

The Word of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 December 2024

Preacher: Aaron Hoak

[0:00] This is God's Word, 1 Thessalonians 2. For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive. But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with the pretext for greed. God is our witness, nor do we seek glory from people, whether you or from others.

Though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ, but we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

[1:19] For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil. We work night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

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

So as always to fill up to the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last.

[2:47] But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly that we and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you.

I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. Preach. I bring you greetings tonight from Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw, Indiana.

We count it a privilege to labor alongside you all in the gospel of Jesus Christ in northern Indiana.

And so, a privilege to get to come back here to the place I called home for a number of years and to be with you tonight.

We are in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 in Warsaw. We're working our way through 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul's two letters to this church in Thessalonica.

[3:56] And we say Paul's letters, but it's Paul and Silvanus. And that's another name for Silas. If you're reading through Acts and you read Paul and Silas, that's the Silvanus that's mentioned if you look back at 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.

They are writing, and it looks like they actually are. It's not just Paul including some of his companions. It looks like Silas and Timothy contributed to this letter along with the apostle Paul.

They were with him in Thessalonica when the church started. And so, they're writing to a really sort of an infant church full of infant Christians.

Some Jews, some Gentile. But they had gotten run out of town in Thessalonica before they could tell the Thessalonians everything that they wanted to about the Lord Jesus Christ and this gospel and the way that they should live.

And so, now they had been separated from them, probably not for very long, maybe just a few months. And when they all get to Corinth, Paul and Silvanus and Timothy sit down and write this letter.

[5 : 00] You can read about their time in Thessalonica in Acts 17 if you want to get a little bit more background. But they were run out of town. They were persecuted out of town. And so, since they didn't get to cover everything that they might have wanted to while they were present there, since they had to leave prematurely, they're going to write this letter to address some things that they've heard since then and some things that they didn't get to talk about while they were there.

And so, Paul in this letter is rehearsing some of that history together. And if you look at chapter 1, you'll see that the gospel has come to the Thessalonians and the gospel transformed the Thessalonians.

And then the gospel was already from an infant church sounding forth from them. They were telling other people about the gospel. And word of that has gotten back to Paul. So, he's rehearsing some of their history together.

And then in chapter 2, he starts to talk something about his ministry. We just read something of the nature of his ministry. It was like a mother in some ways. It was like a father in other ways, the ministry that he had among them.

And when we get to the verses that we want to zoom in on tonight, verses 13 through 16, we start to see their response to Paul's ministry. How was it received?

[6 : 16] What were the results of Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, their little apostolic band? What were the results of that ministry that they carried out there in Thessalonica?

How was it received? That's what we want to see. And what we're going to see, I hope, is that there is no neutral response to the Word of God. There can't be.

And the Thessalonians provide a case study of what happens when the Word of God is proclaimed.

And that should help us today. Because you hear the Word of God proclaimed regularly.

What is that Word? How should we think about that Word? How should we receive that Word? And so we'll think about that together this morning. So, this morning. It's not morning, is it? This evening.

Our evening service is a prayer meeting. I don't preach in the evening very often. So, we want to think this evening about the Word of God in Thessalonica. And we want to see the Word of God proclaimed, the Word of God received, the Word of God working, and the Word of God opposed.

[7 : 19] Right? So we'll start with the Word proclaimed. Look at verse 13 again with me. This is the Word of God. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the Word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers.

So, the Word proclaimed. The Thessalonians heard the Word of God, and they received it from Paul and his friends. Silvanus and Timothy, probably some others traveling with them as well.

In chapter 1, if you read it, you'll see again, the Gospel came to Thessalonica. It came because Paul and his friends brought it. They proclaimed it in Thessalonica.

We read earlier in chapter 2 about how that Gospel of God was proclaimed. We came in verse 8 to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own selves.

They had proclaimed it. If you go back and read Acts 17, here's part of what you'll find. This is their time in Thessalonica. Acts 17, verse 2 and 3. And Paul went in, as was his custom, into the synagogue.

