	+ Perhaps Paul could have been more explicit and stated . . . ***For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you believed it . . .***
* Here in this second step in salvation Paul is teaching us that **for salvation to occur,** **upon hearing the word of God, those who are saved are those who actively welcome the word of God to themselves . . . they believe what they have heard.**
* These are the two primary steps in the process of salvation . . . **hearing and believing**. Paul states this in Romans 10:17 . . .

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***Romans 10:17— So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.***

* In order for saving faith to occur a person must first hear the gospel message. Without the preaching of the gospel, hearing of the gospel can’t occur. And without hearing of the gospel message, faith cannot occur.
* As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul knew this fact to be true. And because he knew that the people in every place he went had never heard the gospel message preached, Paul knew that in order for the people in every town he visited to be saved, they had to hear the gospel message.
	+ Paul states this fact very eloquently in Romans 10:14-15 . . .

***Romans 10:14-15— 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent?***

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* + It is interesting to note that to emphasize the importance of **believing**, Paul lists the four steps of Romans 10:14-15 in reverse order.
	+ The actual order of events is . . .
		- First, the preacher is **called** and **sent** out by the Holy Spirit **to** **preach**

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* + - Second, the preacher **preaches** the gospel message for men and women to **hear**
		- Third, having **heard,** the hearers of the gospel message **believe**
		- Finally, having **believed**, the new believer **calls upon the name of the Lord**
* It is also significant to note what Paul says about **believing** and ***the word of God*** here in v. 13 . . . ***you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God***.

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* + This statement is significant because there are so many professing Christians who have been deceived into believing things that are untrue and are not found in Scripture.
	+ There are a great many teachings within the professing church that are just what Paul states here . . . ***the word,* or teaching*, of men***.
		- In other words, ***the word of men*** is the invention of **false teaching of men** that does not come from Scripture.
	+ Paul’s point here in v. 13 is that **true faith only comes from believing the truth. Believing the false teaching of men does not and can not result in salvation because belief in a lie cannot result in salvation.**
* Paul’s point here in v. 13 is that **the Thessalonians had become true believers because they had believed the truth of God’s word.**

**The Third Step in Salvation— Transformation**

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***. . . the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.***

* Then, having stated that the Thessalonians had **heard** and **believed *the word of God***, Paul then states **the third step in the process of salvation . . . *the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.***
* Here in this third step Paul is teaching us that **those who have been saved by *the word of God*** will also, necessarily, be **changed and transformed by *the word of God***.
* With this statement Paul is making the point that **when God saves you, He doesn’t leave you as you are. As part of the process of salvation He also changes you.**
	+ And furthermore, if you claim to be a Christian and yet you are not changed, you have to question whether you or not you are truly saved.
* When Pastor Matt spent those months teaching through the book of 1 John he was teaching us about how Scripture says we are changed.
	+ When the Holy Spirit saves you, He begins the process of sanctification . . . conforming you more and more into the image of Christ.
	+ This means that He gives you new affections and desires, while taking away old affections and desires.
* One of the interesting phenomena of becoming a Christian is the change that begins to occur within the new believer.
	+ While some of the changes that occur are apparent to each of us . . . a desire to refrain from those things we once did, but now wish to remove from our life.
	+ But some of the changes that begin to occur in us are not so easy for us to see, but are clearly seen by others. The apostle Peter writes of this in 1 Peter 4:1-4 . . .

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***1 Peter 4:1-4— 1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you;***

* + Here in 1 Peter 4 Peter teaches us that people you know will see the change in you as the Holy Spirit begins to change you . . . and they won’t like it.
	+ “Why can’t you just be like you were?” is the common complaint by unbelievers who see your sanctification as a great loss. You are no longer one of them . . . and they mock you and ridicule you for your new-found faith.
	+ But the fact is, as Paul is saying here in v. 13, that **if you are saved** **you will be changed . . . the Holy Spirit will be working in you.**
	+ And the letter of 1 John shows you the many ways that you will be changed.
* But if there is no change of behavior or worldly affections . . . if you still desire and enjoy doing those things that are sinful and disobedient to the teaching of Scripture, you need to ask yourself, **“am I really saved?”**
	+ If you read through the tests of faith in 1 John and find that you fail those tests, you need to seriously examine yourself to see if you are truly in the faith.

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* In my messages I often speak of **the gospel** and **Paul’s ministry to preach the gospel wherever he went**.
	+ But sometimes, in my efforts to explain the meaning of a passage of Scripture dealing with the gospel, I overlook my own duty . . . as a preacher of the gospel . . . to explain the gospel to you during my message.
* As I look out upon all of you whom I know well, it is easy for me forget that there may be some of you who have not yet **heard and believed the gospel message**. So, this morning I want to take the time to ensure that if there is anyone here who has not yet believed, that that person will hear the gospel message this morning.
* As I said a few minutes ago, the word **gospel means “good tidings” or “good news.”** The gospel is the **“good news of salvation.”**

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* + But in order **to appreciate the good news, an unbeliever must first understand the bad news.**
	+ Therefore, **the first step in presenting the gospel message is ensuring that the person with who you are presenting the gospel** **understands his or her condition without Christ.**
* **But before a person can be rescued, they first have to understand the great danger they are in.**
	+ The problem with the unbelieving world is that people who are without Christ believe that they’re just fine. They are drifting along in life, oblivious to spiritual things. So when you come to them with the “good news” of the gospel, they see no need for it.
* It is only when you show them . . . **from Scripture** . . . the mortal danger their soul is in that they may begin to show some interest in what you have to say.

