The Priority of the Word

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[0:00] 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 13. We're continuing this series that I've been going through with you all on 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2, verse 13.
Paul is saying to the church at Thessalonica in his letter today how excited that he is that the word is taking root in the effect that it's having on their lives.
Now, normally we cover a section at a time, but this one verse that we're looking at today, it's a very weighty subject. So I felt that it deserved its own attention.
And honestly, this is really a great follow-up to Pastor Mike's sermon that he gave us last week. He's going through 1 Timothy right now, and he talked about the church's need to protect itself from strange doctrines, strange gospels.
[1:34] And we protect ourselves from false doctrines and false gospels by strictly adhering to God's word. That's where the protection comes from, from these things.

And we live in a world where absolute truth, it's not only denied by most people, but it's often actively fought against in our culture today.
Even in many of the buildings that have the word church written on it, the authority of Scripture is often questioned or outright denied. It may be used to still embellish their sermons, but the absolute authority of God's word is often denied in our churches today.
And in our culture and many other churches, I think the absolute truth is rejected because we don't like the idea of having an absolute authority that's higher than us that we have to answer to.
Or we don't like being the pastor or the people that have to tell someone there's an absolute authority that you have to answer to. Oftentimes, that stirs up some pretty hard feelings in our culture today.
[2:40] Thirty years ago, D.A. Carson wrote this. He said, To our shame, we have hungered to be masters of the word much more than we have hungered to be mastered by it.

He even goes on to say that a high view of Scripture is of little value to us if we do not enthusiastically embrace the Scripture's authority. So God's word, it will only have the effect that God desires it to have if it has the proper place in our lives.
Matthew 24, 35, Jesus says this, That heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. You know, as finite beings, we find our meaning in what is infinite.
What is eternal? God is infinite and eternal. And His word is the eternal foundation that He has given us to build our lives, to build our faith, to draw our doctrines from.
And with that in mind, I don't want to waste any more time. I want to get straight to our text today. If you all would stand with me as we read this verse. 1 Thessalonians 2, 13. Paul says this, This is the word of the Lord, church.
[4:18] Paul is, what he's done here is he's really painted a beautiful picture for us of why his ministry at Thessalonica was so prosperous.

It wasn't because of any prowess that he had or oratory skills. No, Paul proclaimed the word of God. And it was accepted as the word of God.
That's the foundation of any healthy church right there. When you hear the truth, will you receive it as truth or will you reject it? There's no in-between.
There's no gray area that God is ever really going to be satisfied with. There's no effort that we could engage in as a church that would be eternally worthwhile if the proclamation of God's word is not present.
It's the whole reason Paul came to Thessalonica. Paul wasn't going to Thessalonica because this was a poor, downtrodden city that needed some glimmer of hope. Now, Thessalonica, it was a very

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prosperous city in the Roman Empire.
[5:24] As a matter of fact, it had gained its freedom from the Roman Empire, which means it didn't have to pay tribute to the empire anymore because of its service. So this was a very prosperous community. These people were not in need of their lives being any better necessarily.

But what they were in need of was eternal hope, something that was beyond this life. So whether we're rich, whether we're poor, whether we're sick or we're healthy, we all need the exact same gospel that comes from God's word.
So with that in mind, the main idea of our text today is this, that there is no ministry apart from the word. There is no ministry apart from the word.
The greatest need of our churches today is a renewed passion for the authority of God's word. It's the only weapon that we have that can bring an eternal impact on the soul.
It's the only sort of offense that we can carry against Satan's strongholds in this world. And from our text today, I really want us to see three necessities of the word of God in the lives of believers.
[6:33] End of the lost as well. The first is this, the proclamation of the word. As we look at this verse, you know, we see that the Thessalonians, they have embraced the gospel as God's word.

But where did it come from? They didn't come by it naturally. They didn't come up with it on their own. Paul lays it out very clearly how they heard about the gospel.
He says, which you heard from us. The gospel was proclaimed to them. They didn't come by this knowledge on their own.
And I have to tell you this, there's no greater responsibility for a believer to the lives of those that are lost than the proclamation of God's word. It is a task that is before all of us.
And it is a task that embodied Paul's whole life. Unfortunately, though, too many of us, we take the scripture of hiding God's word in our hearts literally, and we try to keep it as secret as possible and never proclaim it to the lost.
[7:36] The word of God must be proclaimed. Romans 10 verses 13 through 15 says this, For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How then will they call on him 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, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news. So you don't need to be a vocational pastor.
You don't need a theology degree. You just need to proclaim Jesus to the lost. Talk about what he has done in your lives. I want to talk about several reasons why proclamation is a necessary part of a believer's life.
And the first one is this, is that proclamation is the only fitting response to our salvation. The salvation that Jesus gives, it demands a response once we receive it.
[8:46] After the church had been established in Jerusalem, the Pharisees had brought Peter and John before the Sanhedrin to question them and to threaten them to stop speaking about Jesus.