[8 : 33] And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

That's what Paul did when he came to Thessalonica. He explained the Scriptures to them. Now, the Scriptures for them at that moment were the Old Testament. And Paul viewed the Old Testament as the Word of God.

But it seems he also had some self-awareness that he was an apostle and as such, that he was proclaiming the Word of God from his own mouth.

They were there. They were there on God's mission. A very particular mission. They were on a missionary journey and Paul and his friends wanted to go some places and the Holy Spirit kept them from going there.

And Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia saying, come over and help us. And so they said, God must be calling us to Macedonia. And what we immediately think of when you hear that is he went to Philippi.

[9 : 41] Right? He went and he preaches and Lydia's saved and he gets thrown in jail and I'm getting way off track. But anyway, where he goes after Philippi is Thessalonica.

It's another city in Macedonia. God called him to preach the Gospel in Macedonia. And so what he was there doing in Macedonia is what God told him to do, which was to proclaim God's Word there. When you are commissioned by God, you proclaim not your own message, but His. That's the work of an ambassador. Proclaiming the Word of the One who sent him. So if God sent Paul, then what Paul is proclaiming in Thessalonica is God's message.

It's God's Word. That's what he did when he was there. And that was Paul's practice everywhere. Colossians 1.25, he's talking about the body of Christ, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you to make the Word of God fully known.

Stewardship. God gave it to him. He said, if God gave this to me, that's what I have to do as a faithful steward. I have to tell you what His Word says. And so that's what he did.

[10 : 52] That flows out of the understanding Paul unfolds in some really well-known verses in Romans 10. And I'm going to read some verses and you'll recognize them. Romans 10.13-15, For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent as it is written now beautiful to the feet of those who preach the good news?

Now, that wasn't just theory for Paul. We love those verses. Those are missionary verses. We're going to send people to preach the Word so they can hear, so they can call on the name of the Lord, and so they can be saved.

That's a beautiful string of logic that Paul puts together. But it wasn't just logic. It wasn't just some idea that Paul dreamed up. It's what he did. He was sent by the church at Antioch to go and to preach the Word of God.

And guess what had happened in Thessalonica as he preached? People heard, they believed, they called on the name of the Lord, and they were saved. That's what they did.

[12 : 00] They proclaimed the Word of God. And not just Paul. Others in the early church. Acts 4.31, and when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness. That's what they did in the New Testament church.

They spoke the Word of God. The apostles in Acts 6, the apostles are getting somewhat burdened by ministering to widows. Not that that is a burden, but they knew their primary focus was to be on the ministry of the Word and prayer.

So they appoint what we think are the first deacons. We're not saying ministry to widows is not important. We're saying it's so important we're going to create an office in the church to take care of it. So that they can continue to do what?

Preach the Word. Acts 6.2, and the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, it's not right that we should give up the preaching, preaching the Word of God to serve tables.

[13 : 06] That's what they did in the New Testament church. They proclaimed the Word of God. Not their own word, not their own ideas, but the message that God gave them. Before the apostles, of course, Jesus, the Son of God Himself, who is the Word of God and in the beginning was the Word.

John 1.1. God communicates Himself to us in words. He is a God who speaks. He is a God who from the beginning revealed Himself in words.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And how did He do that? He spoke it into existence. God gives us words. And so Jesus, the Son of God, God Himself is the Word of God. And what did He speak when He spoke? He spoke the Word of God. Luke 5.1. On one occasion while the crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God. He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.

That flowed out of the Old Testament saints' view of the Word of God too. When God sent prophets, what did He tell them to say? Thus says the Lord. You know what that is? That's the Word of God. [14:15] It's the declaration of the Lord. And guess what that means for us in the church today? It means we must proclaim the Word of God.

It's what the apostles did. It's what Jesus did. It's what the prophets did. It's what God Himself does. He speaks. And so we are to proclaim His Word. Hebrews 13.7. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you, the Word of God.

It is amazing how many times you find this phrase, the Word of God, in the Word of God. I'm going to read you a bunch of verses tonight and you're going to keep hearing that over and over and over again if you're listening.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you, the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. That's what faithful church leaders do. They speak the Word of God.