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* + Unfortunately, there are many who either refuse to believe the danger they are in or refuse to accept the offer of salvation.
	+ But for many, once God opens their eyes to the mortal peril they are in, they gratefully receive the offer of salvation . . . **they hear and believe**.
* Most people reject the offer of salvation because they think they’re doing just fine on their own. They think that, overall, they’re doing pretty good . . . that as long as you do your best . . . as long as you don’t do the really bad stuff, like kill people . . . then God will accept you and invite you to heaven.
	+ The only way you can counter this deception is from the word of God and what it teaches about the ultimate end of those who are without Christ.
* **It is only after a person understands and believes the bad news . . . that he or she is hopelessly lost . . . that that person is then ready to hear the good news.**

**The Good News**

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* And the good news that you bring to those who are list is that **God has provided the way to be saved from the eternal death and punishment.**
* When Adam sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, his sin condemned not only himself, but every member of the human race.
	+ Having been appointed the representative leader of the human race, the guilt of Adam’s sin has been passed down from generation to generation.
* But this “federal headship” of Adam and universal guilt of Adam’s sin was by divine design.
	+ As a result of Adam’s sin and universal guilt, there was no way for man to be reconciled to God. The close, personal relationship that Adam had once enjoyed with God was lost . . . and there was no way for Adam or any human to get it back. We are hopelessly condemned to an eternity of separation from God and an eternity of suffering God’s punishment for our sins and sinfulness.
* But, while we are unable to reconcile ourselves to God, God has made forgiveness and reconciliation possible.
	+ And the way that God has made forgiveness for sins and reconciliation in our relationship to him possible is through Jesus Christ.
* God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to take on human flesh. And the purpose for Jesus taking on human flesh is so that he would be qualified to suffer God’s punishment **in our place**.
* You see, **it was always God’s plan that Jesus would die on the cross**. But nobody knew that. Not the Romans, nor the Jews, nor the angels in heaven nor the demons below. **Not a single creature knew God’s perfect plan until after it was accomplished**.
* **God sent His Son to be an atonement for the sins of men.**
	+ During the 6 hours that Jesus was on the cross, God the Father pour out His infinite wrath upon His Son.
	+ And Jesus willingly took upon Himself God’s wrath to save those men and women and boys and girls whom he came to save.
* One of the questions that is often asked is, **“how could Jesus suffer in a few hours what men must suffer for eternally?”**

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* + This is an excellent question. The answer is **because Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead is an infinite being, He was able to suffer the infinite wrath of God in a finite amount of time what men must suffer eternally.**
	+ In other words, **Jesus did not get off easy. He endured every bit of the wrath of God that we justly deserve and would spend eternity suffering for, had it not been for Him taking our place.**
* On the cross Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for every person whom He came to save . . . for all time.
	+ 2000 years before any of us were born, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our guilt because in eternity past God elected to save those whom He was pleased to save.
* And then, following His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus was buried in a tomb. And on the third day . . . a Sunday morning . . . Jesus was resurrected from the dead.
	+ Belief in the resurrection is a critical part of the gospel. By His resurrection from the dead we have confirmation that **God found Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf to be acceptable.**
	+ If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, then that means that God did not accept His sacrifice. Of the requirement for Jesus to have been resurrected from the dead, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:13-14 . . .

***1 Corinthians 15:13-14— 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.***

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* + From this, and other passages, we learn that **belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a critical component of the gospel.** To reject the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is to reject the gospel.
		- In other words, if you do not believe in the resurrection, then you are not saved.
* The “good news” of the gospel is that God has provided the way in which we can be reconciled in our relationship to Him and be spared from an eternity of suffering His wrath for our sins. And the way of rescue is through the sacrificial death of His own Son, Jesus.
	+ If you believe that Jesus came to earth as the God-man and suffered the wrath of God on the cross in your place . . . and if you believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven . . . you have believed the truth and you are saved.
* **Today is Palm Sunday** . . . the day, nearly 2000 years ago, that Jesus triumphantly entered into Jerusalem, seated on a donkey, and was heralded as the Jewish Messiah. Five days later the Lord would be crucified and on the following Sunday morning He would be resurrected from the dead.
* Next Sunday morning we will gather together here to celebrate the most important day in human history*.* **Next Sunday is** **Resurrection Sunday . . . that Sunday, 2000 years ago, when God raised Jesus from the dead and declared His death for our sins to be acceptable.**
* In preparation for our celebration of Resurrection Sunday next week I wanted to present the gospel message so that we will have the opportunity to meditate upon the incredible gift we have received as a result of the incredible suffering that was endured for our sake.