Because at this point, the church in Acts, it was very new. People were getting healed left and right. People were selling their possessions and taking care of each other. There were these large gatherings of people learning about Christ.
And it was drawing the attention of these Pharisees who had really just gone through all the effort to put Jesus to death. But now here they are. The disciples are proclaiming Christ to the lost.
And this message of Christ that they tried to stamp out with his crucifixion is now spreading like wildfire. And they threaten these disciples. They say to stop speaking in the name of Jesus.
And this is their response. Church, knowledge of the truth.
[9:55] It comes with an obligation to share the truth. But too many of us have decided that we need to settle with what seems right to men.

That's a trap that many churches have fallen in today. We choose to stay silent about the truth. There's no greater measure of gratitude or excitement for the gospel and what Christ has done in our lives than to boldly proclaim it to a world that desperately needs it.
Now the next necessity for proclaiming the gospel in our lives is that proclamation is also an act of obedience.
It's an act of obedience. God has given this task to us. It wasn't a recommendation when he gave us a great commission. And Paul goes on in 2 Corinthians 5.20. He gives this mandate.

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He says, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ. First, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ.
[10:55] Be reconciled to God. Now ambassadors have an important job. Ambassadors don't have any real authority on their own. They go representing the person that has sent them.

And they have a certain measure of authority. Certain terms that they are to negotiate with. And they have the authority that's been given to them by their world leader. Paul describes us in a similar way.
But we have been sent by a much greater leader. Greater than any earthly power. As ambassadors of Christ, we have been given the authority and the mandate to share with the world God's terms for salvation.
And to deny this mandate is nothing short of a dereliction of duty. The third reason why we proclaim is that it is the greatest act of love to those without Jesus.
There is no greater act of love that we can give to the lost than to share with them the truth. And from scripture, we know that God loves the lost.
[12:01] He desires for them to be saved. And it breaks my heart when I see Christians passing messages of condemnation off as evangelism. Now yes, we do preach about sin.

Sin is the whole reason we need a savior. You can't preach about our need for Jesus without talking about our sin. So we do preach about that. But we also preach about a God that loves them and does not want them to stay in their sin.
And to suffer the eternal wages of their sin. God wants the lost to be saved.
That's why he sent his son Jesus. And we mirror that love for the lost when we proclaim God's word to those that are in desperate need of it. Those that are still without Jesus.
Jesus has died for your sins so that you can be made right with God and have eternal life. There was an atheist comedian. I was listening to something that he said.
[13:20] He had an encounter with some street evangelist. And he was thinking on that. Still not converted. But he was thinking about this evangelist effort to win him over to Christ.

And he made this statement. How much do you have to hate someone to not evangelize? In other words, if you know what's at stake. If you know where their eternity is heading.
How much do we have to hate someone to not warn them? To not plead with them? As Paul says to fulfill that role of an ambassador. To share with them the terms of salvation that God has laid out in his perfect word.
So if you are here today. If you are lost. I know that we have people in our church. Just given the number of people here. Odds are someone in this room is lost.
That does not know Christ. That has not had a relationship with God. You're in the right place. And I'm glad that you are here. So if you are here and you've never been made right with God. I want you to know that yes.
[14:21] Sin has separated you from God. But God has made a path forward for us to be made right with him. It's not about trying to make yourself good enough. It's not about turning over a new leaf.

It's about being made new in Christ. Second Corinthians 517 says. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away.
And behold, the new has come. That's good news. It's not about you remaking yourself. It's about trusting Jesus to remake you and to save you.
Because he has already done all the work for you on the cross. And through the empty tomb. That salvation is offered to you today. And if you're here. And that's something that you have never done. I want to invite you to come and talk to me before you leave today. Come and talk to one of our elders. Maybe a Sunday school teacher. Talk to someone about how you can start a relationship with God today. Through Christ.
[15:18] But hearing God's word. To go on. Hearing God's word proclaimed. That's the first step. For believers, proclamation is an act of obedience. For unbelievers, hearing that proclamation is a chance at a new life in Jesus Christ.

So if you're here and know that is something you need. Again, come and talk to one of us before you leave today. But the next necessity of the word of God in the life of everyone is this. The acceptance of the word.