2 Timothy 4.1-2 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing in His kingdom, preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

[15:22] Friends, that's what we have to aim for in our churches. Now, listen, we don't mistake this. We don't have any apostles today. Not living apostles. The apostles we have are right here in the pages of Scripture.

We're not up here preaching new revelation. That's not what Pastor John and Pastor Colin do when they proclaim the Word. They're proclaiming what's already been revealed and set down in the Word of God. We proclaim that Word already revealed and seek to bring it to bear on all of our lives.

And so what we do stands as the continuation of what the prophets and what Jesus and what the apostles and what the church have all done for centuries. Proclaiming the Word of God.

There's good reason that we seek to put the Word of God at the center of everything that we do in the church. That's what we seek to do at our church down in Warsaw. I know it's what you seek to do here as well.

The Word of God. What else could we do? Why would we focus on our words when God has given us His? And so, remember what Pastor Bob said. We sing the Word and we pray the Word and we read the Word and we preach the Word.

[16:34] When you start to open your eyes and see how central the theme of the Word of God is in the Word of God, you see how important it is for the church today. It's why we give so much of our focus and attention and our worship to the Word of God.

So much time to the preaching of the Word. It's why we encourage the careful receiving of that Word so that you're not just sitting here disengaged so that you've got, I love seeing Bibles open on your laps and you soaking up the Word of God and your attentive eyes looking back at me and receiving that, praying for God's grace to receive it well.

We'll say something more about that in a minute. And listen, I'm not saying the church always gets this just right, but friends, any church that doesn't take the Word of God seriously can't be a church that is seriously concerned with pleasing God.

So what should you do when you think about the Word proclaimed? I hope that you will pray. I hope that you will pray regularly that the Word of God will always be faithfully proclaimed from this pulpit and anywhere else in this building.

I hope you, I hope, it is a sobering thing to stand up here and say this is what God says. And so I hope you will pray for Pastor John and for Pastor Colin.

[17:57] I hope that you will pray for them on Saturday night. You'll take a couple of minutes and pause and say, man, he's got a huge job tomorrow.

Why would I not pray for them? Not just on Saturday night. Man, every day while they're preparing and they're digging into this. I want to say to these people what God says in this Word.

And I am wholly inadequate for that task. Pray for your pastors. Pray that they would be faithful proclaimers of the Word of God. That they would do that. That they would fulfill their God-given call. God has sent them on a mission to preach the Gospel to Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen, Indiana. Pray that they will do that right until the end. And if they don't, listen, don't tolerate it. Call them on it. When I preached this at my church, I said, and if I don't repent, get rid of me. Sorry, John.

[18 : 53] But if he stops preaching the Word, you've got a problem. So pray for them. Pray for God. Pray for those men that they would proclaim the Word of God.

It is a task far too great for any preacher. Pray for them that we would preach the Word of God. That's the Word proclaimed. That's what Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy did in Thessalonica. And even what they're doing as they're writing to Him.

Secondly, think with me about the Word received. Not only did Paul preach it, they heard it. Look again at verse 13. We also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the Word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers.

So, Paul preached it, and they heard it. You can have an apostle or a preacher who understands the importance of God's Word and proclaims it, but if the hearers don't receive it as the Word of God with faith, it will not bear fruit.

But with the Thessalonians, Paul is thanking God. He does this all through these two letters. He keeps thanking God for them and praying for them. It's like he pauses and he intersperses prayer.

[20 : 02] Read 1 and 2 Thessalonians sometime. I'm off track again. It's okay. And he just keeps pausing and praying for them. And you can almost picture Paul and Silvanus and Timothy sitting in a room at Corinth writing this letter together and saying, man, this is hard.

This is heavy. Let's stop and pray for them. And praying for them. And then said, maybe we should put that in a letter. Let's write that down so that they're encouraged that we're praying for them. And let's show them how to pray for each other.

And to thank God for them. I thank, we also thank God constantly for this. That when you receive the Word of God, what you heard from us, you accepted it. Not as the Word of men, but the Word of God. They're thankful they did with faith receive what they had heard from Paul as the Word of God and not the Word of men. The Word they heard. There's sort of a progression here. They heard it. They received it. And they accepted it as the Word of God. And it was at work in those who, at the end of the verse there, who believed. And you believers.

[21 : 02] How did Paul know that? Well, it was evident. It had produced fruit. You read chapter 1, you'll find that the Thessalonians had turned from worshiping idols to worshiping the one true and living God.

They had received the proclaimed Word with faith and it transformed their lives. And then they were telling other people about it. It bore fruit. It was obvious that they had received it with faith.

They had called on the Lord and been saved. We're about to see in these verses that they also suffered for the truth. Those were the marks of those who had not just heard the Word but accepted it as true, believed it, and were transformed by it.

The Word of God was at work among those who believe. The Word was received with faith. God opened their hearts to receive His Word as truth and then to live according to it.

What happens when the Word is heard and received but there's no faith? Well, it's not accepted. People aren't transformed. Hebrews 4.2 For the good news came to us just as to them but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

[22 : 09] They didn't receive it with faith and it bore no fruit. But here in Thessalonica it was received with faith. Let me just pause and ask you, every person in the room, have you received the Word of God with faith?

I know that if you're here on a Sunday night, you've heard the Word proclaimed here. Morning, evening, you've heard the Word of God. You've heard the Gospel. You've heard the good news that Jesus saves sinners.

Have you just in one ear and out the other and said that's interesting? Or have you said, I need to be saved. There's a Savior. And so I'm going to call on Him to say, have you received it with faith?

I'm going to call on Him to save me. Have you believed what you've heard proclaimed? I pray that you'll not just hear it every Lord's Day in your homes day by day but that you receive it with faith. Put that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. It's what we desire when we proclaim the Word of God that someone will hear, that someone will believe and that they'll call in the name of the Lord and be saved. That's why we preach the Word.

[23 : 13] We want you to be saved. And then we want to see fruit. That's what we desire. Romans 10.17 So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.

So from Old Testament to New Testament the Word of God was to be accepted with faith. And then even as believers we receive the Word with faith and it should transform us. It should change the way we live. And that's what it had done for the Thessalonians.

But that was true all the way back in the beginning. Joshua 1.8 Some of you kids probably know Joshua 1.9 maybe. Oh, that's bad when you're going to do something from memory and it goes away.

Be strong and courageous for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Do not be frightened or dismayed. And you kids are going, man, he's butchering that. It's okay. Like, you get the idea. Well, right before that is Joshua 1.8.

This book of the law which is the Word of God this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

[24 : 20] Then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success. So don't just have the book of the law and just hear it. Meditate on it and be careful to do it. That's what people do who receive, who accept the Word with faith.

They do it. Psalm 1, the man delights, the man who's planted firmly by streams of water delights in the law of the Lord. It's not like, oh man, there's more of that Bible stuff I've got to listen to.

Dad are always talking about it. Preachers are always talking about it. No, he loves it. He delights it. And he keeps it.

Luke 11, 28, Jesus, but he said, blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God. There it is again. And keep it. That's what that whole story about the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man who built his house on the sand and the storm came and the one on the rock stood and the one on the house or on the sand went flat.

That's the one that stands. That's the one who hears the Word of God and does it. Obeys it.

Receives it with faith. And it transforms the way that we live. James tells us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers.

[25 : 33] The response of the Thessalonians by God's grace was exactly right. They had been transformed by the Word and it was showing in the way that they lived. So what about us?

How do you receive the Word? Like any other Word? Do you read the Word like you read sort of the news or your Facebook feed? That's interesting.

You walk away forgot what you just read don't care. Do you receive it? Do you like kind of like listening to the weatherman? Oh, who knows?

Maybe he's right maybe he's not. We have become consumers of all sorts of information but the way we consume this should be very different.

This is not somebody's best guess whether it's going to snow tomorrow or not. This is not some mindless whatever. This is the Word of God.

[26 : 39] And we're to receive it as such. Listen like you're hearing the voice of God. Read it.

Because it is the voice of God. Now, I'd better not, your pastors, I'd better not just be up here saying whatever we want, whatever we think, but if we proclaim the Word of God faithfully, you are responsible for your response to it.