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The acceptance of the word is the next necessity for anyone that hears it. Again, going back to that quote from D.A. Carson. He said, A high view of scripture is of little value to us if we do not enthusiastically embrace the scripture's authority.
Many people will hold some level of esteem for the scriptures, but will not hold to its absolute authority.
Even non-believers. I've heard many people that are lost. They hold the Bible as a good source for moral teaching, but not as an absolute source of authority.
[16:24] Now, again, we see Paul praising the Thessalonians for this, for accepting his words as the word of God. Not as the words of men, but as the words of God as it actually is. Now, Paul, talking to Timothy, who is also very active in this ministry to the Thessalonians, he said this to Timothy in a letter that he wrote while he was at Ephesus.

In 2 Timothy 3, 1-5, Paul very prophetically laid this out. He said, Having the appearance of godliness.
Despite, out of all these things that he's just mentioned, he says, Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Many people will herald that the Bible is important, but not all authoritative.
And it's these people that hold to a form of godliness, but deny its power. God is not interested in a form of godliness in our lives. God wants our whole hearts.
He wants complete obedience to his word. He has given you his perfect word to know how to live in a right covenant relationship with him. And all of it is authoritative.
[18:02] And we see in this list that Paul gives us an image of what it looks like to claim godliness while denying its power. And what that is, is that we are just as sinful as the rest of the world around us.

We look like the rest of the world around us, but we have the audacity to claim allegiance with God. That is what these false teachers were doing in this time. Either Jesus is Lord of your life or he is not.
There is no in between. There's no gray area that God will be satisfied with. So what does acceptance of the word look like? I think that's the next thing that we need to talk about.
We've talked about the importance of accepting the word. So how do you know if that is something that is real in your life and you have accepted the word? I want to lay out three markers for acceptance. The first is this, and that is belief in its divine origin.
Second Timothy 3.16. All scripture is breathed out by God. What gives the Bible its authority is not anyone that's preaching it, but the one that authored it.
[19:12] The Bible is God's word and to believe anything less than that the Bible is God's complete revelation and his divine word will make it lose all its effectiveness in your life.

Either God's word is absolute or it is not. The next marker, if you have accepted the word, is that your life will begin to align with it.
Your life will begin to align with it. Acceptance of the word means adherence to it. Jesus said this in Luke 11.28. Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.
And keep it. Not necessarily just hear the word of God and maybe think about it from time to time while you go about your day-to-day lives. No. You hear the words of God and you keep it in your life.
Your life aligns with it. So to accept the word of God and receiving his blessing will mean that we obey the words that he has given us. Now the last marker, and there's lots of ways that you could expand on this.
[20:13] If you think I'm leaving something out, it's probably because I am. You could do a whole sermon series on these issues right here. But the last marker is that there's going to be a love for the word of God.

There will be a love for it. Psalm 119. Verses 33 through 40. David said this when he was talking about God's word.
He said, Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain.

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Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways. Confirm to your servant your promise that you may be feared.
[21:17] Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. Behold, I long for your precepts and your righteousness.

Give me life. The word of the Lord is something that we should delight in as believers. His word is not a burden.
It's not a kill joy to our fleshly desires. It is a joy bringer for the abundant life that Christ has promised us. It is something that we should look forward to spending daily time in.
If we claim to have a desire to hear from the word of the Lord, it's something that we truly long for in our lives. Then we only need to spend time in God's word, learning it, ingesting it, applying it to our lives.
His word is perfect. It's never going to lead you astray. I don't think that's any coincidence that Paul is drawing the attention back to the word of God at this particular point in our text in Thessalonians.
[22:23] He has risked his life to proclaim it. He is overjoyed that the Thessalonians have accepted it.

And because through accepting the word, Paul can now rejoice in the work of the word. And this is the third necessity in the life of a believer of the word of God. That is the work of the word.
Paul expresses much joy over his church. And it all revolves around the role that the word is playing in their lives. It was proclaimed.
It was accepted. Now Paul talks about the word here continuing to have an active effect in the lives of believers. There is nothing more essential to the growth of a Christian in his life than the regular intake, proper understanding, and application of the word of God.
Now, neglecting time in the word is going to be one of the most severe handicaps to the life of a believer, to spiritual growth.
[23:23] So the question then is, what is the work of the word? What exactly is taking place in the lives of these believers? And what work is the word going to have in our life today?

The first one is this. That is salvation. The first work is salvation. Romans 10, 17. It says, so faith comes from hearing.
And hearing through the word of Christ. So it's only by hearing the gospel of truth that we can be saved. God has handed down his word to us through the ages so that we can know the salvation that comes from Christ.
John 20, 31. Whenever John was finishing up his gospel, this is towards the end of the gospel of John here. But John was writing the words of Christ.
He was writing his experience with Jesus. And why did he write these experiences? He said, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.
[24:27] And that by believing you may have life in his name. So that belief that would come from reading the truth of Christ. Belief, though, is only beneficial if we know who to believe in.