That's sobering stuff. We should be regularly begging God for this as we pray again for our Lord's Day gatherings, for your pastors to proclaim and for all of you to receive God's Word.

Pray that the Word, pray specifically. That the Word would hit its mark in believing hearts. Pray that the Word preached would bring glory to God and joy and growth to His people and salvation to the lost.

Pray that it would not return empty. Pray that God's people, as they hear the Word, would be transformed by it, that they would be edified and sanctified and comforted and encouraged and challenged and rebuked and equipped and transformed by His Word.

Pray that unbelievers would receive the Word with faith and be saved, that they would believe and call on the Lord you regularly. Again, pray for this gathering. Or, don't just do it, pray for this, that that Word would be received with faith, but pray that every time you sit at home and open it and read it.

[28 : 04] Pray. Lord, give me eyes of faith to see Your Word. Your Word's like a garden. Help me to pick the flowers. It's also like a mine, which means it's going to take some work to dig down and find those jewels deep in the earth.

So, give me grace to do that work and to dig deep and to lay hold of that. Lord, give me eyes of faith to see and to receive Your Word just like we sang about. Pray for the gathering of God's people to hear the Word.

Pray for yourself as you read the Word day by day. Let's pray that as we come to His Word, we would receive the Word of God as it really is the Word of God. That's what the Thessalonians did. They'd received it and they said, that's not just some Yahoo.

That's not just some... There were some... Probably some traveling philosophers in that day that kind of preached their own ideas and kind of promote themselves and Paul's like, none of that. The Word of God is what you need and they had received it like that.

Not just as... Can take it... No. It was the Word of God and it had transformed them and they were telling other people about it because they received it with faith. And I pray that you here tonight receive the Word of God with faith and that I will receive it with faith.

[29 : 14] Third, the Word of God working. The Word proclaimed, the Word received and the Word working. It's the end of verse 13 there, which is at work in you believers.

Now that's sort of a strange idea to us. Words don't work, they're just words. They just sit there. They're on a page. They make sentences and sentences make paragraphs and we've got words. But this is a different word. It's a Word that's at work.

We get that right from the beginning of creation. Let there be light. It's light. The Word of God is at work. But I think this is a familiar concept to you all.

Hebrews 4.12 For the Word of God, there it is again, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Word's doing stuff there, isn't it? It's discerning. It's dividing. It's living and active. God says, Isaiah 55.11, So shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth that shall not return to me empty.

[30 : 22] But listen, this is the Word working language. It shall accomplish. The Word that goes out from my mouth shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I send it.

God's Word is at work by His Holy Spirit taking that Word and writing it on our hearts, transforming us.

Scripture that we hold in our hands, this is the Word of God. And listen to what Paul says to Timothy. 2 Timothy 3.16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God.

Now, just before that, he's been talking about the sacred writings that Timothy's mother and grandmother had used with them. And that's the Old Testament. He's like, Timothy, you've heard the Old Testament and I'm here to tell you that, and I think what he's saying here, he switches words and says, all Scripture.

Not just the Old Testament, but all Scripture. Old and new. I think Paul's got some more self-awareness that the Word of God is still being written. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training and righteousness.

[31 : 33] That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. See, the Word of God is working. It equips us. And you see, the fruit of that in the lives of transformed Thessalonian believers.

The Word was at work turning them from idols to God. It would, we're going to see here, enable them to endure suffering. The Word of God was equipping them to face suffering and to do with suffering for the Word of God.

And it was equipping them to proclaim that Word to others. And so that Word of God works by His Spirit. The book that you hold in your hands tonight is no ordinary book.

The Word of God is not just the Word of man. It's His Word and it's at work. There's evidence of that right here at Grace Fellowship Church by God's grace.

That's why this church is still here because the Word of God is working. That's why God is using this church to grow the saints, to reach out to the lost because the Word of God is at work.

[32 : 39] May God continue that. Lastly, I want to come to the Word and those who accept it being opposed. The Word opposed, but not just the Word, those who accept and receive that Word.

So if you've received the Word by faith, like the Thessalonians did, you can expect opposition. So everything that we've done so far is verse 13 and now we've got to get through verses 14 through 16.

Don't sweat it. We won't take as long on those three verses as we did on the first one. The Word, so we've got the Word proclaimed, we've got the Word received, we've got the Word working, now we've got the Word opposed.

And those who receive it opposed. Opposed. This might sound all pretty amazing up to this point. We've got the Word of God at Grace Fellowship Church. By God's grace, you seek to take the preaching and hearing of that Word seriously.

That Word is a powerful, working Word. And sincerely, hallelujah, praise the Lord for that. For what He's given you here. It's producing fruit.

[33 : 42] So, smooth sailing. We can expect the church to thrive and grow and be blessed at every turn. In some senses, yes.

But friends, don't think for a minute that Satan and his demons and his followers in this world who hate God's Word will take this lying down. What has Satan been doing from the beginning?

Challenging God's Word. In the garden? Remember what he said? Did God really say? What's he doing? He's challenging the Word of God from day one.

He's been on that. And his tactics haven't changed. Look at what happened in Thessalonica. There was opposition. Look at verses 14-16.

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

[34 : 59] So as always, to fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them at last. Paul says that the saints at Thessalonica became imitators of the churches of the churches of God in Christ Jesus in Judea because they suffered from their countrymen, Macedonian Gentiles, like the churches in Judea had suffered from their countrymen, the Jews.

So Jewish Christians in Judea had suffered at the hands of the Jewish unbelievers and Gentile Christians in Thessalonica were suffering at the hands of Gentile unbelievers.

It happened when Paul was in Thessalonica. They got run out of town and it had continued since then. Both letters that Paul writes to the Thessalonians refer to them being persecuted.

Now, it was Jews in Thessalonica that stirred the people up against Paul and his friends. They went to the synagogue, Jews were saved, other Jews didn't like that, and they stirred up a riot, sort of, in Thessalonica and ran them out of town.

But it wasn't just Jews, it seems their Gentile friends got in on the opposition. Acts 17, verse 6 and 7. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, that's going to be Gentiles, shouting, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there's another King Jesus.

[36 : 30] So you start threatening the Roman Emperor, and you're going to get Roman citizens worked up and angry and persecuting. So the Jews started it, they stirred it up, and now there's Gentiles that are persecuting the Thessalonian believers as well.

After Paul and his friends escaped, persecution of Christians in Thessalonica continued. And Paul is now comparing that to what happened in Judea. The Jews had killed Jesus and the prophets before him, and they had driven Paul out of various places.

Instead of loving God and men, they displeased God and opposed all mankind by doing this. They were hindering the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

Do you see that here? That they were hindering, verse 16, by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved. People were trying to stop the spread of the Gospel.

Later in this letter, Paul will explicitly say that Satan hindered us. Down in verse 18. They were opposed to the spread of the Gospel and opposed to those who had embraced the Gospel, and so

they persecuted them.

[37 : 39] Now we could show that from Scripture. We're not going to take the time, but Paul knew this. He says, you all in Thessalonica have become imitators of what happened in Judea. You know how Paul knew what had happened in Judea?

He had participated. He was one of the Jewish persecutors of Jewish believers before God saved him. He was trying to hinder the spread of it.

Paul, before he was saved, was trying to hinder the spread of the Gospel so that Jews wouldn't be saved. What a remarkable thing that is that God saved him and used him to be a proclaimer of the Word of God.

Passionate for people not to reject it, but to receive it. So, while Paul says some really hard things about the Jews here, don't think that he's being anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic.

He's a Jew himself. He's talking about churches in Judea made up of Jewish believers who he loved and who had suffered. He loves the Jews. He longs for more of them to be saved. Read Romans 9.

[38 : 40] He starts his ministry in places like Thessalonica in Jewish synagogues seeking their salvation. Paul is not against his own ethnic people.

He's telling the truth about things that the Jews had done and were doing. They had done terrible things in opposition to Christ and God's Word and God's people and they were filling up the full measure of their sin and would face the fullness of God's wrath coming on them.