And we know who to believe in by the perfect word of God. Now, the second work of the word in the life of a believer is this. That is sanctification. Sanctification is the growth of a believer to be more like Jesus.
And Jesus, as he was praying over his disciples towards the end of his earthly life, he prayed this to his father in John 17, 17. Sanctify them in the truth.
Your word is truth. So if you are going to be more like Jesus, if you're going to grow into his likeness, we need to spend time in the only authoritative source on Jesus, which is the word of God. There's no replacement for time spent in his word. The third work of the word is this. Fruitfulness.
[25:37] So how are you going to produce fruit? How are we going to be effective king and citizens? By delighting in the word and in the laws of the Lord. David, in Psalm 1, verse 3, wrote this.

He said, He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its seasons. And its leaf does not wither. And all that he does, he prospers.
Speaking of somebody that was devoted to the Lord, This is devoted to the law of the Lord. This is what David wrote. It's just like becoming an effective citizen of any place that we live in our lives today.
If you're in a new community, if you're in a country, if you want to be an effective, productive citizen of that community, you're going to learn their laws. You're going to learn their ways. You're going to

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follow the commands of their laws.
And we do the same thing in our lives as Christians. If we want to be effective kingdom citizens, we need to learn God's laws.
[26:37] We need to learn his ways. We need to learn how to be fruitful members of the kingdom of heaven. And we only do that through his word. Now the fourth, the fourth work of the word in the life of believers and in non-believers too initially, is repentance.

Repentance. Repentance. If you are a new believer, I'm not going to lie to you. There is a learning curve to go around when you are following the Lord for the first time.
As you spend time in his word, you're going to learn more about the things that are pleasing to God and the things that are displeasing to God. You're going to learn more about areas in your life that are still sinful that you need to hand over to Christ.
It takes time. That's why it's called a journey. And that journey does not end until we get to heaven one day. So we are constantly being sanctified. And part of that sanctification process is repenting of sin when we find it in our lives.
Hebrews 4.12, the author again describes the word as something that's active and living. It says, The Bible will be the Lord's voice of conviction in our lives for sin that we may not even know that we had before coming to Christ.
[28:07] And the only fitting response to the sharp edge of God's word is repentance. Because the sword that divides the soul is also the sword that is going to bring healing.

It should be seen as a gift that God is making reconciliation possible for us by making us aware of our sin. Too many people encounter the sharp edge of God's sword and they reject it using language like, well, it's no longer relevant.
It's not relevant to the times. It's judgmental. It's closed-minded. It's exclusive. And if that is you, the Bible may not seem relevant to your life because you're not living in obedience to it.
God loves us and wants a right relationship with us. And it's not his standards that are getting in the way. It is our sinfulness that is getting in the way. But praise be to God that he has given us his word so that we can know how to correct course, live in a right relationship with him through his son, Jesus Christ.
We cannot depart from the word of God. So the main application as we're just closing down our time today, it's fairly simple and straightforward.
[29:23] Submit yourselves to the word. Submit yourselves. Now, believers, for you, I want you to examine your lives. Does the word of God have absolute authority in your lives?

Now, a good way that you can test this is by answering this question. Is there any area in your life where you are saying, I know God's word says this, but insert exception here.
If that's the case, then God's word does not have absolute authority in your life. There is no room for exception here. In the life of a born again believer, there's no exception for obedience.
As a church body, as an individual, if we are going to glorify God in this life as members of his kingdom, it's all going to start with adherence to his word.
We cannot have a kingdom impact on the world if we constantly keep making concessions to look more like the world. So believers, submit yourself to the complete obedience of the word of God.
[30:32] If that is something you have not done, submit your time to knowing the word of God and allow it to do its work in you. The word of God can't work in you if you don't know it.

So if that's something that you are not spending daily time in, I want to encourage you to do that. Spend that time in God's word, reading through it, learning it, knowing it.
And if that's something that you're having trouble with, like I understand, the Bible's a big book. If you've never read through the Bible before, it's a big book. There's lots of words there. And if you're a slow reader like me that has the attention span of a gnat, this can look pretty intimidating.
We can help you though. We can guide you on a path to go through God's word, tell you where to start, tell you how to interpret it. There's ways to do this and we would love to teach that to you.
So if that's something that you have an issue with, come and talk to us. There's nothing that we would love more than to teach you how to read and be obedient to God's word. Now, again, if you're a believer, the next response, well, the next question really is, are you proclaiming the word of God?
[31:41] And if not, why? This isn't a call to vocational ministry, okay? I'm not calling everyone to surrender to full-time ministry, but this is a call to daily obedience.