Verse 16. They were being given over to their opposition to God's Word. And wrath would fall because hindering people from hearing the Word of God and being saved is evil.

And God will not tolerate it. Hindering people from hearing the Word of God is evil. Don't make one of these little ones stumble.

Don't keep them from the Word. But that's what was going on in Judea and now it's going on in Thessalonica as well. Now, that is not all Paul has to say about the Jews.

[39 : 41] Read Romans 9-11. But churches of God in Christ in Judea had suffered at the hands of the Jews and now he's comparing that to what's going on in Thessalonica. You became imitators of them. The church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ were imitating them.

They were suffering too. So you've got saints in Thessalonica that are suffering the way that the Jews had in Judea for believing. So they weren't alone. But listen, opposition, we've said this, to the Word of God and to the God of the Word is as old as the Garden of Eden.

So Paul says, dear new Thessalonian believers, don't be surprised. And don't be afraid. If you please God by your life while you're surrounded by those who oppose God, you're going to suffer. We're thankful that you have received the Word, but we also acknowledge that that very receiving of the Word with faith is what's brought the suffering down on you. Just like it did for those Jews. And that wasn't just in Judea or Thessalonica.

This is wherever the Gospel went as the church spread and the Word of God was proclaimed. The Word of God, listen, the Word of God is contrary to the way of the world. And so the world doesn't take it lying down.

[40 : 55] The Jews didn't. The Gentiles didn't. It's all over Acts. And that followed on how the Old Testament prophets were treated. Do you remember what Jesus said? Matthew 5, 10-12, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

That's going to happen if you believe me. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and under all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. So this has been going on again since the garden. The prophets in the Old Testament proclaim the Word of God. What happens? They're persecuted.

Jesus comes proclaiming the Word of God. Is the Word of God. What happens? He's persecuted. Executed. The New Testament starts among the Jews in Judea.

They believe the Word. What happens? They're persecuted. And now it comes to Roman Thessalonica. Macedonian Thessalonica. They believe the Word of God. And what happens? They're persecuted.

[41 : 54] It keeps coming. So Paul says when he's writing to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3.12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, and we want to think all sorts of wonderful things are going to come out of this mouth next.

Everybody who desires to follow and to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be blessed and encouraged and provided for and protected and preserved and kept. And all of that is true, but that's not what he says.

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. It's true for the prophets, true for Jesus, true for Paul and the other apostles, true for the Jews, and true now for these Gentile Christians as well.

But it wouldn't stop there. So Paul's writing, this is probably one of Paul's very first letter. Probably his first letter. Probably around 50 A.D. How about 40-something years later when the apostle John is writing Revelation?

How about him? 40 years on, things calmed down a little bit? A little less personal? No. That's not going to keep going. Yep. Yep, it is. Revelation 1. Verse 2.

[43 : 00] It was John who bore witness, listen, to the Word of God. Okay. That's what John was doing. Bore witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Even all that he saw.

Verse 9. I, John, your brother, and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus was on the island called Patmos on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

John has been exiled to an island because of the Word of God. He's suffering persecution because of the Word of God. And then what does he write in his revelation?

Revelation is about, I believe, the days between the end times, the last days, which I believe are the days between the two comings of Christ. So revelation is about right now.

From the early church to right now. That's what it's about. And listen to what John writes. Revelation 6.9. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God.

[44 : 02] Do you keep hearing the Word of God and that persecution is connected to it? Those who had been slain for the Word of God and for the witness they had borne.

Revelation 20.4 Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God.

No. It gets better. Read the rest of Revelation. But there's persecution for those who received the Word of God. So if Revelation describes those days between the two comings of Christ, days that we live in, what about today?

Well, yes. People in the world today are suffering for the Word of God. Dying for receiving the Word of God as the Word of God.

It shouldn't surprise us. So what about us? We live in rural, conservative, northern Indiana.

[45 : 18] And we don't face persecution like that. We don't. We're here. We're not hiding. We've got the lights on. We're going to put this on the Internet.

We're not being persecuted in that way. And I wonder if maybe we think some of this does not apply to us in 21st century.

in it. Despite thousands of years of opposition to God's Word and the clear testimony of the Word of God that believers will be persecuted because of that Word.

Do you believe that's true? It happens in different degrees and different times and different places? Friends, as we look at what's happening right in our own country, don't think that living in Freeman or Warsaw is going to insulate you forever.

Right in our own country. We shouldn't be surprised. Jesus meant what He said. John 15, 20.

Remember the word that I said to you. A servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted Me. They will also persecute you.

[46 : 33] If they kept My word, they will also keep yours. Look around our land. What the Word of God says about sexuality and gender and immorality and marriage and holiness and sexuality, homosexuality about the sanctity of life.

What the Word of God says about those things and many others is absolutely hated. It's not like people are kind of old-fashioned and they've got some strange views.

That's fine. No, it's actively opposed and hated. People oppose it at every turn to a point where we live in a time where it seems like what God says about these things and a lot more we could say like what God says is the strange view.

And that's what opponents of the Word of God want. They want God's Word to seem not just strange. They want it to seem bad and vile and bigoted and cruel and unkind.

That is what the world wants you to think about the Word of God. And if you're starting to think that way, don't entertain it for a second.

[47 : 46] That Satan's playbook, did God really say? Does He really care about sexuality? It's from cover to cover.

It's been going on since the garden. People trying to get other people to not believe the Word of God. To not receive it with faith. Don't fall for Satan's lies.

The Word is being opposed today. If you don't think that's the case, maybe our head's stuck in the sand a little bit. Get it out of the sand and look around.

It's being opposed. People hate it. Now thankfully, there are many places where it's still believed.

That's the good news of the New Testament. The Gospel's going to continue to spread until Jesus comes back.

There's always going to be people in the world who believe and love the Word of God. Just don't pretend like there's not going to be opposition or persecution because of it.

[48 : 48] So what do we do? Let me soft pedal the Word a little bit. Maybe tweak it. Make it a little more palatable to those who hate God and His Word. No. We can't do that.

We do what the church has done for centuries. It was church just starting when Paul wrote 58E to the Thessalonians. We've got almost 2,000 years of faithful examples to follow. Be imitators.

We thank God for you brothers that you became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus.

And we need to be imitators of them like the church before us. We must boldly hold to the truth and proclaim it even when it is not popular.

We receive it with faith. We do what it says. We don't make it unnecessarily offensive by the way that we proclaim it. But we must not soften or hide the message. Why would we do that?

The Word is working. Why would we jettison or soften or change the one thing that God has given us to equip us to live in these days? Don't get rid of it.

[49 : 46] Stick with it. You get rid of it and you're done. This is what's at work. And so by all means don't change it. Don't soften it.

Don't abandon it. The Word of God is at work among you believers. Hold fast to it. Keep proclaiming it here. Don't reject it.

Receive it with faith. And when we do, when we unashamedly proclaim and hold to that Word, what happened to the prophets and Jesus and the apostles and the New Testament saints and believers throughout church history since then, they suffered.

They were opposed. And so don't be surprised. Don't bury your head in the sand. Are you ready for that? If it comes here in ways more difficult and painful than it has.

May we be imitators of the churches in Judea and the one in Thessalonica and accept the Word of God with faith even when it means suffering persecution. The Word is equipping us for this.

[50 : 54] So we don't need to be afraid of it. I'm not here to scare you tonight. I'm here to encourage you. You've got the Word. You've got everything that you need. Praise God for that. Be encouraged.

Hold your pastor's feet to the fire. Pray they would continue to preach the Word of God in fullness without compromise. And do not abandon the truth that gives us hope. Pray for grace to always receive it with faith.

And when the heat gets turned up pray for grace to be willing and able to suffer for the Word of God. May God help us. Let's pray together. Father, we pray that you would help Grace Fellowship Church to always proclaim the Word of God.

Help them to always accept the Word of God by faith. Cause your Word to produce fruit in us. May it be at work and help us to be ready should that time come to suffer for it. We pray for Jesus' sake and in His name.

Amen.