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Are you looking for opportunities to share the gospel? The family that we've been praying for, the hoods.
Thankfully, I've never received one of these calls, but as a parent of four children, I can't imagine something more terrifying than getting a phone call and saying, your son has been airlifted to St. John's.
They had no idea what they were getting into. They had no idea what to expect when they got to that hospital. They had no answers, even as the doctors were working on them. As a father, that would scare me.
That would shake me to the core. But Amy and Mike, when they were at the hospital, I got a text message from them yesterday. They told me that the other car that was in the crash, the passengers were in the same unit as their son.
[32:56] And they've been sharing the gospel with this family. They were praying with a woman that was in the other car that was conscious. They were sharing the gospel with the parents.

Now, as a father, I can tell you, I would have a hard time leaving my son's side if he was on that table. But they saw a gospel opportunity and they went for it in their daily life.
That should be the tribe and passion of all of us that have the word of truth inside of us to stop at nothing, to share the gospel with those that are around us, even at our own expense. Now, for unbelievers, the word of God speaks to you as well.
First Timothy 2.4 says that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth that is you.
He desires that you be saved and you come to a knowledge of his truth. So if you are here and wondering, what is the first step to making things right with God? Is it getting your life together enough?
[34:09] Is it adopting better life practices? No. The answer is Jesus. Outward reform is going to come with a right relationship with God.

Jesus himself said this, I am the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through me. So if you are here and you know that faith in Jesus is something that you have never professed, if you have not made that first step of obedience after hearing the truth, that is the first step.
It's not about getting your life together enough to come to God so hopefully he will be impressed enough to save you. No, it is coming to God saying, I'm helpless. I can't do this.
I need a salvation that is greater than myself and that salvation is found in Jesus Christ. And God's absolute word of truth says this to you, that he desires that you be saved.
saved. So if you're wondering if your life has been too dark, if you are wondering if your life has been filled with too many mistakes to be redeemed, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross says otherwise.
[35:26] He has done the work for you. All that God asks is that you profess faith in Jesus.
Romans 10, 9 and verse 9 says, if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

So as we close today, before I pray, if you are a believer here today and you are struggling with any of these areas in your life, I just want to invite you to come forward.
Pray. Repent. There's areas in your life where you know that you've not completely surrendered to the authority of God's word. the proper response is repentance and guess what? 1 John says that he is faithful and just to forgive all unrighteousness if we confess our sins.
So come today. Confess. Be made right. If you're struggling with proclamation, the best thing that you can do is pray for God to put people in your life that you can proclaim to.
To kind of have your spiritual antennas up to look for opportunities to share the faith with those that are around you. And I'll be honest with you, most of the time it's not going to result in a conversion. But for you as a believer, success is obedience, not results.
[36:42] And for you here that are unbelievers, again, I just want to make that call to you today during our time of response. If that is a decision that you know that you need to make, I want to invite you to come today.

Talk to me. Talk to one of our elders. Talk to someone that you trust and know that is a believer in Christ. And be made right with the Lord today through a right relationship with Jesus. Let's pray.

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Father, there is truly no greater gift that you have given us than your good word. Lord, I thank you that you have given us these words to live by.
Lord, the Bible is not an ornament to put on our shelves. It is something to be open. It is something to be read. It is something to be adhered to. And Lord, I pray for every believer that is here today. Lord, that the absolute authority of your word would take control of every part of their life. If there is any dark corner of their life that has not yet been revealed, I pray that the light of your word would reveal that to them.
[37:47] They would surrender that to you. Lord, I pray that the believers that are in this church, that they would boldly proclaim your word. Lord, that they would look for opportunities to share your truth to those that are around them.

Just as we have been commanded to in your word, I pray that they would be obedient to that. And Lord, I pray for the lost that are here today. Lord, there is no other place that they should be right now than hearing your truth today.
And Lord, I thank you that they are here. Lord, I pray over their hearts. Lord, I pray that you'd bring repentance to their souls, Lord, that they would realize that their greatest need in life is your son, Jesus, the grace that he offers and his perfect standard of righteousness that he has achieved that we can take part in.
I thank you for that great gift and I pray that we would see souls reborn today. I pray that we would see saints sanctified by the power of your word because as your word says, the gospel is the power of you unto salvation.
Lord, I pray for all these things. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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